Decisionism at the Intersection of Ontology and Politics:
A Study in the Thought of Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt


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# ABSTRACT

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Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt are two of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. They also were members of the most reprehensible political movement of that century. From this historical point and a basis in certain aspects of Platonic thought, this thesis argues that the ontological decisionism of Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, finds a complementary political decisionism in Schmitt's *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*.

First, an examination of *Being and Time* is undertaken. This examination concludes that Dasein, Heidegger's term for the being which human beings *are*, makes its decisions entirely free from principles which could be called normative, correct, or justified. Second, Schmitt's political theory as expressed in *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political* is examined, and, similar to the examination of Heidegger, this section concludes that Schmitt presents a political decisionism in those books. The third and final section attempts to present those two theories as complementary. In this way, Heidegger and Schmitt are taken together as presenting an onto-political decisionism, one not found in either of the two thinkers' works taken by themselves. Finally, this onto-political decisionism is shown as a response to the Platonic assumption under which the thesis as a whole is carried out.

## Acknowledgements

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# General Introduction

Existentialism begins...with the realisation that as the ground of all objective, rational knowledge we discover an abyss. All truth, all meaning, is seen in the last analysis to have no support except man's freedom.

Leo Strauss, 'An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism,' in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, p. 36.

This thesis is an attempt to discern a possible complementary relation between the ontological decisionism of Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, and the political decisionism of Carl Schmitt as portrayed in *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*.[1] This task is undertaken with adherence to a certain philosophical assumption: that a description of the ontology of human beings must have a concomitant political corollary; and, similarly, a political theory must have some concept of the ontological status of the members of the polity it suggests. One finds the basis for such an assumption in the writings of Plato, which will be briefly discussed later in this introduction. For now, though, if this assumption is adopted, one finds a lacuna when considering the conclusions reached in *Being and Time*. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein stops short of providing a political theory, except for his suggestion as to what constitutes an organised group of authentic, co-historicising Daseins. There is no discussion of political relations in Heidegger. Thus, one would be behooved to search for such a theory, if the assumption above is assumed when philosophising. This thesis argues that such a theory may be found in the writings of Carl Schmitt, a political theorist[2] contemporaneous with Heidegger. Similarly, when confronted with Schmitt's political decisionism, there is the lacuna of the ontological status of the members of the polity organised under a deciding sovereign. One finds the solution to that lacuna in the theory espoused by *Being and Time*.

It should be noted at the outset that in no way is this thesis attempting to make the two thinkers' theories complementary for the purposes of suggesting them as correct or good. This is not to say that there is nothing of value to be found in those theories. Rather, Heidegger and Schmitt present powerful criticisms of both their contemporaries and those thinkers preceding them in the history of philosophy, both in its political and ontological aspects. These criticisms must be considered carefully and repeatedly, but this is not the task of this thesis. Rather, the impetus for this thesis is an historical observance: both Heidegger and Schmitt were members of the National Socialist party of Germany. Both thinkers joined the party on the same day, May 1, 1933, and both thinkers harnessed their intellectual gifts to the ever-shifting sands of that regime's politics.[3] Thus, there seems at the outset to be a certain affinity between each thinker, as both believed, in whatever way, that deciding for National Socialism was the right choice to make. However, we are not trying to discover whether these thinkers' political choices were rooted in their thought, although this is also a task that has been undertaken by others, and should be undertaken in the future. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether the two thinkers' theories can be made complementary, operating under the Platonic assumption discussed below and, as both thinkers were Nazis in one form or another, the critical confrontation of these two thinkers' thought seems to suggest itself.

This thesis can also be seen in part as a response to Heidegger's assertion that his thinking is "neither theoretical nor practical." In this statement, Heidegger is close to claiming the same thing as Plato, although it is not his intent. The more important conclusion this thesis wishes to reach, however, is that *Heidegger and Schmitt share a politico-philosophical standpoint*, although there was no direct connection between the

two thinkers at the time of their writings. Heidegger's and Schmitt's theories, when taken together, present one possible answer to the Platonic question concerning the relations between philosophy, politics, and human beings discussed below. This attempt at discovering an answer, one derived from both Heidegger and Schmitt, is done with the purpose of showing the importance of the relations between these two thinkers.

There are many contemporary scholars who wish to save Heidegger from the attribution of 'decisionist,' perhaps in order to exonerate him from his political commitments. Similarly, there are many contemporary scholars who wish to adopt Schmitt's arguments for their own political ends, thus showing that Schmitt's theory does not necessarily result in fascism. This thesis, it is hoped, will attempt to tread the middle ground between apology and condemnation, thereby sidestepping both. Heidegger and Schmitt's political decisions are inexcusable, but it is unclear whether they are directly rooted in each thinker's respective theories. Again, that investigation is not the purpose of this thesis. To state it once more: *the purpose of this thesis is to present Heidegger and Schmitt's theories as complementary to each other, in order to show them, taken together, as an answer to one of the fundamental questions of philosophy originating in Plato.* This answer takes the form of an *onto-political decisionism*, derived from those theories in their complementary relation.

To begin our analysis, we must discuss what exactly the term 'decisionism' refers to in regards to the two thinkers in question here. A decisionistic theory or approach is one where the decision involved in choosing a particular way of going about things is what grants that way validity. There is no principle or basis for that decision that grants normativity, correctness, or justification other than making the decision itself, and

appropriating it *as one's own* decision. This appropriation consists in resolutely embracing that which is decided upon, and, when challenged as to why such a choice was made, simply defending it by asserting it as *the* choice made. An example can make this clearer: the decision reached by a certain public body concerning a political matter would, under a decisionistic theory of political process, require no basis in principles of human rights, lawful procedure, or other such tenets of a liberal democracy. Rather, the political decision of the public body would be justified by the *fact* that it was decided upon by that public body. The facticity of the decision, i.e., *that* it was made by the certain group in question, is the sole basis for the normativity of the decision.

A decision is always required in matters of ethics and politics. In order to act ethically, one must examine the various ways of solving a problem or acting in a situation and choose one of those ways, the one which best exemplifies ethical conduct as the actor sees it to be. Similarly, in a liberal democracy political decisions are made in accordance with the two basic liberal democratic ideas of freedom and equality, and it is those two ideas which delimit the scope of choices that concern a particular problem or situation. In this case, a political decision will be made so as to exemplify the ideas of freedom and equality, and the normativity of that decision, the justice of that decision, is determined by how much it does in fact exemplify those two ideas. That which grants normative status to the decision in both of these cases is that the decision-making process is always informed and guided by a particular principle or set of principles. This principle or set of principles will have been determined previously as the most reasonable one to act in accordance with in order to promote the welfare of the other human beings one must (always) live with communally. Hence, the principle or set of principles will be granted a

certain amount of permanence or inflexibility. The principle or set of principles will not be viewed by those affected by decisions made in accordance with it/them as simply an arbitrary choice, dependent upon the fancy of the person or people making the decision. The principle or set of principles will be considered as what must be the informing guide to decisions for such decisions to be considered reasonable. Decisions may therefore be questioned as to their appropriateness by appealing to the standard of the basic principle/set of principles, and decisions could then be overturned if a principle has been shown to be violated.

A decisionistic theory, on the other hand, does away with any such basis in a principle or set of principles that are considered to be (relatively) immutable. Rather, the *decision* is paramount in granting normativity to a particular way to act. In the ethical realm, a decisionistic theory will claim that the best way to act in a situation is chosen freely by the individual, and the rightness or goodness of that action is not held to any standard other than *the fact that* it was chosen by the individual. One's choices are entirely uncurtailed by rational principles, and ethical life is thereby unanchored from being necessarily rational. This is not to say that ethical choices are therefore *irrational*. Such a stance merely claims that ethical choices do not have to be in accordance with immutable rational principles. Similarly, in the political realm, political justice is not found through adherence to rationally determined political principles. What is considered to be just is up to those who make the decision. Again, this is not to say that decisions reached will be irrational, but merely to state that those decisions are not necessarily in accordance with (relatively) immutable rational principles. In the case of Schmitt, to be examined in Chapter 2, decisions are considered justified if they help to preserve the

state's existence. For Schmitt, the deciding entity can go even so far as to suspend the constitution, the basis from which political justice is determined, in the name of preserving the existence of the state.

A concept of decisionism is not merely applicable to the ethical and political (i.e., *practical*) realms of human endeavours. It is also possible to have an *ontological* (i.e., *theoretical*) decisionism. For example, the ontological character of human beings, the primary entity of philosophy's gaze, would be such that the entity is ontologically defined as 'one that makes radically free decisions concerning itself.' We can see this sort of decisionism in the case of Heidegger to be elaborated below: such an entity is thus free to determine itself as an 'authentic human being' through resolutely choosing a particular way of Being, and the locus of possible choices from which the entity may choose from is derived from its own historical character. For Heidegger, though, the decision is not *completely* arbitrary: the choosing being can only choose its relation to Being from amongst the possibilities handed down to it through its historical character. Regardless, if one accepts Heidegger's idea, then the possibility of discovering the essential ontological character of human beings is circumvented, as each historical epoch will produce a new locus of possibilities from which the entity may choose. The traditional philosophical approach, beginning with Socrates, seems to end in the discovery that that approach has been quixotic since its inception.

It is not coincidental that Socrates is mentioned here, for the Platonic conception of philosophic activity, at least as this thesis interprets it, is the guiding philosophical basis behind this attempt at making Heidegger and Schmitt's theories complementary.

We now turn to a brief discussion of some aspects of Platonic thought, in order to find a basis for the task of this thesis as a whole.

In the *Republic*, Plato presents the myth of the cave. This myth is ostensibly about education of human beings, but, as the following interpretation will hopefully show, also has points to make concerning the relation of philosophy and politics. It is hoped that all readers will have some acquaintance with the myth, so we will only touch on the points important to this thesis. First, the cave is presented as a metaphor for political life.[4] Human beings are bound to the floor of the cave and forced to see the shadows on the wall.[5] This is interpreted to mean that human beings are, at least initially, bound to the opinions of their particular historico-political circumstances. This is because we do not know things "as they are but as they are presented to us by legislators and poets."[6] Legislators and poets are those who carry the objects which then produce shadows on the wall by virtue of those objects being between the wall and the fire.[7] Thus, we have our opinions on things in the world shaped by both the *legislators and poets*, and the *fire* in the cave, which represents the general principles of the particular political situation. The legislators and poets, through their manipulation of the general principles of the political situation (done through interposing their own artifices between human beings and a direct comprehension of the fire/political principles), thus produce our opinions. However, as Allan Bloom claims, "[t]hose opinions are not accurate reflections of nature but are adapted to serve the needs of the city."[8]

Now, the philosopher is the individual who breaks out of this situation, and is compelled to ascend from the cave and out into the sun. Thus, the Platonic philosopher transcends the political opinions that present a particular 'truth,' and enters into nature in

order to contemplate Truth, i.e., the way the world in fact *is*. Whether this claim is even

conceivable given the contemporary situation of philosophy is left unanswered for the

purposes of this thesis. The important thing to note at this point is that the philosopher

*goes back into the cave*, reenters political life, in order to show others in that particular

political situation philosophic truth.[9] The philosopher must undertake the task of

philosophy *within the cave*. The philosopher wishes others to exit the cave so that the

philosopher may impart the wisdom gained through transcendence of particular political

circumstances. Now, if this is the case, Plato claims that the philosopher will be in

*danger*, for those left behind in the cave will see the philosopher as "corrupted" and will

even go so far as to attempt to kill him.[10] Plato is claiming here that philosophy is in

mortal danger from persecution at the hands of those who believe most strongly in the

principles of the political regime. What, then, is to be done? Plato claims that there is an

"art of turning around,"[11] a particular way in which the philosopher accomplishes the task

of philosophical education without danger of political persecution.

Obviously there is much in the preceding passages that remains unclear. It is not

the task of this thesis to clarify these, however. The main point we wish to emphasise

here is that *philosophy, as Plato conceives of it, is always done in relation to and within a*

*particular political regime*. Hence, philosophy is always done with some relation to

politics. This relation is one of strife, for political persecution will always be a possibility

for philosophic activity (according to Plato – *the* just city, the one where philosophy

would be acceptable, is impossible[12]). However, if philosophy is always done in the

correct way, one that hides itself from political persecution, philosophy may continue

uninterrupted.

So far, we have determined a relation, however vague, between philosophy and politics. It seems, then, that questions of philosophy, under the Platonic rubric, must be answered with some relation to the political situation one finds oneself in. Let us now attempt to draw this relation in greater detail. If the objects between the fire and the cave wall are representations of natural objects, as the legislators and poets see them, then our knowledge of those objects, those *beings*, are determined in part by the political regime they exist under. What human beings see on the wall is a combination of light, the fire, and shadow, produced by the objects. All knowledge we may have of beings is therefore conditioned by politics, at least at the outset, as the fire, the light-giving source, produces the possibility of seeing the objects. Every object we see is seen 'by the light' of the political regime we find ourselves in. This is a negative characterisation of the relation between ontology and politics, for Plato sees politics as an *obfuscation* of natural things. Regardless, the relation is set: when doing ontology, when analysing beings as we see them in our own historico-political circumstances, one must also take into account the political aspects of that ontology. The reverse of this relation shows the necessity of ontology *for* politics. In order for a political regime to perpetuate itself, it must have an ontological basis. The objects held by the legislators and poets are seen through the light of the fire; hence, the fire must be in some sense an answer to the question of ontology, i.e., what allows us to comprehend beings *as* beings. For Plato, then, ontology and politics are inextricably linked. The philosopher must always do philosophy within a particular political regime, and therefore must answer questions of ontology in relation to that particular regime and its principles. Ontology thus has a political corollary for Plato. Similarly, the political theorist must possess an answer to the question of Being in order

for the regime to function, i.e., in order for the regime to impart its principles to its polity. Political theory, then, has an ontological corollary

It will be argued, based on the above Platonic assumption, that Heidegger and Schmitt, when placed in complementary relation, in fact satisfy the requirements of that assumption, which, taken separately, those thinkers do not do. Again, as stated above, this task is done not to promote what this thesis will call 'onto-political decisionism,' i.e., the two theories taken in complementary relation. Rather, it is done merely to show that each theory fills the other's missing premise, the lacunae discussed at the beginning of this section as understood through the aforementioned Platonic assumption.

This thesis is divided into 3 chapters. The first deals with Heidegger's ontological decisionism. In that chapter, it will be shown that *Dasein* chooses from amongst the possibilities offered to it by its own historical circumstances, and these choices are justified by the fact *that* they are authentically chosen by Dasein. Once it has made a choice, resolutely embraced as its own in the face of Death, Dasein can then be said to live authentically. Because Heidegger makes assertions concerning a community of such authentic Daseins, a political theory, missing in Heidegger's works, seems to suggest itself as necessary. It will be argued that Chapter 2 deals with such a political theory, found in the writings of Schmitt. Schmitt's political theory also finds its basis in a decision, that of the *sovereign*. The sovereign makes the decision concerning who are friends and who are enemies; this particular bifurcation finds its basis in the existential understanding of the people organised under the sovereign who makes the decision. Thus, the political theory of Schmitt has an unsatisfied premise: what determines the existential understanding of a people? Chapter 3 attempts to show that Heidegger's ontological

decisionism satisfies this requirement of Schmitt, and Schmitt's theory satisfies

Heidegger's political requirement. Thus, it will be argued, the two theories, taken in

complementary relation, produce what can be termed an onto-political decisionism,

which in turn satisfies the requirements of the Platonic assumption this thesis is working

with.

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[1] The terms 'ontological and political decisionism' are applied to these thinkers based on the conclusions reached in this thesis; neither thinker described his theories in such a fashion.

[2] It is assumed that, because Schmitt attempts to answer questions concerning the nature of politics and, more fundamentally, the essence of the political itself, he is making *philosophical* claims. Schmitt was in fact a jurist, and not necessarily doing political philosophy *per se*. This thesis treats him as a political philosopher, however.

[3] It should be noted that neither Heidegger nor Schmitt was a Nazi when their books, the ones under scrutiny in this thesis, were published (*Being and Time* – 1927; *Political Theology* – 1922; and *The Concept of the Political*– 1932). Their respective decisions for National Socialism came later. Therefore, one cannot say that their books are 'Nazi texts' or something of the sort. This thesis wishes to note, though, that, while not necessarily advocating Nazism and whatever ontology/politics (however vague and grotesque) that it entails, the ideas of Heidegger and Schmitt *can* (and did) serve as the basis for their commitment to Nazism. Their ideas should therefore be viewed with great caution.

[4] Most of the following interpretation relies on the interpretive essay by Allan Bloom, included with his translation of the *Republic* (2$^{nd}$ edition, USA: Basic Books, 1991), pp. 403-408.

[5] Plato, *Republic*, 515a-b (Stephanus numbering).

[6] Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *Republic*, p. 404.

[7] Plato, *Republic*, 514b-c.

[8] Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *Republic, ibid.

[9] Plato, *Republic*, 516e.

[10] Plato, *Republic*, 517a.

[11] Plato, *Republic*, 518d.

[12] The city of the philosopher-kings would be the perfectly just city, but there is a problem: *philosophers do not want to rule*. They want to exit the cave and get on with the task of contemplating the beings that lie beyond the threshold. The only way the philosophers will be made to rule is by compulsion, which is unjust. Hence, there is something paradoxical at the heart of the perfectly just city, thereby making it an impossibility for Plato. See Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *Republic*, pp. 408-409.

# 1. Heidegger's Ontological Decisionism

The more authentically Dasein resolves...the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of
its own existence.

*Being and Time*, p. 435, H. 384.
Originally published 1927.

On November 12, the German people as a whole will choose *its* future. This future is bound to the Führer.
In choosing this future, the people cannot, on the basis of so-called foreign policy considerations, vote *Yes*
without also including in this Yes the Führer and the political movement that has pledged itself
unconditionally to him. There are not separate foreign and domestic policies. There is only one will to the
full existence [*Dasein*] of the State. The Führer has awakened this will in the entire people and has welded
it into a single resolve.

'German Men and Women!,' in *The Heidegger Controversy*,
Richard Wolin, ed., p. 48-49.
Originally published 1933.

## Introduction

This chapter will argue that Heidegger's work *Being and Time* can be interpreted

as presenting an ontological decisionism. This means that the way in which an individual

Dasein understands itself ontologically, for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, has as its

basis the *decision* of that individual Dasein. This is because Dasein freely chooses a

certain mode of Being, or way of existing in the world and relating *to* that world, for

itself from amongst the possibilities which it has inherited. That mode then determines

how Dasein understands itself *as* a being, an entity that participates in Being. One of the

possible ways that Dasein may exist in the world is freely chosen and resolutely

embraced. When Dasein is resolute concerning its choice, this means that Dasein has

*authentically* chosen. The choices available to decide upon are determined by the

historicity of a particular Dasein, i.e., the heritage into which each Dasein is thrown. The

point that will be constantly stressed throughout this chapter is that the choice of a

particular way of existence a Dasein must make to live authentically, *if* Dasein wishes to

live authentically, possesses no inherent normativity.[1] A choice is considered to be

authentic, and hence worth choosing, because Dasein resolutely embraces that choice,

from out of the historical locus of possibilities, *as* its own in an authentic way. This

chapter will consist of an interpretation of several sections of *Being and Time* which will

subsequently show the various aspects of the ontological decisionism Heidegger presents

there.[2]

First, a brief analysis of the ontological structure of Dasein will be attempted.

After that, it will be argued that the ontological decisionism of Dasein can be broken

down into four aspects.[3] These aspects will be elaborated under the terms that play an

important role in Heidegger's decisionism: anxiety, death, resoluteness, and historicity.

This chapter will then conclude with a summary of how the four aspects fit together to

make a coherent ontological decisionistic theory, as well as an intimation of the political

consequences for such a theory.


## 1.1 The Ontological Structure of Dasein

A brief sketch of the overall ontological structure of Dasein will now be

attempted. To begin, Heidegger claims that Dasein,[4] his term for the entity which human

beings *are*, is the key entity to interrogate because it is the sole being whose Being "is an

issue for it."[5] Interrogating the Being of Dasein will in turn give an answer to the

question of Being, which, as Heidegger notes, is required for any ontology to not be

"blind and perverted from its innermost aim."[6] All ontological inquiry therefore has as its

task achieving an answer to the question of Being, and in Heidegger's inquiry conducted

in *Being and Time*, this answer is provisionally determined through uncovering the

meaning of the Being of Dasein. Dasein is further characterised as "an entity which in each case I myself[7] am."[8] Any individual human *is* a particular Dasein, and recognition of this fact is what enables that particular Dasein to choose a way of Being that is authentic. For Heidegger, it is recognition of one's own Dasein *as one's own* (recognising the quality of 'mineness' in one's Dasein) which makes choosing an authentic way of Being possible.[9]

However, an authentic, or, for that matter, inauthentic way of Being has its basis in *Being-in-the-world*, the primary mode of Being of Dasein. Dasein finds itself always already absorbed in[10] a world of things and affairs, which in turn are made present to Dasein through Dasein having the kind of Being called *concern*.[11] Dasein is *concerned* with the world around itself, and this fact is the basis for any way in which Dasein then comports itself towards that world. Every way in which Dasein comports itself towards beings in the world is based on Dasein's concern with those beings, i.e., how those beings affect Dasein.

Heidegger explicates the Being of Dasein further: "the Being of Dasein itself is...made visible as *care*."[12] As Dasein is always concerned in some way or another with the world around it, its Being will always manifest itself as care for that world. Dasein is *concerned* with its world, and therefore *cares* about it. It is important to note here the contingency of Dasein's Being-in a *particular* world, by which is meant a particular historico-political situation.[13] Dasein is *thrown* into the world, and it is this thrownness which serves as the basis of the 'there' of Da-sein ('being-there').[14] Dasein is thrown arbitrarily into a (the[15]) world, and Dasein always recognises itself *as* itself in this state.

Continuing, Dasein's mode of Being is also essentially Being-with-Others, other

Daseins who are not encountered as mere beings. Dasein encounters Others as beings that

possess "a sameness of Being as...concernful Being-in-the-world."[16] Dasein's mode of

Being is co-dependent on other Daseins Being-with that particular Dasein.

Daseins concerned about the same common affair, and therefore devoting

themselves to a certain authentic choice concerning that affair, are described by

Heidegger as "*authentically* bound together."[17] What this means, and why it is important,

becomes apparent when one considers the distinction between authenticity and

inauthenticity in relation to the Heideggerian concept of *das Man*, translated as the

'they.'[18] 'Theyness' is described by Heidegger as an obscuring, a covering-over:

> Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets
> glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle
> becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force.[19]

The pejorative description of 'theyness' that Heidegger presents here belies the fact that

authenticity and inauthenticity are *relations* to certain choices. Under the rubric of

'theyness,' all that has been discovered through authentic choice is covered over,

"suppressed," but this means that those things which have been discovered still exist

somehow. The only way that they may be uncovered and brought back to how they

*should* be is if Dasein changes its relation to them, i.e., becomes authentic.

Heidegger further distinguishes Dasein as the 'they-self' from Dasein as authentic

self, which is Dasein that has been "taken hold of in its own way,"[20] i.e., a Dasein whose

mode of Being is different from, distinguished from the 'they.' Simply put, choosing a

certain way or solution as 'they' would is an inauthentic choice, one that would be

characterised by "distantiality, averageness, and leveling down."[21] This is not to say that

Dasein may always exist as authentic, however. Dasein is always already "dispersed" into

the 'they,' and must first "find itself" in its particularity in order to be authentic.[22] Hence,

all Daseins are in part constituted by the 'they.' 'Theyness' can then be seen as a 'first

position' which, when placed in contradistinction to authenticity, can be considered to

*define* authenticity. An authentic choice is seemingly not to be found amongst the ways in

which the 'they' chooses its possibilities. One must live other than how 'they' do in order

to be authentic. The 'they' allows Dasein to take things easy, through one doing what

'they' do. In order to live authentically, though, one must break with norms of the 'they,'

and thus stand apart from the crowd.[23] This 'breaking of norms' consists in Dasein's

assumption of the right relation to its choices, that of resoluteness, which will be

discusses later in this chapter. Even though Dasein must do this to be authentic, however,

Dasein tends to constantly return to making choices the way that 'they' do, and this

fundamental characteristic of Dasein is called 'falling.'[24] Hence, even what could be

called an 'authentic Dasein' is constantly vacillating back and forth between authenticity

and inauthenticity, and an authentic life is therefore a project rather than the result of one

decision.

Some other key concepts of *Being and Time* must be discussed now before the

elaboration of Heidegger's decisionism can press onward. First is that of 'thrownness,'

which signifies Dasein's "facticity of...being delivered over."[25] This means that it is the

case that Dasein is thrown into its 'there,' 'delivered over' into the 'there' where it is (or

dwells) by something not itself, yet also not something else (i.e., not another being). It is

simply a basic feature of Dasein that *it is thrown*. Dasein realises that this state is how

Dasein *is*, and therefore "finds itself" in this state, through having a *mood*. A mood

discloses the Being of Dasein to itself through showing Dasein how it is doing, and it is

thus in a mood that "Dasein is brought before its Being as 'there.'"[26] Now, the key mood

for Heidegger is *fear*, for it is only beings whose Being can be an issue for them who can

experience fear. Further, "fear always reveals Dasein in the Being of its 'there.'"[27] This is

because when Dasein experiences fear, it is concerned about the possibility of its no

longer being a Dasein; it is afraid of being annihilated by whatever it is that is threatening

it. The issue of the Being of Dasein then becomes of great concern to Dasein, and in this

way Dasein realises that it is fundamentally a *particular* 'being-there' which is threatened

with impossibility. The Being of Dasein thus reveals itself much more distinctly.

Elaborating on the subject of thrownness, Heidegger claims that "Dasein is

thrown into the kind of Being which [is called] *projection*."[28] Dasein always projects

itself towards its own possibilities, in the sense that it acts in such a way that those

possibilities may be realised in the future. Dasein is always future-oriented. One can say

that in this way, Dasein fundamentally *is* its own possibilities. Dasein is always already in

motion, struggling towards achieving possibilities which thereby define it. Dasein

therefore is not a static being, but, as it is *always* projecting towards its own possibilities

as a primary characteristic of its Being-in-the-world, it would seemingly be unfixed and

constantly in flux. Heidegger characterises the fundamental character of Dasein

succinctly, and it is an appropriate passage with which to conclude this section:

> Dasein has a kind of Being in which it is brought before itself and becomes disclosed to itself
> through its thrownness. But thrownness, as a kind of Being, belongs to an entity which in each
> case *is* its possibilities, and is them in such a way that it understands itself in these possibilities and
> in terms of them, projecting itself upon them.[29]

1.2 Decisionism Aspect A: Anxiety

Given that Heidegger characterises Dasein in this way, this chapter will now turn to elaborating the four aspects that occur when Dasein makes a decision concerning its mode of Being. These four aspects are: anxiety, death, resoluteness, and historicity.

This section will begin by explaining the role of anxiety in Heidegger's decisionism in *Being and Time*. Dasein is thrown into a state of falling, and this state is characterised by a return to being as 'they' are, hence a turn towards an inauthentic choice. Dasein turns to this state of falling when confronted with itself as a being which *is* fundamentally its own possibilities. Now, Dasein can be afraid of certain beings in its world and responds to these beings with fear, thus turning *away* from them and attempting to evade them. In the turning to the state of falling, Dasein "turns thither" *towards* these beings and attempts to "absorb" itself into them, thus losing itself in the 'they.'[30] Dasein attempts to shield itself from the truth of the matter of Dasein's fallenness, which 'theyness' obscures. Dasein is afraid of *itself*, of its quality of Being-in-the-world as such. This is the case because Dasein recognises its Being as thrown, and the resulting total contingency of Dasein's existence makes Dasein fearful. As this source of fear is not a being but a mode of Being, one cannot be afraid of it; rather, one must be *anxious* about it. Anxiety is a type of fear, but a fear without a specific object about which to be afraid. Anxiety, then, 'threatens from nowhere,' and, as Heidegger eventually concludes, "the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety."[31]

Anxiety has the effect of individualising Dasein, throwing Dasein back upon itself as a radically free 'locus of possibilities' and making it aware of this. Through this awareness, Dasein realises that it is *radically free*. Dasein realises that it can have the

attribute of "*Being-free for* the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself."[32]

Through this choosing and taking hold of a way of Being, free from the quality of making

choices as 'they' do, Dasein may then exist authentically. The important point here is that

Dasein is radically free to choose from amongst the possibilities which it itself is. There

is no basis upon which to make the choice, other than the freedom Dasein possesses. To

achieve authenticity, however, Dasein must make a decision and 'take hold' of it. This

crucial point, the radical freedom of Dasein to choose itself in its mode of Being, is the

first aspect of Heidegger's ontological decisionism. The remaining aspects will be

discussed through an examination of Division II of *Being and Time*, which will be

undertaken next.


## 1.3 Aspect B: Death

We are now in the midst of the description of the process/structure of Dasein's

decision, encapsulated by Aspects A to C. Aspect D shows how the locus of possibilities

from which Dasein may chose arises. Of course, the relation between these four

categories is more of an interweaving than a strict demarcation, but it is useful to make

these distinctions for the purposes of this thesis.

The next aspect Heidegger discusses sets the limit to all possibilities Dasein may

choose from: the negation of possibility, impossibility – *death*. Death "limits and

determines in every case [i.e. every ontic case, and therefore ontologically as well[33]]

whatever totality is possible for Dasein."[34] All choices Dasein makes end in death, which

is the ultimate end of Dasein. Thus, every Dasein has death as its 'not-yet,' i.e., a

potential which eventually will be fulfilled. This means that Dasein is carrying with it the

potential to be what it must eventually be, i.e., dead. As well, says Heidegger, "Dasein must itself *become*—that is to say, *be*—what it is not yet."[35] Dasein must direct itself *towards* its 'not-yet,' and in this way it will become what it is in its nature to become. Dasein thus *becomes* its 'not yet,' and also in effect *is* its 'not-yet.' Heidegger calls this mode of Dasein's Being 'Being-towards-death.'[36] It is in this mode of Being that Dasein can then *decide* itself: "[w]hen we say that Dasein is factically [i.e., ontically] dying, we are saying at the same time that Dasein has always *decided* itself in one way or another."[37] In factical dying, Dasein has come to the end of itself, and thus the possibility of Dasein's making another choice is no more. When Dasein dies, it has also made its final choice, whether it knows this or not. If Dasein was authentic, it will know this and be prepared for it; if Dasein was inauthentic, death will come unprepared for, and it will die an inauthentic death as 'they' do.

The way in which Dasein decides itself authentically, i.e., without evading itself as a being that is dying, will now be explained. First, Dasein comports itself towards something possible by expecting it to occur, and such a state of comportment is what Heidegger calls *anticipation*. In expecting death to occur, which absolutely will occur as the one certain end of all possibilities, Dasein is thereby anticipating death.[38] It is through anticipation of death that Dasein recognises the possibility of death as its *ownmost*, for no other Dasein may die in a particular Dasein's place. Dasein is individualised through anticipation of death, in the sense that it recognises its own unique character as a particular being. Dasein "discloses itself to itself as regards its uttermost possibility."[39] Through this anticipating of death, the potential for making an authentic choice from amongst the possibilities given is realised. As Heidegger states,

[w]hen, by anticipation, one becomes free for one's own death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factical possibilities lying ahead of [death].[40]

Dasein thus recognises itself properly, as a being with the radical freedom to choose itself from amongst its own possibilities, as a result of anticipating its own death (or negation of Being-in-the-world). As Dasein must hold itself in the mode of Being-towards-death, it must always treat death as a limit to itself, a limit that opens up the possibility of an authentic relation to the choices Dasein can make. However, because this limit-giving is not produced by any particular being in the world, Dasein is literally afraid of 'nothing' (no-thing) and therefore has the mood of anxiety. Heidegger states that anxiety is the mood that occurs through Dasein's Being-towards-death.[41]

In order to extricate itself from its fallenness into the 'they' and thereby authentically choose a way of Being, Dasein must modify itself in an existentiell manner (i.e., particular to a particular Dasein). As Heidegger states, "[t]his must be accomplished by *making up for not choosing*" at an earlier time, as Dasein was initially part of the 'they.'[42] Dasein must atone, in a sense, for its 'sin' of shrinking back into the 'they,' rather than anticipating death as its ownmost possibility. This is done, however, through Dasein choosing to do this 'making up,' i.e., choosing to make the choice of one of the possibilities presented to it, "deciding for a potentiality-for-Being, and making this decision from one's own Self."[43] Dasein thus possesses an even more radical freedom than simply to choose its own possibility; it possesses the capacity to *choose to make this choice* and thus choose *authentically*. This more primary choosing consists in Dasein comporting itself in the proper relation to the sum of its choices, i.e., comporting itself

*authentically*. Dasein chooses to make authentic choices, and hence be authentic, through this atonement, prior to making a particular choice concerning its mode of Being.

Dasein recognises that there *is* a choice to be made through what Heidegger calls 'the call of conscience.' Dasein's conscience calls it through disclosing to it "its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-self."[44] Through the call of conscience, then, Dasein recognises that it is *guilty* of falling back into the 'they,' and therefore is guilty of allowing itself to adopt an inauthentic way of Being. In order to be authentic, then, Dasein needs this initial call out of itself to itself. There is therefore a *wanting to have* a conscience, in the sense that Dasein recognises itself as fallen and, wishing to live authentically, wants to call out its own guilt to itself and remedy the situation. In the case of a particular Dasein, though, this desire to have a conscience is fulfilled through choosing to choose a way of Being-one's-self that Dasein accomplishes as explained above. Heidegger calls this way of Being-one's-self *resoluteness*,[45] which will be explained in greater detail in the next section.

The guilt experienced by Dasein is a lack, says Heidegger, as there is "something which ought to be and which can be [that] is missing."[46] Dasein experiences the call of conscience as an indictment from itself: 'Guilty!' Dasein is guilty of constantly falling back into the 'they,' and hence lacking authenticity. In order to live authentically, Dasein must then decide to decide upon that which constitutes Dasein: *one of the possibilities which it hands down to itself through projecting itself towards those possibilities*. Hubert Dreyfus states this clearly: "[w]hen I lucidly understand my existential guilt, I see that, even when my choice involves a matter of life and death, I have to choose one alternative, and to do so without justifying principles to fall back on."[47] Dreyfus

encapsulates the both the radical freedom that Dasein possesses, and Dasein's tendency to evade this freedom and do as 'they' do. Dasein must recognise its own contingency, and when it does, it feels guilty for having made choices as 'they' do rather than making authentic choices. This guilt manifests itself through the call of conscience. The call of conscience distinguishes itself from the constant chatter of the 'they' through its *being silent* (as opposed to the 'they's' "idle chatter"), and "the discourse of conscience never comes to utterance." The call Dasein receives as an impetus to resoluteness is not expressed in language. Rather, it is part of the (presumably prelinguistic) phenomenological structure of Dasein itself that Dasein will call itself to pull itself out of the 'they' and into authenticity, accomplished through achieving the authentic relation to Dasein's choices. This is shown through guilt manifesting itself as a mood rather than something discursive. Taylor Carman describes the relation between authenticity and inauthenticity as a tension, one that is a structural characteristic of Dasein: "[a]uthentic existence is...constituted by the very forces against which it has to push in its effort to grasp itself in its facticity."[48] Thus, Dasein's path into authenticity is a constant struggle against acknowledging death as 'they' do, taking the easy way out and accepting death without making it Dasein's *own*. Dasein is always already guilty of this, and thus is always already guilty of being inauthentic. It is through heading the call of conscience that Dasein can rectify this guilt and thus be authentic.

## 1.4 Aspect C: Resoluteness

Resoluteness was described above as the existentiell choosing to choose to be-one's-Self, and through this standing apart from the 'they' and 'their' ways of choosing.

Dasein thus discloses itself through being resolute, as resolutely abiding by a decision

concerning one mode of Being makes that mode authentic. The problem obviously still

remains, 'which mode of Being?' How is it that Dasein should choose, and what are the

criteria that would allow Dasein to claim that the choice made was a good one?

Heidegger asks this same question, in perhaps the most crucial passage impinging on

decisionism's political manifestation, to be discussed in the chapter on Schmitt. For now,

it is worth quoting this passage in full:

> [b]ut on what basis does Dasein disclose itself in resoluteness? *On what is it to resolve* [my
> emphasis]? *Only* the resolution itself can give the answer. One would completely misunderstand
> phenomenon of resoluteness if one should want to suppose that this consists simply in taking up
> possibilities which have been proposed and recommended, and seizing hold of them. *The
> resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factically possible at
> the time* [Heidegger's emphasis].[49]

For Heidegger, the normativity of a given choice, the reason why Dasein should resolve

upon a particular choice, is granted by the fact *that* it was chosen resolutely by a

particular Dasein, from the set of possibilities factically offered to it, *at a particular time*.

Facticity of a choice recognised as one made differently from those of the 'they'

determines whether that choice was an authentic one. Resoluteness, as Laszlo Versényi

claims, is "a mere choice of choice, an open decision that could be given any content."[50]

What matters is *how* that choice was made, not *what* that choice is. Of course, what

Heidegger means by 'time' in the passage quoted above makes all the difference, and will

be elaborated in the next and final section concerning the aspects of his ontological

decisionism.

However, for now there is still more to be elaborated concerning resoluteness.

Resoluteness "brings the Being of the 'there' into the existence of its Situation."[51]

Through resoluteness, then, Dasein experiences its 'there' as its own Situation, which is

delimited by the existentiell-ontic parameters of what it as Dasein experiences. There is

also a spatial quality to a particular Situation.[52] If this is so, there must also be a trace of

the political in the Situation, for a spatial location in the world is always partially

politically defined (as within, e.g., a city or a country). This politico-spatial quality of

Dasein will be elaborated in the next section; for now, the discussion of resoluteness must

press onward. It is through resoluteness, says Heidegger, that Dasein is shown "the null

basis of its own nullity," which is characterised by Dasein's "thrownness into death."[53]

Resoluteness allows Dasein to *anticipate* its own death through showing the radical

freedom it possesses in the face of death. This freedom obtains through Dasein being able

to choose from amongst its ownmost possibilities and live authentically *by virtue of the*

*fact* that *it made that choice*. Thus, Dasein achieves full authenticity in its choice by

abiding by such a choice in the state of *anticipatory resoluteness*. Any resolute decision

must be made in anticipation of that decision's way of being's inevitable ending in death,

for it to be considered an authentic one. As well, it is through anticipatory resoluteness

that Dasein experiences temporality as a phenomenon,[54] i.e., the temporal character of

those possibilities from which Dasein may choose reveals itself.

To reiterate, then: In anxiety, Dasein encounters itself as a particular being who

will die; recognising death as the end of all possible modes of Being allows Dasein to

choose from amongst those possibilities offered to it, through Dasein recognising its own

radical freedom[55] as a unique Dasein (one who is individuated through death) choosing

itself; and once that choice is made, resoluteness allows Dasein to assert itself as a

decision maker in a way differing from the 'they' and thus be considered as authentic.

This decisionistic theory is still incomplete, however. There is one aspect of Heidegger's

ontological decisionism remaining to be discerned: where does the set of Dasein's

possible choices come from? The next section will elaborate this.


### 1.5 Aspect D: Historicity of Dasein

Dasein must make a choice from amongst the possibilities it has before it, and

anticipatorially resolve to abide by that decision in order to count it as authentic. The

origin of this set of possibilities will now be discussed. First, Heidegger claims that the

assertion 'Dasein occurs in a world history' is an ontic assertion, but 'Dasein is historical

in character' is an aspect of Dasein's ontological constitution.[56] Dasein is thus in some

way an historical being, whose mode of Being must then in some way be historical. This

characteristic of Dasein is expressed through a link to Heidegger's concept of the

Situation described above: "[t]o the anticipation which goes along with resoluteness,

there belongs a Present in accordance with which a resolution discloses a Situation."[57]

The Present Heidegger speaks of is the temporal aspect of Dasein in the decision-making

process, the 'now' where a decision would be reached. Based on Heidegger's claim, one

can conclude that the spatial Situation is disclosed in accordance with the temporal

Present, thereby linking space and time for Heidegger's theory. The Present that is held to

be authentic, the Present in which an authentic resolution is made in anticipation of death,

is called the 'moment of vision.'[58] It is the 'moment of vision' that is the temporal locus,

the link to a particular Dasein's factical 'here and now,' of Heidegger's ontological

decisionism.

Temporality, then, is part of Dasein's fundamental ontological constitution. This

has been shown through the fact that part of the structure of anticipatory resoluteness, the

way in which Dasein attains an authentic way of Being, is composed of the Present time

in which the moment of vision occurs. The historicity of Dasein, the historical quality

which is characterised by Dasein's "stretching out and stretching itself along" across

time, finds its basis in this temporality.[59] As Dasein persists over time as a 'being-there,'

Dasein can be considered as an historical being, for "[w]hatever may happen to Dasein, it

experiences it as happening 'in time.'"[60] This historicity constitutes the basis for the last

aspect of Heidegger's decisionism, as will be shown next.

The question that has been haunting Heidegger's description of authenticity since

the beginning is finally asked: from where can Dasein "draw those possibilities upon

which it factically projects itself"[61]? Heidegger answers thusly: "[t]he resoluteness in

which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factical possibilities of authentic

existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown,

*takes over*."[62] 'Heritage' here presumably[63] means the language, customs, and history of

a particular group of Daseins; hence, heritage is inherently political in nature.[64]

Commenting on Heidegger's notion of 'heritage,' John Caputo claims it to be a

restatement of what constitutes Dasein's thrownness: "thrownness more deeply

considered, which means repeated in terms of temporality, turns out to be Dasein's

'heritage'… so that Heidegger now speaks of what has been 'handed down' to resolute

Dasein."[65]

Resoluteness, then, discloses the set of possibilities in terms of the heritage of a

particular Dasein. This logical structure maps onto that of Situation and Present

expressed above: as spatial Situation is disclosed in accordance with the temporal

Present, the resoluteness which allows for the Situation to occur discloses possibilities in

accordance with the temporal heritage of a particular Dasein. Further, the disclosing in terms of heritage is also a "handing down to oneself of those possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily as having thus come down."[66] Dasein thus has room to work with the possibilities it receives, in the sense that can hand down to itself possibilities in a changed form, and is therefore not completely determined by historical circumstances.[67] Richard Polt notes this: "Heidegger does not mean that I have to do exactly what someone else did in the past. His notion of 'repetition'...does not mean aping the past, but appropriating it freely and creatively."[68] Dasein chooses a particular historical possibility and makes it Dasein's own, changing it and making it "a model and point of reference for [its] own life."[69] However, the decision to be made in order to anticipatorially resolve, and thus live authentically, must be made in accordance with and from out of those possibilities.

It is through the free choice of a way of Being from out of those possibility offered by its historicity, and anticipatorially resolving by that choice, that Dasein is brought "into the simplicity of its fate."[70] *Fate* is the term by which Heidegger "designate[s] Dasein's primordial historicising, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen."[71] The historical character of Dasein is expressed in the concept 'fate,' for Dasein's character is such that it projects itself towards its own possibilities futurally, while at the same time accepting those possibilities as derived from what heritage it has been thrown into. 'Fate' therefore captures the paradoxical nature of Dasein, for Dasein possesses radical freedom, but such freedom is only the freedom to

choose from amongst those possibilities which it has inherited, and to choose to make that decision.

So much, then, for how a particular Dasein's available possibilities are given to it. There is one more step for a political corollary of Heidegger's phenomenology of Dasein to obtain, and Heidegger makes it now: "if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with-others, its historicising is a co-historicising and is determinative for it as *destiny*. This is how we designate the historicising of a community, of a people."[72] Dasein's historicity, its historical character, is always a co-historicity of those Daseins which compose a particular 'people.' Thus, any particular ontically-defined people will have a particular ontically-defined set of possibilities from which it may anticipatorially resolve to choose. As Heidegger claims, "Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up for the full authentic historicising of Dasein."[73] Thus, *a fully authentic Dasein will choose from amongst the possibilities offered to it as an historical entity, and thus can be considered as choosing itself with its particular people as a destining of itself.* Dasein's full authenticity depends on this co-historicising with other authentic Daseins, and therefore a fully authentic people will be one that has chosen itself in a way different from how *das Man* would.

Dasein's handing-down to itself of its own possibilities is described by Heidegger as a *repeating* of past possibilities, a choosing and redoing aspects of the lives of past 'great individuals' which have been revealed by one's heritage. An authentic repetition, then, a "choosing of one's hero" to emulate, is based in a resolute choosing to make oneself "free for the struggle of loyalty following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated."[74] The temporal structure of the handing-down of Dasein's possibilities to

itself, then, is circular, in the sense that there is a constant handing down of oneself to oneself, while at the same time receiving oneself *as* handed down. Dasein reaches back into its own past and the past of its people to determine (past), in the moment of vision (present), which possibilities it must then choose to project itself onto (future).

Conclusion

The four aspects of Heidegger's decisionism can now be seen clearly, and will be reiterated as follows: A. Dasein experiences anxiety in the face of the lack of ground it has, its radical *freedom* from an outside determination of its Being-in-the-world. B. Through realising that it will die, Dasein then understands its *uniqueness* as a radically free individual. Thus, Dasein will make a choice from one of the possibilities it has inherited, and C. *be resolute* concerning that choice by choosing to Be-one's-self in a different way from that of the 'they.' D. The set of possibilities a particular Dasein receives depends on its *historicity*, its heritage as part of a group of Daseins who Are-with-Others.

The key point this chapter wishes to stress is that Heidegger's ontology of Dasein leaves no room for criteria by which to make authentic decisions, except for that the decision must be made differently from the way in which 'they' do. Thus, a political assertion of a politically defined group of co-historicising Daseins must also make their decision differently from how 'they' do. Heidegger's belief in National Socialism becomes clearer when one considers this. Germany, specifically Hitler, broke with the League of Nations in 1933, and Heidegger considered this to be an important philosophical event, as evidenced by the second epigraph of this chapter. It seems that

Heidegger believed in the possibility of Germany becoming an authentic co-historicising

people through the decision made by Hitler as understood through the categories of *Being*

*and Time*. In fact, when asked about his continued involvement with National Socialism

being grounded in the "essence" of his philosophy by Karl Löwith, "Heidegger agreed

with me without reservation, and added that his concept of 'historicity' was the basis of

his political 'engagement.'"[75]

If Heidegger's ontological decisionism can have these political consequences, it

would seem that there should also be a concomitant political theory to go along with the

ontological one, for politics on a scale as great as that of a 'people' demands analysis and

clarification. Heidegger claims that asking for this is a fundamental misunderstanding of

his work: "...thinking, when taken for itself, is not 'practical.'"[76] However, considering

the political affiliation of Heidegger (however brief), and considering his comments to

Löwith above, it is prudent to see if there is a political decisionistic theory that can be

seen as complementary to Heidegger's ontological decisionism. It will be argued that we

can find such a theory in the political writings of Schmitt, and so we turn to them in the

next chapter.

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[1] One can argue that 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' are normative categories, but I wish to distinguish between the *content* of a normative statement and its *quality* of normativity. The category of 'authentic choice' as Heidegger uses it does not contain any particular content that suggests a good or right way to live, or way to understand oneself. 'Authenticity' is merely a quality of the relation between Dasein to its choices, and thus to call a particular choice 'authentic' does not then imply that it is normatively correct for all other Daseins to decide for that same choice.

[2] The 'later' Heidegger explicitly argues against certain aspects of the interpretation of *Being and Time* put forth in this thesis. In Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism,' certain concepts of *Being and Time* are reread in order to distance that work from 'existentialism,' which finds its archetype in the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre. This post-*Kehre* work wishes to show the extension of Heidegger's notion of man's 'shepherdic' quality concerning Being back into the arguments of *Being and Time*, thus showing a continuity between that work and Heidegger's later writings and preventing a 'subjectivist' reading of that work, as Sartre is claimed to have done. This rereading is an intentional one, and, it is hoped, the examination of *Being and Time* put forth by this thesis can be construed as an argument against such an endeavour. Heidegger's ideas in *Being and Time* certainly seem to have a subjectivist character, at least insofar as Dasein can be considered as a 'deciding entity.' While he may have corrected this 'error,' as he understands it, in his later works, this

does not give him license to reinterpret his past efforts in light of his new discoveries. This thesis attempts to let *Being and Time* speak for itself, so to speak, and the interpretation this thesis puts forth seems to show that the later Heidegger is not justified in his reinterpretation of his own work. Obviously more needs to be said on these matters, but this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

[3] The term 'aspects' has been chosen because there is no real decisionistic 'process' put forth by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Rather, the decision is a logical nexus to which all of the aspects contribute parameters.

[4] Literally 'being-there,' which speaks to the absolute basis for existence of human beings in the world. In order for a human to be, it must be 'there' as a witness to the unfolding world around it.

[5] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward G Robinson, trans. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1962, hereafter referred to as *B & T*), p. 32, H. 12. The first number of pagination refers to the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, the second refers to the German original.

[6] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 31, H. 11.

[7] I.e., the particular Dasein observing itself as an object of study.

[8] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 78, H. 53.

[9] Heidegger, *B & T*, ibid.

[10] Heidegger here means "Being-alongside" the world, which finds its basis in "Being-in" the world. As Dasein *is* in-the-world, and hence 'alongside' beings in that world, "it can understand itself as bound up in its destiny with the Being of those [beings] which it encounters within its own world" [Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 82, H. 56.] To be absorbed in the world means to recognise one's own self as related fundamentally to other beings through sharing a destiny. See 1.5 below for further discussion of 'destiny.'

[11] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 83, H. 56-57.

[12] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 83-84, H. 57. It is important to note here that the Being of Dasein *reveals* itself, i.e., manifests itself, as care, not that Dasein's Being *is* care.

[13] A particular Dasein grasps a particular world as a world, and each Dasein understands Being in a certain way depending on what choice it has made from amongst the possibilities it has inherited. This will be elaborated in section 1.5 below.

[14] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 174, H. 135. Dasein must always 'be *there*,' and thrownness refers to 'where' a particular Dasein is when 'there.' The spatiality of Dasein will be explained further in sec. 1.5.

[15] 'The' for a *particular* Dasein.

[16] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 154, H. 118.

[17] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 159, H. 122, Heidegger's emphasis.

[18] An extended quote from Heidegger shows what he means by the 'they:' "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find shocking what *they* find shocking" [Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 164, H. 126-127, Heidegger's emphasis]. The pejorative intent of this classifying term is readily apparent.

[19] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 165, H. 127.

[20] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 167, H. 129.

[21] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 165, H. 127. Distantiality here means a lack of being involved in the affair, a safe 'hanging back' without commitment to a certain course of action. Averageness means a lack of any grandness in ones actions. Finally, leveling down is a reduction of all possibilities to that of the average response to an affair.

[22] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 167, H. 129. Dasein is dispersed into the 'they' as part of its thrownness, and therefore begins as a part of the 'they.' Dasein must struggle against this state by asserting itself authentically, through making a decision in accordance with the four aspects under scrutiny in this chapter.

[23] Attention must be paid to this idea in light of the quote from the *Republic* at the end of Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede*, which he translates as, "All that is great stands in the storm" (in *The Heidegger Controversy*, Richard Wolin, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 39). One could surmise that Dasein, in choosing a different possibility than what 'they' offer, would bring a 'storm' down upon himself from the 'they,' be it criticism, ostracism, or worse.

[24] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 220, H. 175: "[fallenness]...is used to signify that Dasein is proximally and for the most part alongside [emphasis removed] the 'world' of its concern. This 'absorption in...' has mostly the character of Being-lost in the publicness of the 'they.' "

[25] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 174, H. 135, emphasis removed.

[26] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 173, H. 134.

[27] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 180, H. 141.

[28] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 185, H. 145.

[29] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 225, H. 181.

[30] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 230, H. 186.

[31] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 231, H. 187, emphasis removed.

[32] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 232, H. 188, Heidegger's emphasis.

[33] This is because each ontic case is an instantiation of the ontological structure of Dasein, and if *all* ontic cases have a certain attribute, in this case curtailed by death, than the ontological structure underpinning them would seem to share the same attribute.

[34] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 277, H. 234.

[35] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 287, H. 243, Heidegger's emphasis. In much the same way as Nietzsche, Heidegger here equates being and becoming. This equating is made through the fact that Dasein is always in flux as a projection of itself towards its own possibilities. Its Being is characterised by this projection, and thus for Dasein to *be* it must also *be becoming* one of its own possibilities.

[36] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 303, H. 259.

[37] Heidegger, *B & T*, ibid.

[38] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 306, H. 262.

[39] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 307, H. 262.

[40] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 308, H. 264.

[41] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 310-311, H. 266.

[42] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 312, H. 268.

[43] Heidegger, *B & T*, ibid.

[44] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 314, H. 269.

[45] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 314, H. 270.

[46] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 328, H. 283.

[47] Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time, *Division 1* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 307.

[48] Taylor Carman, "Must We Be Inauthentic?," in *Heidegger, Authenticity, and Modernity: Essays in Honour of Hubert L. Dreyfus*, Mark A. Wrathall and Jeff Malpas, eds. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 24.

[49] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 345, H. 298.

[50] Laszlo Versényi, *Heidegger, Being, and Truth* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965) p. 189.

[51] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 347, H. 300. Anxiety also brings Dasein to its 'there,' but in a different way, i.e., not a 'there' as a Situation.

[52] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 346, H. 299.

[53] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 354-355, H. 307.

[54] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 351, H. 304.

[55] Mark Basil Tanzer, in his book *Heidegger: Decisionism and Quietism* (New York: Humanity Books, 2002), interprets the freedom of resolute Dasein differently than this thesis does. He claims that the criterion for resoluteness is indeterminate, but this does not mean that it is inviolable. Rather, "resolute Dasein's freedom is self-restrictive; it is constrained by uneclipsable laws of self-achievement" (p. 75). Thus, claims Tanzer, It is wrong to claim that Heidegger's description of Dasein results in a decisionistic theory of Dasein, for "Heidegger's notion of free subjectivity...yields a practical criterion that, though indeterminate, is well equipped to pass negative judgement on actions, whether they be the actions of an individual or a state" (ibid.). However, it remains a lacuna in Tanzer's argument as to how a self-imposed criterion for decision-making is any different from the concept of a radically free Dasein put forth in this chapter. If those criteria are self-imposed, Dasein has thus *made the more primary choice* to impose them on itself. The primary choice of Dasein is still the basis by which to judge a decision, either individual or on the level of a state (as Tanzer notes) as justified.

[56] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 381, H. 332. The ontic-ontological distinction is an elementary one of Heidegger's: 'ontic' refers to particular beings, while 'ontological' refers to the Being of those beings, i.e., Being in general. Similarly, Heidegger makes a distinction between 'existentiell' and 'existential,' corresponding to the ontic-ontological distinction.

[57] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 387, H. 338.

[58] Heidegger, *B & T*, ibid. 'Moment of vision' translates '*Augenblick*,' which literally means 'blink of an eye.' Thus, the *Augenblick* is that moment where everything becomes clear, where the 'curtain is drawn back and the sun shines in,' so to speak. This is not to say that it is a mystical experience, as nothing is granting Dasein this vision. Rather, it is Dasein's coming to realise its own ontological nature through its own call of conscience, as elaborated in the preceding section.

[59] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 427-429, H. 375-377

[60] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 429, H. 376-377.

[61] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 434, H. 383.

[62] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 435, H. 383, Heidegger's emphasis.

[63] 'Presumably' is used here because Heidegger does not explicitly define what 'heritage' means. Thus, it is assumed that Heidegger is using it in its everyday meaning.

[64] Dreyfus describes an authentically appropriated 'heritage,' as Heidegger understands it, as consisting in "marginal practices that have resisted leveling" by the 'they' (Dreyfus, op. cit., p. 329, emphasis removed). Such marginal practices would be those of individuals who stood in relation to their own choices differently than the 'they,' individuals who would be then described (by those who think and decide as 'they' do) as iconoclasts.

[65] John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 87.

[66] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 435, H. 383.

[67] It is of passing interest to note that one could elaborate a Heideggerian criticism of Hegel from this point.

[68] Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 101.

[69] Polt, *Heidegger*, ibid.

[70] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 435, H. 384.

[71] Heidegger, *B & T*, ibid.

[72] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 436, H. 384.

[73] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 436, H. 384-385. The importance of this conclusion cannot be overstated.

[74] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 437, H. 385.

[75] Karl Löwith, 'My Last Meeting with Heidegger,' in *The Heidegger Controversy*, op. cit., p. 142.

[76] Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism,' in *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1977), p. 194.

# 2. Schmitt's Political Decisionism

> The political entity presupposes the real existence of an enemy.
>
> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 53.

> 'There's one thing I would do if I were in power,' he began again. 'I wouldn't take prisoners. What sense is there in taking prisoners? That's chivalry. The French have destroyed my home and are coming to destroy Moscow; they have outraged and are outraging me at every second. They are my enemies, they are all criminals to my way of thinking. They must be put to death. Since they are my enemies, they can't be my friends, whatever they may have said at Tilsit.'
>
> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

> πολεμος παντων…πατηρ εστι.
>
> Heraclitus, Fragment 53.

## Introduction

This chapter will be a discussion of the political decisionism of Carl Schmitt, as expressed in the books *The Concept of the Political* and *Political Theology*. Carl Schmitt's political writings, it will be argued, may be made coherent with Heidegger's writings on ontology. In fact, the structure and aspects of Schmitt's political decisionism will reveal themselves as strikingly similar to Heidegger's, in the way his was outlined in the last chapter. A direct comparison between the two thinkers will be undertaken in the chapter following this one. For now, though, a careful exegesis of Schmitt's overall political decisionistic theory is in order.

For Schmitt, the essence of 'the political,' which means the criterion by which to judge human things as political things, is determined by the distinction between friends and enemies. Because of how this distinction is reached, the political finds a basis in the particular historical circumstances a people finds itself in. As well, the decision concerning who are friends and who are enemies is a radically free decision made by a

sovereign, and the normativity of that decision is granted by virtue of the fact that it was decided on by that sovereign. The friend/enemy distinction, made by the sovereign, is also made in the face of the possibility of death, of physical killing by the enemy, and thus the essence of the political is conditioned by the fear of dying in war with the enemy.[1] Thus, it may be said that the sovereign makes a radically free political decision in the face of death as to who is the friend and who is the enemy, and that decision is factually grounded in the actual distinction, between two (or more) peoples, produced by the decision. This decision, claims Schmitt, is always made for the sake of preserving the state under which the sovereign is organised. The similarity of the aspects of Schmitt's decisionism, when compared to those of Heidegger's as outlined in Chapter 1, is readily apparent.

The structure of this chapter is made up of two main parts: an examination of *Political Theology* in order to determine what sort of entity it is that makes the political decision; and an examination of *The Concept of the Political* to determine the essence of what constitutes a political decision. The attempt will be made establish a parallel with the last chapter's discussion on Heidegger: 1) Dasein (Heidegger) vis-à-vis the sovereign (Schmitt); and the structure of Dasein's decision (Heidegger) vis-à-vis the structure of the sovereign's decision (Schmitt). The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the ontological implications of Schmitt's political decisionism.

2.1 'He who Decides:' The Sovereign and the Exception in *Political Theology*

To begin to outline Schmitt's political decisionism, one must first determine what entity is that which accomplishes the decision concerning what constitutes 'the political.'

Schmitt describes this entity in *Political Theology* as the *sovereign*. For Schmitt,

"[s]overeign is he who decides on the state of exception."[2] To elaborate this statement,

the sovereign is a *unified* entity, indicated by Schmitt's use of the singular 'he' in this

initial statement on the concept. This unified entity possesses the power to decide on

what constitutes the *state of exception*,[3] through choosing a certain plan, approach, or

method to reach that decision. For Schmitt, the state of exception is "a general concept in

the theory of the state,"[4] and will be shown later to be one of the defining features of that

concept. The decision reached concerning the state of exception cannot find its basis in a

certain political *norm*, i.e., a particular way in which political affairs are considered to be

conducted well, for "a general norm...can never encompass a total exception."[5] Thus, in a

sense the state of exception *conditions*, and thereby (in part) *determines*, the political

norm.

The sovereign is given a twofold character at this point in Schmitt's discussion. 1)

Sovereigns stand apart from a constitution of a state, for "the most guidance the

constitution can provide is to indicate who can act in such a case [of exception]."[6] This is

because all a constitution can do is outline norms or guidelines of statecraft, while the

state of exception *suspends* norms. Thus, the constitution must allow for the sovereign to

do what it sees fit to preserve political order. This is done through 2) the sovereign

possessing the power to decide whether or not there is a state of emergency, and how to

eliminate it.[7] The sovereign's motivation is always to preserve the state and its polity,

and, when confronted with an outside (or inside) threat, the sovereign will decide on the

best course of action to take to eliminate that threat. The sovereign "stands outside the

normally valid legal system [i.e. a system based on norms, the rule of law/principle]...and

must decide whether the constitution needs to be suspended in its entirety"[8] in a state of emergency. Sovereign decisions thus can be in disagreement with the constitution of the state the sovereign commands, and in fact the sovereign can go as far as abolishing the constitution if the sovereign deems that action necessary.

The sovereign is not bound to anything such as "general natural principles," i.e. natural laws,[9] which the political system could reflect through its constitution.[10] Schmitt takes this line of thought even further, claiming that "[l]ike every other order, the legal order rests on a decision and not on a norm."[11] Schmitt here is referring to the order of law governing a people persisting over time, and thus that order is judged *as* an order through the decision of the sovereign. It would seem, then, that the 'general natural principles' mentioned earlier are in fact not natural at all, and Schmitt characterises all political order as resting on a free decision by the sovereign concerning whether that order is ordered at all. The sovereign thus has absolute free control over a political order, and determines whether that order reflects the sovereign's own conception of justice. A political order claiming to be based on 'natural principles,' for example the inherent natural rights of human beings, is really based, or so Schmitt would claim, on the free decision of that order's sovereign to shape the polis in accordance with the chosen principles of its constitution.

Continuing, for Schmitt the exception is a "suspension of the entire existing order," for the sovereign has "unlimited authority," one unchecked by the rule of law, during an exceptional situation.[12] Due to this unlimited political authority being granted to the sovereign, in effect "the norm [i.e., the principle on which law is based] is destroyed in the exception."[13] An exception irrupts into the status quo, disrupting and

unsettling the order that prevails there. As such, the exception "is that which cannot be subsumed"[14] under a general description or conceptual scheme—the exception disrupts the possibility of its own codification. Through the exception's impossibility of conceptualisation, the basis of the political as Schmitt sees it is revealed: *the decision of the sovereign* in "its absolute purity."[15] The sovereign, says Schmitt, also decides when a *normal* situation obtains,[16] for if one decides when the state of exception obtains, the norm is defined by contradistinction. Thus, the sovereign's free decision is the basis of both the norm and the exception, which, taken together, sum up what can be called 'political possibility'—for Schmitt, political life is always either governed by constitutional norms or by the sovereign in a state of exception, but all political possibilities ultimately find their basis in the decision of the sovereign.

Schmitt defines his project in *Political Theology* as a "philosophy of concrete life,"[17] which means that he is attempting a phenomenological account of what constitutes sovereignty and politics. Thus, the concepts of 'sovereign' and 'decision' are an attempt to conceptualise actual entities and events in the world. Schmitt's theory is an attempt at a description of actual historico-political beings, *sovereigns*, and their actual historico-political actions, *decisions*. In fact, claims Schmitt, the exception and the sovereign that makes the decision concerning it are the more important subjects of political theory (rather than the general rule, which repeats itself under ordinary circumstances):

> [t]he exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.[18]

For Schmitt, the decision by the sovereign has "autonomous"[19] value, entirely apart from argument for or against it and "independent of the correctness of its content."[20] Bringing rational discussion to bear on the state of exception is a worthless endeavour, Schmitt claims, because in the last instance the decision of the sovereign is what is important and lasting. The decision may even contradict the law and constitution of the polity that is effected by it; paradoxically, the sovereign will accomplish this contradiction in the name of *preserving* that constitution and the state organised under it.[21] From the point of view of the law and constitution of a state, the decision concerning the exception "emanates from nothingness."[22] As the law and constitution is suspended in the state of emergency, the decision concerning that state irrupts through the 'torpid mechanism' of the everyday, revealing itself as something originating in the spontaneous will of the sovereign (from the point of view of the norm). The analogy Schmitt makes in *Political Theology*, 'all modern political concepts are secularised theological concepts,' applies here: the exception is "analogous to the miracle in theology."[23] The sovereign decision regarding the exception is, according to Schmitt, analogous to God's suspension of natural law in order to make events occur in accordance with His will. Thus likened to divinity, the sovereign's word above all else commands and organises any political organisation, and the decision made by the sovereign concerning the state of exception conditions, and therefore *fundamentally determines*, any norms with which the polity can live in accordance. Schmitt notes the power of myth in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* when he quotes a Mussolini speech:

> '[w]e have created a myth, this myth is a belief, a noble enthusiasm; it does not need to be reality, it is a striving and a hope, belief and courage. Our myth is the nation, the great nation which we want to make into concrete reality for ourselves.'[24]

Mussolini's statements reflect Schmitt's political theological stance. The sovereign, in this case Mussolini himself, achieves a political-world-making status though unifying the people under a national myth which, even though it is declared as a fiction, possesses the concrete power to shape political life for that people. Jacques Derrida identifies the mythological foundation of politics in his essay 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority.' In that essay, he claims that laws have a mystical status, as in their original founding they cannot be just or unjust. Laws "can't by definition rest on anything but themselves," and thus they are a "violence without ground."[25] The imposition of law is a violent act, a world-shaping act, which cannot be described as just or unjust by virtue of the fact that such concepts only apply after the law has been instantiated. In much the same way, Schmitt's sovereign suspending a law of the constitution cannot be determined as unjust through recourse to the norms of that constitution, for the sovereign's decision is the basis of justice for that particular polity.

To sum up, then, we have at this point a description of what the entity is that makes crucial political decisions. The sovereign, the head of state, gives value to its own decisions by virtue of the fact *that* it has decided them, and the decision of the sovereign trumps any possibility of discussion when the state of exception obtains. Of course, the sovereign also decides upon the state of exception's existence or non-existence. The sovereign therefore possesses the most basic political power: the ability to decide when and how to act to preserve itself and its polity in the state of exception or emergency, to freely choose a way in which to ensure its own continued existence. Richard Wolin describes the reason behind the sovereign's actions clearly:

> ...in the prosaic terminus of Schmitt's political thought—its ultimate emphasis on questions of functional self-preservation—his existential point of departure has merely come full circle. When

sheer existence is posited as a primary value, whence all other values follow, it is only logical to perceive naked self-preservation as the highest end of political life.[26]

The sovereign will always act in such a way that its own existence is ensured. This basis for action is derived from the fact of the concrete existence of the sovereign, the fact *that* it exists, which in turn is *the justification for all of its decisions*.

So much, then, for the entity that decides. To complete an outline of Schmitt's political decisionism, the structure of the decision must be determined. This has been accomplished partially, though discussing what it is the sovereign decides on: the state of exception. One must look to *The Concept of the Political* to discover what this state of exception is in its essence, and how the sovereign thereby makes a decision concerning it, and this is where we now turn.

## 2.2 The Nature of the State of Exception: *The Concept of the Political*

Schmitt begins *The Concept of the Political* with a definition of the state: "a specific entity of a people."[27] Simply put, the state is a group of people that defines itself politically. The state appears this way both conceptually and when such an entity makes its appearance historically. It will become readily apparent why the concept of the state as simply 'a political organisation,' with no further definition, is appropriate for Schmitt's uses.

The basic political distinction, in fact *the* basis of the political, is for Schmitt the *distinction between friend and enemy*.[28] All political action and motivation, Schmitt claims, springs from this distinction. This distinction "denotes the utmost intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation."[29] As such, the political distinction can be said to be the basic distinction a human being will face for Schmitt, for if it is the

'utmost intensity of a union or separation' between peoples, all other human endeavours those people engage in will be conditioned by that distinction. This is because for Schmitt any division between peoples on any particular subject may become political if that division, already present between them, achieves its utmost intensity. This is shown by Schmitt's concept of the *enemy*, which for him is "the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a special intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme cases conflicts with him are possible."[30] This phrase turns on what Schmitt means by 'existential.' In order to fill this lacuna, we will borrow the definition given by Heidegger[31]: the 'existential quality' of a group of people would be that people's understanding of themselves *as* a people, as a group of beings sharing a common self-understanding that they themselves have chosen and recognised as their own *destiny*. For Schmitt, then, different self-understandings of what it means to be a human being can result, in the 'extreme cases,' in conflict between groups who each believe in one of those differing understandings.

For Schmitt, this distinction cannot be decided upon by adherence to a norm, for in the extreme situation the norm is destroyed.[32] It is worthwhile to quote Schmitt in full here:

> [o]nly the actual participants can correctly recognise, understand, and judge the concrete situation and settle the extreme cases of conflict. Each participant is in a position to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence.[33]

A conflict between two enemies cannot be arbitrated from a neutral perspective, claims Schmitt, for only those involved may 'settle' the conflict between them. It is up to the peoples in conflict to decide on whether a particular hostile people is attempting to destroy them, such destruction being the final possibility of conflict between groups for

Schmitt. Under this rubric, if another group is *not* attempting to destroy my own, they are

my friends; if they *are* attempting to destroy my own, they are my enemy. Thus *the*

political decision finds its justification in the fact *that* a certain people decided that way.

To clarify, Schmitt states that the concepts of friend and enemy are to be treated "in their

concrete and existential sense."[34] This means that Schmitt is continuing his

phenomenological study of the political, for the concept of the political finds its basis in

the actual friend/enemy groupings that occur in a particular historico-political situation.

Continuing the definition of 'enemy,' Schmitt states that the decision concerning

who is an enemy occurs when "at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people

confronts a similar collectivity,"[35] the extreme case being on the field of war. The

potentiality for the decision to be necessary increases as the "concrete antagonism[s]"

between peoples mount. As the antagonism gets closer to the point of conflict, the

antagonism gets that much more political, until at the "extreme point" the state, the group

of people involved in the existential conflict, must "in its entirety...decide for itself the

friend/enemy distinction."[36] This means that for Schmitt the people must make a decision

concerning who is the friend and who is the enemy, and then dedicate itself entirely, as

one deciding unit, to destroying the enemy who threatens extermination (if the

antagonism reaches the 'extreme point').

According to Schmitt the enemy is defined by the possibility of engaging in

*combat* with him. Schmitt uses 'combat' here in its "original existential sense," for the

term refers to the "real possibility of physical killing."[37] The possibility of death

conditions every encounter with the enemy, if the extreme situation occurs between

enemies. Fear of "existential negation"[38] through the actions of the enemy compels a

political group to decide that the agitators are in fact the enemy, and then go to war with

that enemy. Thus, it could be said that for Schmitt it is in the face of annihilation, in the

face of Nothingness,[39] that the political group must make its decision. The justification

for this decision lies in the fact that it *has been made* by that threatened group, for it is

that particular group who is being threatened with destruction and no other group may

involve themselves in the concrete antagonistic situation. It is important to note here that

Schmitt is not claiming that all politics will result in war, or that every state must always

consider the decision as to friends and enemies in regards to every other state in the

world. Rather, he is only making the claim that all politics is conditioned by the

possibility of war with those who have been decided to be the enemy. For Schmitt, the

actual practice of politics does not necessarily have to consist of war or preparations for

it. This shows the phenomenological character of Schmitt's endeavour, his turn to an

analysis of the 'things themselves,' for his theory is an attempt to circumscribe the

essence of the political as it is instantiated in concrete examples of it. His theory is only

providing an analysis of how political groupings actually occur, not making a suggestion

as to how they *should* occur.

Schmitt again claims that, for politics, 'the exception defines the rule:' "only in

real combat is revealed the most extreme consequence of the political grouping of friend

and enemy. From this most extreme possibility *human life derives its specifically

political tension.*"[40] It is this second point that reveals the extent to which the possibility

of physical death influences and shapes human existence. According to Schmitt, the

possibility of death is the extreme possibility of conflict between political groups, but it is

this possibility which determines those groups in the first place. A political grouping

must decide who is the enemy in the face of death (Nothingness), and the sole criterion for this decision is the possibility of conflict to the death with that enemy. The decision is freely made, unfettered by principles of justice that supposedly reflect the order of things. The state of exception defines the norm, and hence the political leader freely determines and shapes human life in a political way. The essence of the political is, for Schmitt, a constant projection towards the possibility of death, and this possibility allows for political decisions to be made. Hence, a politically defined grouping is always future-oriented, projecting itself into the future towards the possibility of its own annihilation in order to make decisions concerning the present. On this point we already are anticipating the comparison with Heidegger made in the next chapter.

Schmitt next claims that any point of conflict between human beings, religious, moral, etc., can intensify into enmity and therefore combat, if one side of the conflict decides the other side warrants destruction. At that point, however, the basis for the conflict, heretofore unpolitical, achieves political status and thereby follows the logic of politics.[41] For Schmitt, then, any conflict between groups of humans can result in war to the death between those groups, if one side existentially conflicts with the other. The political is determined by "clearly evaluating the concrete situation and thereby being able to distinguish correctly the real friend and the real enemy."[42] The evaluation may be bluntly described as 'realising that another group wants to kill you and your group.' The bond between friends, and the concomitant enmity between enemies, is very strong due to its basis in the possibility of physical death (for what could be more powerful a motivator than the fear of death?). Due to the strength of this bond, Schmitt considers the political grouping to be *the* decisive grouping, because of its power to override all other

human relations.[43] Thus, the political is the most powerful human grouping, and therefore can potentially determine all other human groupings:

> If [the political] entity exists at all, it is always the *decisive* [my emphasis] entity, and it is sovereign in the sense that the decision about the critical situation, even if it is the exception, must always necessarily reside there.[44]

If the political is based fundamentally in the possibility of death in combat, this means that for Schmitt the possibility of death is a possible determining factor in all human endeavours. The possibility of death is the basis for the decision as to who is the enemy. According to Schmitt, a political group, a state, must choose who must be engaged in combat through the confrontation with Nothingness, with existential annihilation, which that conflict will bring.

The state, for Schmitt, has "the right to demand from its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies."[45] Members of a state therefore must be committed to the possibility of death in combat, in order to defend the way of life they and their friends lead. This is, for Schmitt, the only possible justification for the killing of other human beings. Killing in war must be justified by "an existential threat to one's own way of life;"[46] thus, it is by virtue of the fact *that* the possibility of death exists in a concrete sense that making the decision concerning who is the enemy is justified. Schmitt states this succinctly: "[t]he justification of war does not reside in its being fought for ideals or norms of justice, but in its being fought against a real enemy."[47]

To sum up, then, Schmitt's characterisation of the fundamental essence of the political is the distinction between friend and enemy, and this distinction is characterised by enmity between enemies such that they are each willing to annihilate the other. This annihilation consists in actual physical death, and it is physical death that thereby conditions the decision. The state can command sacrifice for its own way of life, as well

as command the killing of its enemies, and it is only this that can justify the death of one

human being at the hands of another. For Schmitt, the possibility of death must be faced

as a people, as a unified group who is in danger of annihilation. It is only through

reference to a politically unified people that death at the hands of another human being

finds a sense of *worth*. This is the basis of *the* political decision for Schmitt, for "the high

points in politics are simultaneously the moments in which the enemy is, in concrete

clarity, recognised as the enemy."[48] The essence of the political, then, is conflict

conditioned by the possibility of death, and this conflict can determine all other human

groupings due to its extreme nature.

At this point, we have the 'who' that accomplishes the decision, and the nature of

the decision itself. It remains to see how they complement each other. This chapter will

therefore conclude with an interweaving of the two previous discussions, those of

*Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*, in order to determine a complete

political decisionistic theory from Schmitt's writings.

2.3 Schmitt's Political Decisionism

This section will be an attempt to outline Schmitt's political decisionism. First,

the sovereign of *Political Theology* is the primary being who decides on the state of

exception, and is therefore the primary political actor. The sovereign can be an

individual, in the case of a dictatorship; a small ruling elite, in the case of an aristocracy;

or something as abstract as 'the people,' in the case of a democracy.[49] The actual political

organisation does not matter; what matters is the unification of the deciding body *as* a

sovereign. The sovereign decides when the state of exception occurs and how to deal

with it. The decision made by the sovereign has no normative, correct, or justified quality other than the fact that it was decided upon by the sovereign. This is shown through the power of the exception to destroy norms, to overturn existing orders and force the sovereign to implement a new order. In fact, the norm is conditioned by the exception, and thus the sovereign decides what constitutes the state of normality as well (the state of rule under a constitution). It can therefore be said that the sovereign's decision is the basis of all political possibility. Schmitt goes so far to associate the sovereign decision with the miracle in theology, likening that decision, based in and from out of nothing, to be similar to God's intervening in the world to go against its laws. The sovereign therefore decides what counts as the norm and what counts as the exception, what counts as just political process and what counts as injustice, what counts as the time for continuance of the status quo and what counts as time to suspend that status quo in order to preserve the existing regime.

In *The Concept of the Political*, the sovereign is given the placeholder of 'state,' for Schmitt describes both as unified political entities. The sovereign decides, for the sake of its state, on when a state of exception occurs, which is elaborated as the possibility of conflict with an existentially different people. The sovereign therefore decides on who counts as an enemy and who counts as a friend. The possibility of war with the enemy conditions any relations with him, and with the possibility of war comes the possibility of death, 'existential negation.' Thus, it can be said that for Schmitt the possibility of death is *the* fundamental feature of the political, the basis upon which political decisions are made. The decision made by the sovereign has no basis in a norm or rule, as such things are destroyed by the state of exception. Therefore, under a Schmittian rubric the decision

is entirely up to the sovereign, and, because the sovereign is in effect protecting the existence of the people, the people are called upon by the sovereign to sacrifice themselves and kill others in the name of the preservation of the regime. The only justification for war, according to Schmitt, is the threat of existential destruction. The basis of this possibility, determined through deciding who constitutes the enemy that presents that threat, is entirely up to those involved in the concrete situation of conflict.

Conclusion

The political decisionism of Carl Schmitt has now been outlined. The sovereign of a state decides on the political ordering of friends and enemies, by virtue of the fact that the state itself is threatened with existential annihilation and therefore must decide who is to be defeated in battle. Schmitt's quasi-Hobbesian justification for adherence to the state also presumes a quasi-Hobbesian notion of human nature: that human beings are generally bad.[50] Enmity of the Other is the defining feature of human beings when they are engaging in politics at its extreme, 'high,' level.

The ontological implications of such a political theory are readily apparent. The way in which a people understands itself and the world around it, or, the way in which it understands the meaning of Being, is, according to Schmitt, fundamentally conditioned by the political.[51] This is because all human activity can become political if antagonisms between groups possessing different beliefs reach their extreme point. An ontological understanding of a people is conditioned by the possibility of conflict with other, existentially different and hopelessly irreconcilable, peoples. Therefore, the ontological understanding of a people is always conditioned, in the extreme case, by the possibility of

death. For Schmitt, every political grouping has as its basis the distinction between those

who are existentially the same as that group, and those who are different and therefore

must be annihilated (if the conflict builds to that point). The possibility of a unified,

singular ontology, an answer to the fundamental question of metaphysics, 'What is

there?' is therefore curtailed, for each people will have its own understanding of Being

depending entirely on its historico-political situation. It seems, then, that Schmitt's

ontological commitments include a radical historicism: the meaning of Being, the 'truth'

concerning the order of things as a people conceives it, is determined entirely by the

historico-political situation of that people. There is no possibility of discovering *the* just

political order for Schmitt, for such a thing cannot exist.

Finally, we have reached the point where discussion of the two thinkers in

question here, Heidegger and Schmitt, may be usefully compared. The goal in mind is to

show how Heidegger's ontological decisionism can be shown to complement Schmitt's

political decisionism, and this will be the task of the next chapter.

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[1] The similarity to Hobbes' understanding of why human beings group themselves under a sovereign is apparent. See n. 48 below.

[2] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, George Schwab, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 5.

[3] For now, what constitutes the state of exception will only be discussed briefly, for it is more clearly defined in *The Concept of the Political*, discussed in section 2.2 of this chapter.

[4] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[5] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 6.

[6] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 7.

[7] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[8] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[9] Such laws are natural if they guide human beings towards a life according to their nature as human beings. See Leo Strauss's discussion on this, based in the ideas of Plato, in *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 127: "[o]ne may call the rules circumscribing the general character of the good life 'the natural law.' " Heidegger and Schmitt, both exponents of a radical historicism concerning the nature of human beings, are opposed to the idea of a fixed, transhistorical 'nature' of humanity.

[10] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 8.

[11] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 10.

[12] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 12.

[13] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[14] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 13.

[15] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[16] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[17] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 15.

[18] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, ibid.

[19] Etymologically, 'autonomy' means 'self law-making' or 'self-governance.' The decision gives itself its own lawful value, which thereby gives that decision its political power.

[20] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 31.

[21] In the state of exception, the constitution can be suspended for the sake of the preservation of the state; after the state of exception concludes, the constitution can then be reinstated.

[22] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 31-32.

[23] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 36.

[24] Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Ellen Kennedy, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 76.

[25] Derrida, 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,' Mary Quaintance, trans., in *Cardozo Law Review* 11, 1989/1990, p. 943.

[26] Richard Wolin, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 97.

[27] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 19.

[28] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 26.

[29] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ibid.

[30] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 27.

[31] See Chapter 1, p. 17, above. The insertion of Heidegger here is done because his concept of a people seems to meet the requirements of Schmitt's political decisionism, which include a shared ontological understanding, a shared confrontation with death, and, most importantly, a shared basis on a decision.

[32] This was discussed in section 2.1 above.

[33] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ibid.

[34] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ibid.

[35] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 28.

[36] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, pp. 29-30.

[37] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 33.

[38] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ibid.

[39] We are here again transposing a Heideggerian category into our analysis of Schmitt; see n. 31 above. It is hoped that the final justification for doing this *is* this thesis itself in its entirety.

[40] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 35, my emphasis.

[41] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 36.

[42] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 37.

[43] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 38.

[44] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, ibid.

[45] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 46.

[46] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 49.

[47] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. ibid.

[48] Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p. 67.

[49] This is not to say that Schmitt's idea of democracy can be made coherent with tenets of a *liberal* democracy. Schmitt believes liberalism and democracy to be fundamentally at odds with each other, and a plebiscite or the acclamation of a dictator as possessing the 'will of the people' may be a more democratic means of governing a democracy. See Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, p. 13, for a discussion of the contradiction between liberal individualism and 'the general will.' Chantal Mouffe, in her book *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), makes note of this tension but does not accept Schmitt's conclusions. Mouffe agrees with Schmitt on the fact that rationalism in politics is no longer tenable. She therefore recommends that "parliament [should be seen] not as the place where one accedes to truth [i.e., a politics following from a metaphysical commitment], but as the place where it ought to be possible to reach agreement on a reasonable solution through argument and persuasion" [p. 130]. This claim stems from her commitment to "political principles of the liberal democratic regime" [ibid.], which

can then be seen as the basis for the homogeneity Schmitt requires for a properly functioning democracy. Mouffe thus is recommending an agonistic democracy, where conflict between groups can be settled in the parliamentary chamber. The problem with this approach when depending on Schmitt for argumentative ammunition is that it does not take into account the basis of conflict for Schmitt: *existential understanding of a people*. The conflict between groups cannot be settled through parliamentary means, Schmitt would claim, because this presumes that the different groups possess a shared belief in the parliamentary system for conflict resolution. The only way to solve conflicts, in the extreme case, is through battle, and, under a Schmittian rubric, politics follows this logic inexorably. Mouffe's acclamation of Schmitt's criticism merely brings to the fore the impotence of arguing for left-liberal democracy from an anti-rationalist perspective against the strong existentialism of Schmitt's political concepts. One must find other means of challenging anti-rationalism in politics than an anti-rationalist position.

[50] For Hobbes as well as Schmitt, different groups of men have a natural enmity for each other. Stemming from this natural enmity, the natural condition of humanity is a 'war of all against all.' See Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), Chapter XIII. Schmitt differs from Hobbes, however, as Schmitt claims that it is the natural condition of political life to be at war with those who differ from you existentially. Hence, Hobbes' solution to free human beings from conflict (granting power to the sovereign in exchange for protection from others) does not work according to Schmitt.

[51] This claim is subject to debate, because Schmitt never makes explicit what he means by 'existentially different.' This is because it is always up to the participants in the concrete conflict what counts as a criterion for difference. Heinrich Meier, in *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy*, Marcus Brainard, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), claims Schmitt to be similar to Heidegger on this point: "Schmitt makes it clear beyond all doubt that he conceives of the political as a state that grasps man wholly" [p.38]. If the political 'grasps man wholly,' then human beings are fundamentally determined as human beings through their political categorisation. Thus, their ontological understanding is based on a freely chosen decision, much in the same way as Dasein freely chooses itself and determines its own ontological understanding for Heidegger.

# 3. Decisionism at the Intersection of Ontology and Politics

> And thus it is no accident if Heidegger's existential ontology corresponds to a political "decisionism" in Carl Schmitt, a decisionism that shifts the "capacity-for-Being-a-whole" of the Dasein that is always one's own to the "totality" of the state that is always one's own. To the self-assertion of one's own Dasein corresponds the self-assertion of political existence, and to "freedom toward death" corresponds the "sacrifice of life" in the political exigency of war. In both cases the principle is the same, namely "facticity," i.e., what remains of life when one does away with all life-*content*.
>
> Karl Löwith, 'European Nihilism: Reflections on the European War,'
> in *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*, p. 215.

## Introduction

So far this thesis has outlined the structures of the ontological and political

decisionistic theories of Heidegger and Schmitt, respectively. Already some similarities

between the two theories have been intimated. However, mere intimation does not go far

enough in completing the task at hand. The main purpose of this thesis is to show how the

two thinkers' aforementioned theories *can be made complementary*, in their purpose,

structure, and conclusion. Why this task has been undertaken has been shown in the

General Introduction of this thesis through its discussion on Plato. Here, it is enough to

say that we are working under the assumption that ontology and politics are inextricable

from each other. An ontology, a reflection on the order of beings and the nature of their

Being, also must include *human* beings in that order/nature, and human beings are

inherently *political* beings. Similarly, any political organising principle must have a

notion, however vague, of *what a political participant is* in its nature, and thus any

political theory needs an answer to the question, 'what is a human being?'

It must be said at the outset as to how a complementary relation between the two

decisionistic theories can be drawn from the similarities between them. Might not the

similarities just be that, and therefore the two theories stand far enough apart that they

cannot be made complementary? This is an important question to ask, but I believe that,

when asked in light of the two thinker's political commitments, and the philosophical

commitments of this thesis explained in the general introduction, the conclusion that

forces itself upon me is that they are indeed complimentary. Of course, these two theories

are not the only ones to which each may be placed in complementary relation. It is the

historical circumstances and political commitments of the thinkers themselves that

prompted such a comparison. Other thinkers have noted the general 'conservative

revolutionary' milieu which both Heidegger and Schmitt had been writing within[1]; their

political commitments are a matter of historical record. Due to each theory's decisionistic

character, at least as they have been interpreted in this thesis, the complementary relation

seems to suggest itself as a worthwhile path to pursue. Heidegger's ontological

explorations require a political corollary; Schmitt's political theory requires an

ontological basis. Each theory finds the solution to its respective lacuna in the other, or so

this thesis argues.

This chapter will be organised into two parts. The first will be an examination of

the *similarities* between the two decisionistic theories outlined in the last two chapters,

dwelling on both the deciding entity and the structure of the decision itself. The second

will be a shorter discussion of the *differences* between the two theories, with the same

aforementioned divisions. This second discussion, it is hoped, will simultaneously

construe this thesis's interpretation of the two thinkers as a charitable one, and also help

to justify the conclusion that the two thinker's theories can be made complementary. This

chapter can also be seen as an attempt to elaborate and add depth to Löwith's epigraph

above, which succinctly captures the essence of the intersecting trajectories of ontological

and political decisionism. Löwith's claim above is that, due to their similar basis on the

'naked facticity' of existence as the criterion for judging a decision as justified,

Heidegger and Schmitt's theories are complementary to each other. On the concepts of

'mineness,' 'self-assertion,' and 'freedom towards death,' Löwith finds a correspondence

between the two thinkers. This chapter hopes to make that correspondence more explicit,

in albeit slightly modified terms, in order to show that Löwith's claim was correct.

## 3.1 Points of Intersection between Ontological and Political Decisionism

This section will be an attempt to outline the similarities between Heidegger's and

Schmitt's decisionistic theories. The nature of the *deciding entity* in both theories is the

first aspect to be examined. After this is complete, the corresponding *structures* of the

decision-making processes themselves will be compared, although of course some

aspects of the structures will be discussed in the aforementioned first section. At the end

of this section, the corresponding *purposes* of each thinker's theory will be briefly

discussed.

### 3.1.1 Dasein vs. Sovereign: The Deciding Entity.

As stated in Chapter 1 above, the deciding entity for Heidegger's ontological

decisionism in *Being and Time* is called *Dasein*. Heidegger describes Dasein as the

"entity which in each case I myself am."[2] Human beings must recognise that their

primary characteristic as a being is that they are a Dasein, a 'being-there' which finds

itself always already immersed in a 'there,' a place in the world. Further, a characteristic

of Dasein is that it *cares* about its world and its place within that world. This place is

arbitrary, though, for Dasein is always *thrown* into that world. Dasein's world, and by

this is meant its particular historico-political situation, is the site into which Dasein is thrown by the destining power of Being. Dasein also always exists as an entity amongst and with other Daseins. Thus, a primary characteristic of Dasein's Being is *Being-with-others*. The historicising characteristic of Dasein is always a *co-historicising*.

Dasein exists as a *projecting* entity, in that it directs its actions towards something in the future. Every choice that Dasein makes is in accordance with some future end, some goal or conclusion that the choice facilitates. Dasein also possesses the characteristic of being able to make a *free* choice from amongst the possibilities laid out before it. Dasein does not make a choice in accordance with a 'natural' law[3] or the ethical system such a law would prescribe. Dasein's choices are deemed valid solely on the basis *that* they were chosen by Dasein and appropriated as Dasein's in a particular way.

Accordingly, Heidegger describes Dasein's choices as *authentic* or *inauthentic*. An authentic choice is one that has been made, in part, with due acknowledgement that *every* choice, including the one decided upon, will end in the death of that particular Dasein at some point in the future—authenticity requires the appropriation of that final possibility as Dasein's *own*. Acknowledgement of this fact causes Dasein to experience *anxiety*, the fear of non-being or nothingness. The mood of anxiety discloses to Dasein the final possibility of all choices, the end of Being-in-the-world through the death of Dasein. Through Dasein's experiencing of anxiety, death acquires the characteristic of 'mineness' for that particular Dasein – no other Dasein may die in 'my' place. Once this is realised, Dasein then sees the plethora of choices laid out before it in a new light. Every one of those choices ends in death, 'my' death, and therefore every one of those choices can be resolutely acknowledged as 'mine.' There is no other criterion for making

a decision from amongst the possibilities offered. Any choice, if resolutely embraced, becomes an authentic one if the proper relation to it, resoluteness, is adopted.

Now, if Dasein always exists with others as a co-historicising being, a resolute decision by a particular Dasein becomes authentic if it is in accordance with[4] the resolute decisions of the other co-historicising Daseins. In this way Dasein appropriates its *fate* as an historical being and thus lives authentically. The community of Daseins choosing themselves authentically can then be described as choosing their own *destiny*. The co-historicising community of Daseins chooses from amongst the possibilities that they themselves hand down to themselves, and their acknowledgement of that choice being freely made in the face of death and resolutely embraced as such allows that community to be 'welded together' into a *people*.

As stated in Chapter 2 above, for Schmitt the deciding entity is a unified entity, either a unification of many, a few, or one individual. For Schmitt, this entity, the sovereign, decides when a state of exception occurs in the political realm. The state of exception occurs when the possibility of conflict with another people or members of one's own people who are existentially different obtains. The state of exception, due to its extreme nature, destroys the normal way of relations between peoples. According to Schmitt, whether the state of exception actually exists, and thus whether the distinction made between friends and enemies is valid or not, is entirely determined by those involved in the conflict, and thus the decision is not made in accordance with a natural law or any other like principle. For Schmitt, the sovereign is a particular political grouping at a particular place and time. The sovereign, much like Dasein, stands conceptually for a particular historically situated decision-making entity.

The decision made by the sovereign is made through acknowledgement of the possibility of death at the hands of an enemy. This possibility is, for Schmitt, *the* basis for the political decision, deciding who are friends and who are enemies. The sovereign thus makes its decision in accordance with a future possibility, and all practical political decisions are made in light of this possibility. As there are no criteria that may be applied to the sovereign's decision from outside the actual conflict between peoples, e.g., a 'natural' law, the decision is radically free. The decision concerning the exception appears to "emanate from nothingness."[5] The basis for determining whether a decision made by the sovereign was politically just/justifiable is *that it was made by the sovereign*, and nothing further. Of course, criticism as to the justness of a decision can be made, by individuals or organised groups, for example. These sorts of criticisms ultimately have no impact, however, unless the sovereign *chooses* to take them into account. For Schmitt, the basis of political justice remains the facticity of the sovereign's decision.

A sovereign is meant to represent the will of the people, and can thus be, e.g., the will of one person, in the case of a dictatorship, or the sum of the wills of the citizens of a polity, in the case of a democracy. These two political forms are not necessarily exclusive of one another under Schmitt's rubric, as we liberal democrats may first intuit, for a dictator may choose in accordance with the will of the people if those people's wills are in accordance with that dictator's. Linking Heidegger to Schmitt, the 'will of the people' can be found in the 'single resolve' of a group of co-historicising Daseins. A people welded together in their destiny (Heidegger) will then express itself politically as one will (Schmitt). The political organisation does not matter, as long as the decision reached is an authentic one made in accordance with the people's will. This decision will, for both

Heidegger and Schmitt, be made in the face of the possibility of non-existence, non-Being, and thus non-existence conditions and shapes any choice made. All political choices made by the sovereign are projections toward the possibility of combat and destruction at the hands of the enemy. One could say, then, that the sovereign is the totality of those possibilities, for its essence as Schmitt describes it is to decide on courses of action that will preserve it from destruction through acknowledgement of the possibility of death as its own. Such courses of action then determine the political self-understanding of the polity united under that sovereign. The sovereign is thus an entity that projects itself into the future, in much the same way that Dasein does.

To sum up, then, there are three main points of contact between the concept of Dasein (Heidegger) and the concept of the sovereign (Schmitt). 1) Both decide from amongst possibilities that are handed down to them as historically situated beings. Dasein decides from amongst those possibilities that constitute its own heritage (as distinguished from the *other* heritages of other peoples), while the sovereign decides from amongst those possibilities that are determined through its distinction as a people who are existentially different from other peoples. The locus of possibilities is made available to both entities entirely through their own particular historico-political situation. 2) Both entities are radically free in making their decision, for the sole criterion by which to judge a decision as valid is that it was decided upon by that entity and appropriated *as* its own. Dasein makes its decision from amongst the possibilities it hands down to itself through its own historical character, and any of them, if appropriated authentically, is considered valid. The sovereign, similarly, makes its choice free from outside constraint or judgement. The only criterion by which the sovereign's decision is made is the existential

difference between itself and its enemies, and the concomitant possibility of being annihilated by those enemies. 3) Both entities make their decision in the face of death, i.e., the possibility of non-Being or destruction. Dasein's decision is authentic if it realises that any decision it makes will end in its own death, and appropriation of a choice of how it lives, i.e., making that choice its own, allows that choice to be considered authentic. Similarly, a decision made by the sovereign is essentially a decision concerning the possibility of death at the hands of an enemy, and this possibility of death thereby determines that essential political choice as to who is a friend and who is an enemy.

It seems, therefore, that both deciding entities play a similar role in the decisionistic theories of Heidegger and Schmitt, and both share essential structural elements. This chapter will now turn to the structure of the decisions themselves, in order to show the similarities between the two thinkers even more succinctly.

3.1.2 The Structure of the Decision in Heidegger and Schmitt

Chapter 1 of this thesis outlined Heidegger's four aspects of Dasein's decision-making process. Those four aspects were: Anxiety, Death, Resoluteness, and Historicity. Anxiety was determined to be fear of annihilation, but without a concrete cause of the fear. Anxiety is thus fear of the Nothing, the end of Dasein as a mode of Being. In experiencing the fear of Nothing, Dasein realises that it will be Nothing at some point in the future, and thus any decision it makes concerning what sort of life to lead, indeed its very own way of Being-in-the-world, will finally result in the cessation of that way of Being. Thus, every decision made by Dasein is in the face of Death, in the face of that

Nothingness which pervades every possible choice that Dasein can make. Once this is accepted as an essential quality of every possible choice Dasein is confronted with, Dasein may then appropriate one particular choice as *its own*. In granting that choice the quality of 'mineness,' Dasein thus comes into proper relation with that choice, and such a choice can be deemed *authentic*. This proper relation, the only authentic relation, is accomplished through Dasein anticipating the end of its existence. Through the appropriation of that choice, through grasping that choice *as* its own, Dasein's choice acquires the characteristic of resoluteness. In this state of *anticipatory resoluteness*, Dasein can be said to have made an authentic choice. Finally, the choice is a choice made from a certain amount of possibilities, which, when gathered together, constitutes the historicity of a particular Dasein. Dasein hands its own history down to itself, through acknowledging that history as a set of unactualised possibilities. These possibilities are inherited from the heritage a particular Dasein has found itself thrown into. Through the state of anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein thus recognises those possibilities *as* possibilities. As well, Dasein realises that in order to adopt an authentic way of Being, the choice made from out of those possibilities must be appropriated and approached in a state of anticipatory resoluteness. In making a choice this way, Dasein thus achieves the state of Being-a-whole, in the sense that it has become one of its own possibilities, and has done so authentically.

The structure of Heidegger's ontological decisionism can be thus stated briefly: 1) Through the mood of anxiety, 2) Dasein recognises the possibility of Death. 3) Dasein thus also recognises its own character as a locus of choice from amongst a certain set of possibilities. It then makes a radically free choice, and, through recognising its own

finitude, Dasein appropriates that choice as its own in a state of anticipatory resoluteness. 4) The set of choices Dasein may choose from is determined by Dasein's quality of historicity, the tradition or heritage a particular Dasein has been thrown into. Through choosing one of the possibilities Dasein hands down to itself as a heritage and appropriating it in a state of anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein achieves Being-a-whole and lives an authentic existence.

The structure of Schmitt's political decision, as presented in Chapter 2, may also be usefully broken down into its constituent parts. *The* fundamental political decision is deciding who is one's friend and who is one's enemy. The enemy is that people who are existentially different from a particular polity and therefore threatening that polity's way of existence. For Schmitt, even before the political decision is undertaken, the polity must have some conception of itself as an existentially similar and bound unity. Heidegger's ontological decisionism stands in well for the process leading to this point, due to the process Dasein accomplishes to be considered as 'authentically co-historicising.' Each individual Dasein chooses from amongst the possibilities offered to it by its historicity, and thus a group of authentically co-historicising Daseins will all have chosen from their own shared fate. In this way, the co-historicising Daseins will view themselves as a people, demarcated from other peoples by their shared historicity. The sovereign determines who is existentially different and thus threatening. The sovereign, the concrete political entity *par excellence* for Schmitt, projects itself towards the possibility of its own annihilation in order to determine the enemy with whom, if the political relations reach their extreme point, it must engage in battle. Through this anticipation of death, the political choice is realised. As an historico-political entity, the sovereign finds

its friends amongst those peoples with whom it shares an existential identity. Thus, the historical character of the sovereign conditions the choice that sovereign must make, for the historical understanding of the polity, which then determines that polity's existential self-understanding is the fundamental basis upon which the political decision is made.

The corresponding structures of Heidegger and Schmitt's decisionistic theories can now be woven together to produce what can be termed an *onto-political decisionism*. This notion, while not found in either of the two thinkers, is a tentative product of their complementary relation. Through being anxious of the end of Being-in-the-world/conscious of the possibility of annihilation in battle, the deciding entity recognises the set of possibilities it may choose from to reach a decision. In the case of Heidegger, Dasein recognises its set of possibilities as its own; similarly, in Schmitt the sovereign's choices are determined by acknowledging which other political groupings share that sovereign's own existential understanding, and hence that particular sovereign's choices are also fundamentally its own. The deciding entity thus makes its decision through recognition of the possibility of death. Only a particular Dasein may lose its *own* Being-in-the-world, and this loss is acknowledged as the endpoint, the final possibility, of all possible choices. Similarly, the sovereign recognises the possibility of the death of its own polity in battle with those who are existentially different, and this then determines the political choice that sovereign can make as to who are friends and who are enemies. Through this recognition of the 'mineness' of possible cessation of Being-in-the-world, Dasein appropriates the choice decided upon *as* its own choice, thus giving that choice the character of resoluteness. Similarly, the sovereign's decision *qua* its decision justifies that choice, and the decision reached is held to firmly in the face of death in battle with

the enemy. Finally, as both Dasein and the sovereign are concrete, historical entities, the set of possibilities they may choose from is limited. Dasein/the sovereign chooses its own self-understanding, and that choice thereby produces that particular Dasein/sovereign's ontological/political (respectively) character.

At this point, it seems that Heidegger and Schmitt's decisionistic theories are complementary, both in their concept of 'decision-maker,' and their structure. What remains to be discussed is the similar *purposes* of these two thinkers' projects. Both Heidegger and Schmitt are proposing to describe something about *concrete* existence, the individual ('human' may be too loaded a concept here) in Heidegger, and the political entity in Schmitt. Neither thinker believes that, concomitant with their *descriptive* analyses, a *prescription* as to what constitutes right action follows. Heidegger's analysis of Dasein says nothing as to any particular 'right' or 'good' way of Being in the world. This is because such a 'good' way a) does not exist definitively, due to Dasein's radical dependence on its own history as a wellspring of possibilities, and b) the mere asking for such a concept belies a return to traditional metaphysical understandings of human beings as fixed, law-determined entities, and therefore a return to the philosophical position Heidegger attempts to deconstruct. Similarly, Schmitt's analysis of the 'political' in its essence has no suggestion as to what constitutes political justice. This is because the question of political justice has no definitive answer, for the basis of the political, the conflict between friends and enemies, is for Schmitt wholly determined by the participants in that conflict. Both thinkers may be seen as continuing and radicalising the Kantian distinction between facts and values, and therefore presenting analyses of how ontological/political understanding actually works, not how it *should* work or what

conclusions it should reach. There is an important difference between Kant and these two late modern thinkers to highlight here, though: for Kant, *objective human reason* is the basis upon which all decisions concerning human things are made, and therefore Kant assumes this objective arbitrator to settle disputes over ontological/political decisions. For Heidegger and Schmitt, there is no such thing as human reason *per se*, as the understanding an individual/people has of itself is dependent upon its historical circumstances and the choices that it makes for itself. This is why existential conflicts under Heidegger's rubric cannot be arbitrated – the individual's choice, resolutely decided upon, is the basis for the validity of that choice. Similarly, for Schmitt existential political conflicts, in the extreme case, must end in battle to the death, for there is no outside, neutral, 'human' reason to fall back on as a standard by which to judge who is the friend and who is the enemy. There is only the decision of the sovereign, in its facticity, to serve as justification for a political choice. Heidegger and Schmitt can, in this way, be seen as the final answer to the questions of political philosophy first posed in the Platonic dialogues, as discussed in the General Introduction of this thesis. This is done through showing the *impossibility* of answering those questions definitively.

It seems, then, that at this point we have achieved showing a complementary relation between Heidegger and Schmitt's theories. However, this is not to say that the two theories are *identical*. Such a claim does a great disservice to the thinkers under scrutiny, and disrupts the possibility of a charitable reading this thesis is attempting. The next section will show some important differences between the two theories which must be taken into account. These differences will hopefully be shown to have negligible impact on the overall thrust of this chapter, however.

## 3.2 Points of Divergence between Ontological and Political Decisionism

It is important here to note the differences between Heidegger and Schmitt's decisionistic theories, to avoid the danger of building up straw men. As per the precedent set in section 3.1, the difference between Heidegger and Schmitt's deciding entities will be examined first, followed by differences in the structure of the decision. It is hoped, however, that these differences will be shown to have little impact on the argument just accomplished, and that the complementary relation between ontological and political decisionism will weather the following discussion.

### 3.2.1 Dasein vs. the Sovereign: The Deciding Entity

The first and most obvious difference between Dasein and the sovereign is the *number* of each entity: Dasein is meant to refer to one specific being, while the sovereign's number is left intentionally unspecified. This presents no problem for the intertwining of decisionistic theories attempted thus far. The two theories, at least at this level, complement each other, the first referring to individuals, the second to politically organised collectives. In fact, the differing numbers of the corresponding deciding entities can be seen to make the two theories even more complementary, for the individual is always ensconced in an historico-political life, and the polity for whom the sovereign makes decisions is always composed of a conglomerate of individuals. One theory corresponds to human beings as individuals, the other as a totality of individuals organised politically.

The second difference to be examined here, one which perhaps holds more importance for our discussion, is Heidegger's emphasis on the disclosive power of

moods, specifically that of *anxiety*. This was left undiscussed earlier in this chapter, and must be addressed here. For Heidegger, Dasein experiences the call of conscience, the instigating force which presses Dasein towards authenticity, through a mood.[6] As such a mood is non-discursive, the call of conscience is also non-discursive and therefore non-rational. One cannot reason about *why* Dasein is guilty of falling; it is part of the character of Dasein itself to be in this situation. For Schmitt, conversely, mood does not play into the decision at all. The sovereign chooses from amongst the possibilities determined by its existential quality, and there is no 'call' it experiences compelling it to make an authentic choice from amongst those possibilities. This does not impact on the discussion of the structures of the decision compared above, though. Both Dasein and the sovereign make their decision in the face of death, or the Nothing. The fact that this conditioning element of the decision is disclosed to Dasein through a mood (and not that way to the sovereign) has no impact on the fact that *both Dasein and the sovereign make their decision in light of this threat*. Death figures in the same way for both Dasein's and the sovereign's decision, for it is the possibility of non-Being, annihilation, which conditions any ontological or political understanding, respectively. For Heidegger, death is the final possibility of all possibilities from which Dasein may choose, and it is recognition of this that allows Dasein to appropriate its choice as its own. Similarly, for Schmitt the possibility of death is the final possibility of conflict with an enemy, which means that the sovereign makes its decision through determining that a particular group could destroy it. For the sovereign, death is a conditioning feature of any choice it makes. Death discloses to both Dasein and the sovereign the range of possible choices they can decide upon *as* possibilities, albeit in slightly different ways. For Dasein, death is the

final possibility of all possible choices, and therefore is something to be *accepted*. Accepting death is part of the process of Dasein's individuation, which in turn discloses possibilities to Dasein and enables it to make resolute choices and hence live authentically. For the sovereign, on the other hand, death is something to be *prevented*. This is accomplished through the sovereign deciding on the existence of a threat and taking steps to eliminate that threat. However, in a sense death discloses possibilities to the sovereign *as* the sovereign's own as well. In order to prevent its own destruction, the sovereign must decide who is the friend and who is the enemy. The enemy is determined through the possibility of annihilation at its hands, due to existential conflict that, if taken to the extreme point, erupts into war. Hence, the possibility of death determines whom the sovereign designates as the enemy. In this way, it can be said that death discloses possibilities to the sovereign. The difference between Heidegger and Schmitt on this point thus seems to be reconcilable.

Finally, the third important difference, the one with the most impact on this thesis's interpretation, is that for Heidegger Dasein's existence is always conditioned by the 'they,' *Das Man*, while there is no such similar concept in Schmitt's decisionism. Dasein is always in danger of 'falling' back into making decisions as 'they' would, and hence leading an inauthentic life.[7] In fact, when Dasein relinquishes its resoluteness concerning its decisions, it immediately does fall back into the 'they,' doing as 'they' do, e.g., treating death as something that happens to 'them.' If there is this constant vacillation between authenticity and inauthenticity for each individual Dasein, how is it possible for a 'people,' composed of authentic co-historicising Daseins, to come about as something lasting over time?

The solution is presented by Heidegger himself: the transposition of some of the concepts of *Being and Time* into a concrete political application. This is exactly what he did in his so-called *Rektoratsrede*, "The Self-Assertion of the German University." In this speech, presented upon Heidegger's assumption of the rectorate of Freiburg University in 1933, Heidegger describes a "spiritual mission which impresses onto the *fate* of the German *Volk* the stamp of their *history*."[8] Already an insinuation of the argumentation of *Being and Time* is apparent: the *history* of a certain people determines the possible *fate* of that people. The 'mission' Heidegger is referring to is for the German people to *will themselves* in their essence *as* Germans.[9] The 'willing' consists in "*resolutely* obeying [the] decree to win back the greatness of the beginning"[10]—the beginning being the initial Greek experience of Being. It is thus (according to Heidegger) Germany's destiny to appropriate this beginning through recognising that Germany is the inheritor of this experience. Such an appropriation occurs *resolutely*, which means that the appropriation is done through the embracing of that choice as one's own and recognising that it was a freely chosen possibility from amongst other possibilities. In this way, Heidegger is making a political suggestion in accordance with the ontological analysis of *Being and Time*. The German people must make a decision for an authentic possibility that they themselves hand down to themselves from out of their heritage. One can therefore conclude that the *Rektoratsrede* is an impetus to German students, indeed to Germany as a whole, to achieve an authentic, co-historicising Being-a-whole through making a resolute decision. Heidegger believed that the German people could choose themselves authentically as a whole, and such a whole is then united as a people through their resolute decision concerning their fate. Continuing the argument from Paragraph 74 of

*Being and Time*, if the German people did this they would achieve their *destiny*. The problem of how a people can be a lasting authentic whole, stated above, is thus no longer a problem. Heidegger's ontological decisionism allows for the entirety of a people to unify authentically, and therefore the possibility of that unity being useful for Schmitt's political decisionism is preserved.


3.2.2 The Structure of the Decision in Heidegger and Schmitt

There are also differences between the structures of Heidegger and Schmitt's theories. First, as above, the concept of *mood* has no bearing on the structure of the decision undertaken by Schmitt's sovereign, unlike its fundamental status for the disclosure of anxiety to Dasein. Again, this presents no problem to the interpretation presented here, in the same way as above. The sovereign makes its decision in light of the possibility of death, which is disclosed to it through the threat of existential negation by the enemy. Death still conditions the sovereign's decision, and the way in which acknowledgement of death occurs is seemingly unimportant (as it does so in much the same way for Heidegger). For Heidegger the proper experience of death is experienced through a mood; In Schmitt, the experience of death is not specifically discussed. What is important, though, is that both Dasein and the sovereign encounter death, and death must be acknowledged in each entity's decision-making process.

In addition, there is an absence in Schmitt concerning how the set of possibilities from which a decision is reached is realised for a sovereign, unlike Heidegger where the set is handed down to Dasein through its historicity. An attempt has been made above to describe the historicity of a Schmittian polity above, through the acknowledgement that

in order to determine who is an enemy, the sovereign must already have an existential understanding of itself and its polity. The polity has a particular existential understanding of itself, distinguished from other polities. These distinctions, presumably, have a history, be it through differences in language, religion, customs, or something of this ilk. It has been claimed above that Heidegger's ontological decisionism can satisfy the historical lacuna in Schmitt's political decisionism, as a decision made as a people, welded together in their destiny through being authentic co-historicising Daseins, grants an authentic self-understanding of that people to themselves. This self-understanding thereby gives the sovereign its range of possible choices: those who differ existentially must be treated as an enemy, if the political relation to those who differ reaches its extreme limit. It seems that the historicity of Dasein as an individual can, with the work Heidegger has accomplished in his *Rektoratsrede*, be transposed into the political realm and hence be made applicable to Schmitt's theory.

A third difference between the structures of Heidegger and Schmitt's decision is that there is the absence of an antagonistic logic between peoples for Heidegger, whilst Schmitt's theory is all but based on the antagonism between peoples. This point seems to be irreconcilable, as Heidegger's analysis of the destiny of a people stops short at the relations *between* different peoples. It seems, however, that Heidegger fulfills this requirement, albeit perhaps inadvertently, through his concrete political commitments. His commitment to National Socialism, and the aggressive foreign policy that regime had, seem to show that for Heidegger, the *self-assertion of a people requires an assertion against other peoples*. There are intimations of this in Heidegger's analysis of Dasein: the emphasis on 'standing apart' from the 'they,' and the quality of 'mineness' (and hence

'no one else's') of Dasein's choices, for example. Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede* seems to bring this antagonism to the fore, however. Germany's uniqueness as the inheritors of the meaning of Being, as Heidegger claims, lends itself to interpreting that Germany stands apart from other peoples in Europe. While this does not mean there is a necessary antagonism between those peoples following from that standing-apart, given the particular historical circumstances in which Heidegger expressed these thoughts, the antagonistic interpretation cannot but be assumed. Obviously an assumption does not equal a concrete relation; suffice it to say, then, that Schmitt's antagonistic logic finds a *possible* parallel in Heidegger's concept of self-assertion in the *Rektoratsrede*.

Conclusion

As can be seen, the transition from individual Daseins to a 'German' Dasein prepares the way for a possible intertwining of Heidegger and Schmitt's theories. When the Dasein of a people is considered as such, the problem of the unification of that people under a sovereign *as* an authentic people is no longer present. Heidegger's major foray into the political use of his philosophical ideas, the *Rektoratsrede*, can be seen as the final step to the conclusion reached here: that powerful and telling similarities exist between aspects of the ontological decisionism of *Being and Time*, and the political decisionism of *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*. From this basis, the two thinkers' theories may be placed in a complementary relationship, each filling the lacuna of the other as outlined in the General Introduction of this thesis.

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[1] For example, Jürgen Habermas, in "Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective" (in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, Shierry Weber Nicholsen, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989)), notes that "the spirit of the times, with which our author was already imbued, show itself in this central work [i.e., *Being and Time*]" (p. 146).

Habermas then goes on to give numerous examples of similarities between Heidegger's rhetoric and that of other German thinkers and polemicists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, e.g., Oswald Spengler and Ernst Jünger. Heidegger himself mentions his dependence on Jünger's analysis of Germany's historical situation leading up to World War I, and what Germany could or should do about that situation in the future (in "The Rectorship 1933-1934: Facts and Thoughts," in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds., Lisa Harries, trans. (New York: Paragon House, 1990), pp. 17-18).

[2] Heidegger, *B & T*, p. 78, H. 53.

[3] I.e., a law derived from a rational discovery of a natural order in the world. See Chapter 2, n. 9 for a discussion of this.

[4] This does not imply that all individuals in the co-historicising relation of a people need to make *identical* choices. Rather, it means that each individual Dasein must be in the proper relation to *its* choices, which are in turn determined by the historicity of that people.

[5] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pp. 31-32.

[6] See Chapter 1, p. 11-12

[7] See Chapter 1, p. 5.

[8] Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," in *The Heidegger Controversy*, op. cit., p. 29, my emphasis.

[9] Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," p. 38.

[10] Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," p. 32.

# Concluding Remarks

In the preceding chapters, this thesis has attempted to outline an onto-political decisionism, which is constituted by the complementary relation of Heidegger and Schmitt's theories. Each theory, it has been argued, satisfies the lacuna of the other, and such lacunae are considered as such under the Platonic assumption outlined in the General Introduction. Heidegger's ontological decisionism finds its complement, both in deciding entity and the structure of the decision, in Schmitt's political decisionism.

Onto-political decisionism has a number of consequences for philosophy, both political and ontological. If Heidegger and Schmitt are correct in their analyses, the whole history of philosophy is called into question. In the case of 'first' philosophy, i.e., metaphysics, the series of thinkers from Plato to Nietzsche (whom Heidegger includes amongst 'Platonists') were all in error, because they were attempting to determine a final answer to the questions of metaphysics. This is ultimately impossible, Heidegger would claim, because an understanding of Being is entirely based in one's choosing that understanding from out of what is offered by particular historical circumstances. In the case of political philosophy, any regime claiming to base itself on principles that are themselves the truth, or self-evident, is in error, as Schmitt would claim that the history of politics is the history of those who possess power, sovereigns, deciding upon what constituted justice. Such claims as to what constitutes justice have no basis other than the decision of the sovereign itself, historically situated in conflict with other peoples. Considering the recent revival of Schmitt by leftist democratic theorists, any attempts at finding normative grounds for belief in their political theories becomes problematic. The use of Schmitt to criticize liberal democracy in the name of a more 'radical' democracy

does not seem to have taken into account Schmitt's decisionism that is concomitant with such a criticism. Schmitt's decisionism calls into question the possibility of a lasting political regime based on principles of freedom and equality: if those principles are based on a previous decision to accept them, there is no guarantee that those principles will be usurped by others unconducive to a leftist political program at some point in the future.

If one does not wish to accept the claims of these thinkers, where can one turn? One is eyed with suspicion, marked as a fanatic or an elitist, if one claims to have discovered an ontological truth. Similarly, to claim to have discovered political principles that purport to be just for all times and places leads to being branded an imperialist. While these terms are pejorative, in certain situations, especially when considering contemporary political circumstances, they can be seen as apt. It seems, then, that a return to old, absolutist ways of thinking is not to be recommended. However, one particular method of philosophising seems to suggest itself as a solution: *Socratic scepticism*. This position, one which is based on the character of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, may be briefly described as follows. One adopts this philosophical viewpoint, one assumes that there *is* truth to be discovered 'out there,' both ontological and political, but it is always subject to revision and, if later found to be incorrect, discardable. In the face of onto-political decisionism, the Socratic sceptic claims that such a conception of ontology and politics is in error, for there *is* ontological and political truth to discover. However, this truth is always subject to scrutiny and revision. In fact, if it were discovered in the future that onto-political decisionism *is* the truth concerning the nature of things, the Socratic sceptic would have to accept such a conclusion. What matters for the purposes of this thesis, though, is the fact that onto-political decisionism effectively subverts the

Socratic sceptic's task. If a people's onto-political understanding finds its basis in the historical circumstances it dwells within, then there is no possibility of the discovery of an ontological or political human essence. Such a concept is impossible to find, and hence the Socratic sceptic's task is effectively curtailed.

Obviously, the concept of the Socratic sceptic requires much more elaboration, including the construction of a detailed confrontation between Heidegger/Schmitt and the Platonic dialogues, but such things are far beyond the scope of this thesis. It can be said, however, that this thesis was undertaken in order to contribute towards the revival of the task of the Socratic sceptic. Through its attempt at putting Heidegger and Schmitt's theories in complementary relation, this thesis, it is hoped, has prepared a little of the way for the Socratic sceptic to continue his journey, however it may seem quixotic, towards comprehension of the nature of things ontological and political. This is done through attempting to find answers to the enduring questions of ontology and politics, and thereby arising from opinion concerning those things to knowledge of those things.

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