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HEIDEGGER AND THE CONCEALMENT OF CRISIS

Joel Morrow

Philosophy

Introduction

The first premise upon which this paper is being written is that modern civilization is currently facing a crisis of historically unprecedented proportions.¹ This "crisis" can be described and explained in many ways, as it is taken here to be a product of the systemic conditions upon which civilization has developed into its current form. It is generally accepted that these conditions are most essentially accounted for in "economic" and "ecological" discourse—that is, the two discursive fields that are distinguished by their fundamental concern with *oikos*: 'home', 'dwelling', 'habitat'. This semantic convergence should by no means be assumed a meaningless coincidence, as the current crisis is precisely one in which human beings are destroying their own capability of inhabiting the very planet they call "home." Through an interminable, systemic process of procuring, enhancing, and expanding this human habitat we call "civilization," the global economy pushes human existence toward its own ecological self-destruction. The "global economic system" that has been programmed to sustain itself on the principle of indefinite growth is not only colliding with the reality of finite resources on a finite planet, it is arriving at this critical moment at the cost of this very planet's capability of supporting human life. As rapidly changing climate systems further disrupt food production across the world, and as the global economy itself continues to collapse in the wake of rising oil prices and unmanageable national debt, the volatility of domestic and international politics intensifies. Nonetheless, it can be observed that amidst all of this the common, unconscious assumption remains: the world as we know it will go on indefinitely.

¹ This paper is thus not intended to argue or defend this claim. Nonetheless, it seems appropriate to indulge some hypothetical incredulities. For a comprehensive picture of what is at stake, see: Steffen et al. *Global Change and the Earth System: A planet under pressure* (executive summary). Stockholm: IGBP Secretariat Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, 2004; For a more concise picture, see: Ahmed, Nafeez Mosaddeq. "Globalizing Insecurity: The Convergence of Interdependent Ecological, Energy and Economic Crises", *Yale Journal of International Affairs* (Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010) pp. 75–90

There are a variety of different ways in which such an assumption could be upheld in the daily life of a political subject. No doubt, for many, there may simply be a lack of positive knowledge about certain world events and scientific discourse, while others may be genuinely skeptical towards the available evidence. These epistemological cases, however, will not be the focus of this discussion. There is a far more enigmatic kind of thinking to be reckoned with that cannot be reduced to ignorance or skepticism, as it manifests itself in the vast amount of those who *accept* these catastrophic terms as legitimate descriptions of the state of their situation, but nonetheless proceed through their daily lives as if this were not the case. The second premise of this discussion will accordingly be that "proximally and for the most part"² the majority of those who 'rationally' accept the basic reality of this crisis are not responding to it as such.

This condition poses the central problem that will be addressed in this paper. Attending to the question of empirical ignorance or skepticism in this regard is a task for empirical research, not philosophical discourse. No doubt, the prevalent dissonances on this issue between public knowledge and scientific evidence, or between scientific evidence and "personal belief," is remarkably troubling and problematic given the urgency of the overall situation. However, what is taken here to be far more troubling and problematic is the fact that, even when ignorance and skepticism appear to be overcome, a dissonance between knowledge and belief seems to remain—and, in effect, remain just as politically immobilizing.

Describing this condition as a question of 'belief' and its relation to 'knowledge' would certainly be Slavoj Žižek's approach to addressing the issue, as he often has. The overall situation

² In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses this phrase to describe how things are in their "everydayness," which is to be understood in its temporal connotations. It could in a certain way be rephrased, "in the order of the everyday." Heidegger most clearly explains what he means by this towards the end of the book: "'Everydayness' means the 'how' in accordance with which Dasein 'lives unto the day', whether in all its ways of behaving or only in certain ones which have been prescribed by Being-with-one-another. To this 'how' there belongs further the comfortableness of the accustomed, even if it forces one to do something burdensome and 'repugnant'" (422).

no doubt seems to beg for a Marxian critique of ideology, and Žižek's "inversion" of the classic interpretation of Marx's line, "they do not know it, but they are doing it," is evidently in tune with matter at hand:

we have established a new way to read the Marxian formula...the illusion is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing...They know very well how things really are, but they still are doing it *as if* they did not know (29-30; my emphasis).

For Žižek, ideology today is not ultimately a matter of 'us' somehow being unaware of the injustices, inconsistencies, or absurdities involved in our way of life (in this case, the overall absurdity of ecocide), but a matter of how we *effectively* disavow what we really do factually know about the world *in* our everyday practices. Hence, the "illusion is not on the side of knowledge" but "reality itself" in the sense that, despite what we know, we continue (through our everyday social practices and institutional commitments) to secure and maintain an effective social reality for ourselves that ultimately contradicts or 'neutralizes' the ontological *veracity* or *significance* of whatever ontic knowledge may put the truth of this reality to question. Thus, with his inversion of the classic Marxian understanding of ideology, Žižek implicitly shifts the matter from being primarily an epistemological question to being more fundamentally and peculiarly ontological. To this extent his thinking helps indicate the kind of situation that is here assumed to be fundamentally at stake: one defined by an effective maintenance, preservation or continuation of a kind of 'ontological hegemony' that overrides and overpowers the *effective* veracity of what is commonly known to be true, thus placing invisible limits on the everyday horizon of ethical/political action.

The terms in which Žižek would further examine this condition are only helpful in our case to an extent. For Žižek, it is 'belief' that "supports the fantasy that regulates social reality"

(33). Thus, on his account, the persistence of a 'false reality' (as opposed to the Marxian "false-consciousness") amidst a well-informed society indicates the "disturbance in the relationship of knowledge and belief that determines our everyday ideological horizon," exhibited, as he describes, in the "experience of when we say of something (as a rule terrible, traumatic), 'I know that it is so, but nevertheless I cannot believe it'" (33). Addressing the present condition in terms of 'belief' (counterposed to 'knowledge') certainly has its rhetorical advantages, which Žižek clearly exploits. However, this notion inevitably brings an unnecessary set of conceptual baggage to the question, ultimately obfuscating what is taken here to be a more fundamental issue, which is not in the *saying* "I cannot believe it," but, as he describes, in the "*experience* of when" we say such things. Thus, to reformulate Žižek's line, the fundamental issue may be more directly indicated in the expression, "I know that it is so, but nevertheless I cannot '*experience*' it as *such*." My knowledge proves to be, as it were, *affectively* ineffective.

Indeed, an explicit consideration of 'affect' is taken here to be absolutely critical, particularly as it relates to ontology. This is in fact one of the major reasons why this paper will ultimately be an engagement with Heidegger's thought, rather than Žižek's. Heidegger's claim in *Being in Time*, that, "we are never free of moods," that our Being-in-the-world is always-already disclosed by an affective disposition "*prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure," indicates our basic terms for understanding this ontologically inconspicuous crisis on the level of embodied experience (175). Indeed, regardless of whether I 'rationally affirm' that the predictable world I take for granted on an everyday basis is in fact highly precarious, this world will never *affectively be* precarious on this fundamental level unless I am '*affectively* disposed', or as Heidegger would say, "attuned" (*Gestimmtsein*) to being fundamentally

uncertain.³ To try and account for this discrepancy as a discrepancy of belief is, at least for the purposes of this discussion, unnecessary. I do not need a theory of belief to appreciate the basic point that my knowledge of something fearful is not the same as actually *Being fearful*—that the world *really is* disclosed as a fundamentally different place when I am *gripped* by fear and not merely in acknowledgment of its potential. As Heidegger himself emphasizes, this point must be understood with the recognition that "phenomenally, we would wholly fail to recognize both *what* mood discloses and *how* it discloses, if that which is disclosed were to be compared with what Dasein is acquainted with, knows, and believes 'at the same time' when it has such a mood" (175). The ontological comportment of this mere "knowing" (*theoria*) is described by Heidegger as a kind of "pure beholding," which "even if it were to penetrate to the innermost core of the Being of something present-at-hand, could never discover anything like that which is threatening" (177).

Hence, it would be absurd to assume that generating the initiative to respond to this crisis on its own radical terms could simply be a matter of rational persuasion, as it is only through a "disclosive submission to the world" (i.e., an attunement) that "we can encounter something that *matters* to us" (177). It is important in this regard to recognize that a 'crisis' is really not a crisis at all if it is not *significant*, and significance is utterly indifferent to the disinterested procedures of logic or the simple existence of 'facts' when divorced of any interpretation that *cares*. If I am not attuned, or affectively disposed to the world *as* what I purport it to be, this "knowing" will play no significant role in determining the basic manner in which the world is disclosed to me. 'Being' will continue to "presence" as if things always-were and always-will-be the way they are:

³ In order to bring out the sense in which Heidegger's *stimmung* (often translated as "mood" though literally translated as "attunement") is not merely an inconsequential "feeling" but a fundamental, ontologically determinate condition, I will often deploy this hybridization of 'affect' and 'effect' (a/effect).

familiar, obvious, everlasting—and as long as this persists uninterruptedly as my a/effective ontological matrix, I will continue acting as if my knowledge bears no relation reality.

The following discussion will accordingly be an attempt to address this situation as one in which the ethical (but really, political) question, "what is to be done," is not only empty, but utterly *impractical*, as it is being asked under conditions in which the scope and severity of the issue is being ontologically mitigated and thus drastically underestimated. As long as this is the case, any 'plan of action' will be inevitably delusive. The focus here will therefore be on these very conditions of ontological mitigation, which, in concurrence with Žižek, are understood to be fundamentally rooted in the domain of everyday *praxis*. However, in a radical departure from Žižek's conceptual framework, this domain will not be examined as a site of belief or ideology, but rather as a site of "truth" in the Heideggerian sense of "disclosure" or "unconcealment" (*alethia*). In this regard, the "essence" or 'fundamental condition' of truth is a question that on the most basic level does not concern correctness or incorrectness, but the way in which certain modes of thinking, understanding, or experiencing the world become under certain conditions possible, while under others, impossible. This understanding has already been prefigured by our brief consideration of attunement—which, for Heidegger, is essentially another word for "primordial disclosure". However, this understanding remains significantly problematic insofar as there is still an unspoken attempt to ground the conditions of such disclosure within the "inner" domain of a centered, self-encapsulated subject. It must therefore be shown how the 'alethiological conditions' in which I find myself are by no means reducible to my "inner life," but are rather always already "outside" or "beyond" my own determinacy in the "forms of life" that shape and configure the most basic elements of my everyday existence.

Praxis and Alethia

The major assumption that we are here trying to avoid is that the apparent disjunction between 'theory' and 'practice' regarding the problem of ecocide is reducible to some kind of determinate act of "denial" that occurs (consciously or unconsciously) within the private spheres of our inner conscience, as if each individual undergoes their own personal struggle with an unbearable truth, ultimately failing, in one way or another, to allow that truth its rightful place in their sense of reality. The argument here is, on the contrary, that the ontological '*realization*' (literally, the-coming-to-be-effectively-real) of what would otherwise be neutral ontic knowledge, cannot be appropriately accounted for in terms of individual (which is to say, private, isolated) sensibility, precisely because any individual's 'sense' of reality is inextricably bound to an anthropogenic world (of culture, socio-political institutions, technology, etc.), whose 'being' is always in excess of and irreducible to any abstracted 'unit' of sensibility (ranging from a single person to a historical generation).⁴ Žižek certainly follows this point in his own way, which is why he must constantly emphasize that belief, "far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always *materialized* in our effective social activity," it is "radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people" (31). In order for the catastrophic implications of what is known to literally "presence" in my world *catastrophically*—which is to say, to actually *be* catastrophic, and not merely be known-to-be-catastrophic—something about this very *world* and the way in which I am engaged with it must be altered. It is not simply a matter of me having theoretical knowledge and, as if out of sheer will, *believing* in it—or for that matter simply 'allowing' my knowledge to seep out of its abstraction and 'take hold', as it were, of

⁴ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger uses the term 'ontical' in reference to that which concerns beings (entities) and facts about them, as opposed to 'ontological', which concerns Being (the way in which beings are in their 'Being'). In order to distinguish between the ontic 'being(s)' (*das Seiende*) and ontological 'Being' (*das Sein*), the latter will always be capitalized, as with most translations.

my concrete sense of reality—*and only then* somehow modifying my practical existence in accordance with this reality. On the contrary, the realization of what I know to be true must first and foremost come through this practical existence itself.

One should notice here a repetition of the earlier point about attunement. This is not coincidental. The a/effective state in which I find myself (*Befindlichkeit*) is a practical affair, not a theoretical one, and the aim of this section is accordingly to 'feel out' the ontological sense of practice *qua* disclosure or as the 'site of unconcealment' that operates at the core of both Heidegger's early and later thinking. In this regard, a typical understanding of practice in terms of some vague notion of "doing" as opposed to "thinking," or as that which concerns concrete action rather than abstract reflection, must be provisionally suspended in order to avoid misleading conceptual tendencies. The most obvious avoidance should be the assumption that practice is, in opposition to 'theory', essentially defined as "physical" rather than "mental" activity. More importantly, however, the metaphysical terms in which "activity" or "action" itself become commonly conceptualized must also not be assumed to be the most appropriate terms in which the question of practice can be examined and discussed. Namely, practice should not be assumed to be something that is grounded in individual "wills" or "intentions," as if it is merely a matter of *my* determinate 'doings,' rather than, say, the overall world or context of 'doings' that I am a/effectively *involved* in.

The significance of this question could be accordingly framed in terms of its fundamental relevance to what made Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and Heidegger's *Being and Time* so methodologically unique and similar. For Wittgenstein, the workings of language cannot be approached as if they could be analyzed "in a vacuum," but rather as they are fundamentally "at work" in our everyday "forms of life" (*Philosophical Investigations* 11-15). He thus

emphasizes over and over that his concern is not "to hunt out new facts," but rather, "to understand something that is already in plain view," a dimension to language that often seems "inexpressible" as it is in the "background against which whatever I could express has its meaning" (*Culture and Value* 14e). Likewise, Heidegger argues that any interpretation of our "sense of Being" must assume that we already have some kind of "pre-ontological" (pre-thematic) understanding of Being, thus indicating that his intention in *Being and Time* is not necessarily to find anything "new" about Being, but, on the contrary, to engage in a phenomenological "retrieval" of it as it is always already understood, and thereby also "concealed" or "forgotten," in our everyday existence (2). This understanding is accordingly not to be found in any kind of theoretical or reflective representation of 'what' Being is, but rather in our non-theoretical, pre-reflective, *implicit way* of "Being-there" (in-the-world) that always, as Wittgenstein might say, forms "the background against which whatever I could express" as 'Being' "has its meaning."

This 'implicit' way-of-Being thus exhibits what could be considered our understanding of Being 'in practice', which, according to Heidegger, constitutes our "closest" or most primordially *familiar way* of Being-there (Dasein) in-the-world. If we adopt this Heideggerian perspective, it can then be observed how the question concerning my inability to experience what I know to be true is at the same time a question that concerns the *realization* of this truth *in practice*. Again, the connection is ontological: it is a matter of how the reality of my purported situation is disclosed to me through the very way in which I am a/effectively 'in' it. Indeed, while Wittgenstein's thinking of practice tended to be expressed in his constant appeal to "forms of life," Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of "Being-in" (as one way of looking at the

overall phenomenon of Being-in-the-world) presents his most direct and succinct articulation of practice as an existential-ontological condition of disclosure.

For Heidegger, Dasein's condition of 'Being-in' a world must not be thought of as some kind of spatial "insiderness," as if it were the "Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) 'in' another entity which is present-at-hand" (79). This way of thinking represents an appeal to theoretical understandings of the way beings relate to one another, rather than the way in which you or I relate to "beings-as-a-whole" *in practice*—that is, in our own Being-there.⁵ Heidegger accordingly insists that the "inness" of my Dasein's 'Being-in' is most fundamentally characterized by a state of intimacy or familiarity with "where" and "how" I am. Hence, to Be-in a world is to be, as it were, already "accustomed to," or as Heidegger would say, "*at-home-in*" a world. I exist in a world through *in-habiting* it.

'In' is derived from "*innan*"—"to reside", "*habitare*", "to dwell". 'An' signifies "I am accustomed", "I am familiar with"...The entity to which Being-in in this signification belongs is one which we have characterized as that entity which in each case I myself am [bin]. The expression '*bin*' is connected with '*bei*', and so '*ich bin*' ['I am'] means in its turn "I reside" or "dwell alongside" the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way (80).⁶

The question would then be: *how is it* that I am accustomed or familiar with my existential condition? What exactly is involved in "inhabiting" or "settling into" a world? It certainly is not a matter of me acquiring factual knowledge *about* some configuration of physical, social, or cultural phenomena that stands, as it were, "over-against" my detached, self-encapsulated ego.

⁵ In his later writings, "beings-as-a-whole" became another way for Heidegger to articulate the concept of 'world'.

⁶ Heidegger thus terms the existential mode of Being-in with the phenomenological interpretation 'Sein-bei'. This becomes translated by M&R as "being-alongside," which, as they rightfully admit, can be utterly misleading. The preposition '*bei*', though it does not really have an English correlate, is closest to the sense of being 'at' in expressions like "at home" or "at my father's." Thus, when Heidegger writes "*Dasein ist bei der Welt*" (typically translated as "Dasein is alongside the world"), the sense being conveyed would be better rendered as Dasein "inhabits" or "is familiar in" the world.

For example, my ontological familiarity with what is theoretically understood to be "gravity" and "friction" is not demonstrated by knowing mathematical formulas, but by *being careful* on ground that is slippery and around ledges that are steep. Likewise, I demonstrate my ontological inhabitation of a "culture" precisely through *not* knowing it *qua* "culture," but effectively taking my cultural understandings of reality for granted as simply "the way things are," and engaging the world in terms of this assumption. Hence, Being-in is a matter of how I am practically committed to a world, how I am involved and *entangled* in it, and it is only through being thus 'immanently engaged' that I am capable of becoming *accustomed* to it, and thus capable of taking it for granted as "home."

On this consideration, the ontological significance of taking something "for granted" should not here (if I may) be taken for granted. Not only is this key to understanding how Being-in operates 'alethialogically' (that is, as a condition of disclosure), it is key to recognizing the significance of *alethia* as a recurrent theme throughout Heidegger's thinking. What does it mean to be 'taken for granted'? When something is taken for granted, it is taken as "given." To be "given" in this sense implies a condition of "assumption". That which is given is assumed, which is to say, it is left "without question," and in being thus left without question, it is "of no concern"—it is utterly insignificant. Hence, that which is taken for granted is effectively displaced from my field of attention, and in that regard, my reflective thought. It is, in Heidegger's terms, ontologically "concealed." However, it is not merely concealment that is involved here. There is always a simultaneous 'opening-up' and 'closing-off' at play, where determinate horizons of significance are 'opened up' on the condition that certain things remain utterly insignificant and thus effectively concealed. Again, for example, it is precisely through taking my cultural understandings for granted that they are allowed to genuinely disclose my

world *culturally*. My culture only "functions," so to speak, insofar as it is invisible to me, and this "functioning" is none other than its disclosure of the world *in practice*. Similarly, language can only be effective—that is, disclosive—insofar as *it* is not itself the object of my attention, but only the inconspicuous means by which I attend to other things. Indeed, the telltale sign that I am not 'in' a linguistic world, that my world is not being disclosed by a language, is precisely when all I can "hear" or "see" is the *language itself* (the words, the accents, the symbols, etc.). Hence, Being-in, *as* a practical phenomenon, is always 'taking place' through assumption, and as such, is always an unconcealment-through-concealment. Heidegger describes this event-like character of Dasein's "disclosedness" as a form of transcendence, where a world is opened up or "cleared" through the way in which Dasein is always "stepping beyond itself," or "projecting itself" beyond its own conditions of disclosure (*Pathmarks* 107). I do not inhabit the world through constantly taking every possible factor of my situation into consideration, but through always-already taking the most basic elements of my situation for granted and only thereby attending to the manifold horizon of concerns that remain "proximally" significant in my everyday life. This opening-through-foreclosure "occurs" precisely in the form of a practical engagement. As Heidegger would say in writing "On the Essence of Truth"—it occurs as an "engagement in the disclosure of beings as such" (*Basic Writings* 126).

This phenomenon of "engaged disclosure" is not only one of the most important themes in Heidegger's corpus, it penetrates the core issue that is at stake in this discussion. Recalling the overall problematic, the central question here is: how is it possible that ecological crisis can be at one and the same time a 'fact' but not a *reality*? Or, again in more characteristically Heideggerian terms: how is it that the catastrophic implications of this crisis can indeed be "correct," but not *a*/effectively "true?" The question is one that essentially concerns ontological *concealment*, and,

as it has been outlined in this section, this concealment takes place most fundamentally through the practical conditions of everyday existence—through the way in which I am immanently 'in' this very reality that my factual knowledge purports to represent. Hence, this concealment takes place precisely through the way in which I am always already "engaged in the disclosure of beings as such."

The remainder of this discussion will accordingly be an attempt to contextualize this alethiological understanding of practice within the basic terms of what is at stake in this crisis, which I take to be essentially expressed in the language of "economy" and "ecology." The aim is namely to provide a phenomenological account of the alethiological conditions in which I find myself *as* an account of a priori *practical* conditions. Specifically, this will involve showing how Heidegger's basic account of Being-in-the-world is always-already an implicit phenomenology of historically specific conditions of practice that are systematically taken for granted and thus operate as a priori conditions of ontological disclosure. For reasons that will soon be discussed, I will be describing this general condition of a priori practical disclosure as "economy," in regards to which "ecology" will likewise attain new meaning.

Oikos, nomos, logos

In common ontic fields of discourse, the basic terms of what is at stake in this crisis are generally articulated thus: the systemic means by which human beings sustain their way of life in industrialized society (economy) directly conflicts with our scientific understandings of what it would mean for a 'way of life' to be "sustainable" (ecology). Or, more succinctly: our global economic system is ecologically self-destructive. However, even as they are directly posed against one another in the same sentence, the fundamental connection between these two words

is rarely if ever addressed as a significant matter unto itself. This oversight becomes especially curious when considering the fact that one of the most basic and important points that ecologists make in this regard is that an economy *is* 'ecological'—that it is not separate from the greater ecosystems in which it is embedded. There is, needless to say, already a primordial relation implied in the language itself. Through a close, phenomenological explication these interconnected terms, we can get a sense of how the very language that is mobilized to articulate this crisis can either obfuscate or elucidate the way in which it can be most effectively addressed.

Let us first consider 'economy'. Like ecology, root 'eco' derives from the Greek '*oikos*', meaning 'home', 'dwelling', or 'habitat'. The suffix, '*nomos*' is typically translated as 'law' or 'custom,' and is a derivative of the verb *nemein*, which indicates a manner of 'holding sway over' something, or of 'dispensing,' 'ordering,' 'managing,' or 'customizing'. Thus, the word economy (*oikonomia*) most fundamentally means something like, 'the administration of the household,' 'accustomed means of habitation,' or 'how the home is made to function as such'. On the most basic level economy should thus be understood as a matter of how a home-in-the-world—which is to say, a *habitat*—is in the broadest sense 'maintained'.

The etymology of the term is then by no means irrelevant to its more colloquial significance. No doubt, if one were to be asked, "what is economy?", the answer could vary from some ambiguous notion of monetary systems to the distribution of resources to modes of production, etc. However, if one were asked, "what is an economy for?—why does it exist?", the answer would be clear: it is what allows us as a whole to live in the specific way we do, in the specific place we call our home.

Overall, however, the typical discourse that emerges around 'economy' as a question exhibits a manifest concern with "how it is doing," and in that regard, how it can be improved,

developed, expanded. For the most part, the terms in which economy is allowed to be a question are informed by the modern field of "economics," as the purported "science" of economy, which does not approach economy as a questionable phenomenon in itself, but as a pre-given system to be understood simply in "how it works," precisely so that it can be made to "work better" through proper management (*nomos*). Thus, what is studied are market trends, GDP growth, monetary systems, employment statistics, land resources, investment, consumption, and so on. What is left unquestioned (in conventional economic discourse) is the way in which all of these things are working, or purportedly working, to secure, maintain, and perpetuate a very specific kind of human habitation on planet Earth (the planet we humans call "home") in a very specific manner. The discursive horizon of economic questions are essentially predicated on taking this basic phenomenon for granted, leaving its thematic questionability to the "ecologists".

The relation between *logos* and *nomos* in this regard is particularly interesting, especially when examined in light of Heidegger's etymological phenomenology. Given the way in which the suffix, '-logy' has become somewhat confusingly used to denote specific fields of scientific study, a typical, non-phenomenological assessment of their relation would perhaps end up with something resembling the common sort comparison that is made between 'theory' and 'practice'. While there is an important problem with certain associations being made here, the intuitive gesture remains ontically significant nonetheless: the way in which our habitat is inhabited 'in practice' (economy) remains indifferent to how this habitat is 'theoretically' understood in its capacity to be inhabited (ecology). The same basic phenomenon that has thus far been described in terms of a dissonance between 'knowledge' and 'belief', 'fact' and 'truth', 'recognition' and 'experience', has merely been re-articulated in this case as a dissonance between ecological 'theory' and economic 'practice'. However, this particular formulation is important in that it

allows us to see precisely how this acknowledged dissonance maintains itself through the very terms in which it is articulated. The suspect in this regard is not the association of *nomos* with 'practice', but with that of *logos* and 'theory'.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger devotes a considerable amount of effort to explicating the "concept of *logos*," particularly as it pertains to his use of the word "phenomenology". '*Logos*', as it is often acknowledged, is a notoriously difficult word to translate out of the ancient Greek language, and has consequently accumulated a multitude of associated terms that often seem entirely unrelated to one another.⁷ Circumventing all of the obfuscations and entanglements that have built up through its long history of translations, Heidegger simply turns to its shared root with the verb, *legein* ('to talk', 'to hold discourse'), which, in the context of ancient Greek, implies a sense of "letting-something-be-seen" (56). Hence, translated as "discourse," *logos* marks the way in which things are rendered manifest and intelligible in and through discursive engagements. The operation of *alethia* here is critical, and as it happens this is one of the first moments in Heidegger's corpus that truth is discussed in terms of unconcealment.

Because the *logos* is a letting-something-be-seen, it can *therefore* be true or false. But here everything depends on our steering clear of any conception of truth which is construed in the sense of 'agreement'. This idea is by no means the primary one in the concept of *alethia*. The 'Being-true' of the *logos* as *alethenein* means that in *legein* as *apophainesthai* the entities *of which* one is talking must be taken out of their hiddenness; one must let them be seen as something unhidden (*alethes*); that is, they must be *discovered*. Similarly, 'Being false' amounts to deceiving in the sense of *covering up*: putting something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen) and thereby passing it off *as* something which it is *not* (56).

Thus, as a means of intelligibility, *logos* can be a site of uncovering or covering. It can, phenomenologically speaking, "hold open" the possibility for that which "shows itself" to be

⁷ E.g., 'word', 'a ground', 'reason', 'ratio', 'account'.

"seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (the goal of phenomenology); or, it can just as well obscure the Being of phenomena through enforcing a paradigm of 'obviousness' (*ob-viam*, to be 'in the way' of something so as to be 'in plain view').⁸ This is why Heidegger's phenomenology is a method of description and interpretation, rather than proposition and explanation. The core attempt is to retrieve and explicate an understanding of Being that is always already taken for granted (i.e. concealed) by the very way in which 'beings' are made intelligible in and through our everyday *logos*.

What is most important for us to consider then is how, in being a question of *alethia*, *logos* is not a question of theory, but of *practice*. It is a way of 'Being-in' a world precisely as an engagement in the "disclosure of beings as such." *Theoria*, on the other hand, is not a question of *how* something is made intelligible in this primordial sense, but merely, as Heidegger describes, a question of how an already-intelligible thing is to be "looked at" (99). The point that he makes is accordingly that theoretical "knowledge" is always derived or "founded" on more primordial ways in which a world is disclosed through 'Being-in' it (86-90). This, then, underlines the core problem with presenting the terms of this crisis as merely a disjunction between a 'practical' economy and 'theoretical' ecology, as it is precisely this kind of thinking that *reinforces* the very dissonance that it is attempting to address and purportedly overcome. This reinforcement comes through the same tacit assumption that has been examined and critiqued in a variety of ways thus far in our discussion: namely, that "positive knowledge" functions as my primary relation to the world, that it is what most essentially grounds my sense of reality, and thus, that it is "all I need" as an imperative to act. A phenomenological understanding of 'ecology' that is rooted in the *alethia*-logical significance *logos* as a primordial mode of Being-in a world would in this regard

⁸ As indicated in the above quote, Heidegger considers the potential 'untruth' of *logos* to lie in the tendency to put "something in front of something (in such a way as to let it be seen)." This is essentially the definition of 'making obvious'.

not only indicate a way of avoiding this kind of assumption, but also signal a mode of ethics that is capable of responding to this crisis in terms of its ontological concealment.

As the *logos* of *oikos*, ecology is the method by which habitats are allowed to be "seen" *as such*. A habitat becomes intelligible *qua* habitat through the ecological dis-covering of the various ways in which a home-in-the-world is secured and sustained. Hence, in this primordial sense, eco-logy is the discursive exhibition of eco-nomy. As an ontic field of discourse, ecology has typically been associated with "natural" habitats, understood in terms of relationships that form between organisms and their environment without any "human" intervention. This is an arbitrary limitation, as many have in recent years come to acknowledge. We see this namely in the explosion of new applications of the ontic concept of ecology to virtually every domain of the social sciences and humanities.⁹ However, while there is certainly in these cases an explicit recognition of a "human" habitat that is just as eco-systemic as any other, this habitat nonetheless remains accounted for in representational terms. It is merely "looked at" in various ways as an entity or system of entities that are "present-at-hand," rather than articulated in terms of how it is practically "ready-to-hand" *as* our home. Thus the ontico-theoretical question asks: how do various beings relate to one another as components of a ecosystem? The insight that can be provided by this kind of investigation is limited to the nature of the questioning: it can provide insight into the way in which the beings of our world interact in systems of habitation. It cannot, however, provide insight into the way in which this world as a whole is disclosed through *our* everyday *inhabitation* of these systems—that is, how the very way in which we ourselves are *in* an economy conditions our capacity to experience the (potentially catastrophic) implications of this eco-nomic existence.

⁹ Most notably: cultural ecology, ecological psychology, industrial ecology, social ecology, and of course, human ecology.

This calls for an ecology that does not ask what kinds of beings constitute our economy, or how our economy "works" as system of beings that relate to one another in various configurations. Rather, it calls for an ecology that asks how it is that we are *in* an economy, and how our everyday practical existence in this habitual system of habitation conditions the extent to which its own finitude can not merely be known as an ontic fact, but practically, a/effectively "presence" as an ontological truth.

Oikonomia

The thematic question of 'Being-at-home' has recurred throughout our discussion in various forms. Yet, up until this point it has for the most part remained in the background, and Heidegger's explicit account of the phenomenon has not yet been directly acknowledged. Here, it is finally brought to the forefront of our attention as the explicit matter of investigation.¹⁰ To ask how I am *in* an economy is to ask how my practical world is customized and ordered in such a way that I cannot help but be *at-home* in it. For Heidegger, 'Being-at-home' (*zuhause-Sein*) is essentially a more concrete way of articulating the experience of Being-in as an existential condition. As one should recall, Heidegger characterizes Being-in as precisely a state of "inhabitation," or "dwelling" in which Dasein is primordially "familiar with" or "accustomed to" the world in which it finds itself. Accordingly, the concrete experience of Being-at-home is described in *Being and Time* as a state of "tranquilized self-assurance," where the "average everydayness" of Being-in-the-world is disclosed "in all of its obviousness" (233).

The key is to understand how this is not merely some free-floating feeling that arbitrarily comes and goes in a private domain of "subjective emotion," but how it is rather a fundamental

¹⁰ For a relevant discussion of 'habit' in the context of Heidegger, see: Russon, John (1995). Heidegger, Hegel, and Ethnicity: The Ritual Basis of Self-Identity. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 33 (4):509-532.

state-of-Being (*Befindlichkeit*) or attunement (*Grundstimmung*) that emerges through and is maintained by the everyday practical conditions of Being-in a world. This understanding is perhaps most explicitly articulated by Heidegger in his much later (1951) lecture, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," where he elaborates on the same etymological theme used in *Being and Time* to introduce the concept of 'Being-in,' only now with a more direct (albeit, poetic) emphasis on the practical nature of the question, which he articulates in terms of the German word "*bauen*" ("building").¹¹ In an attempt to distinguish common understandings of 'dwelling' from the more fundamental, existential significance that he finds in its relation to 'building,' Heidegger provides us with a telling illustration of how Being-at-home occurs in and through the element of practice:

The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his lodgings there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there. These buildings house man. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them, if to dwell means solely to have our lodgings in them (*Basic Writings* 348).

It should be noticed that all of Heidegger's examples here involve people at work. Specifically, it involves work that is routine. This routine work is occurring 'in' and 'through' structures (buildings) that have been built for its occurrence, and in being thus customized provide environments to which one would only become *accustomed* (at home) through engaging in the particular kind of work (the particular kind of 'building') that it has been built for. Hence, more fundamentally than 'making things' or 'things that are made', "building" here for Heidegger refers to the way in which human beings are *in* a world *through* their engagement with it, how it is in this very engagement that a state of Being-at-home (dwelling) is ontologically secured and maintained for Dasein. Heidegger describes this engaged *in*-habiting as none other than the very way in which human beings 'make their home' and only thereby exist "on earth"—a description

¹¹ See pg. 10 for original discussion of 'Being-in'.

that resonates with his exposition of 'Being-in' twenty-five years prior: "Building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth...remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset "habitual"—we inhabit it, as our language says so beautifully: it is the *Gewohnte*" (348-49). Turning back to *Being and Time*, we can find this 'existential economy' at the heart of Heidegger's analysis.

On an everyday basis, I do not explicitly interpret my existence within an economy in terms of productive forces, markets, financial systems, and so on. For the most part, I *implicitly* understand my economic existence through *inhabiting* the kind of world that is provided 'in it'. This "world" that is provided is ontologically not some collection of entities or a fixed region of psychical space, nor even some socio-political superstructure that could only really be grasped through a theoretical representation of social class, law, culture, ideology, etc. Rather, it is most essentially that basic everyday horizon of practical forms of living that is "closest" to me in my Being-in-the-world, and thus also most readily *taken for granted*. In this sense, the root, 'habit' of 'in-habit' must not be overlooked. As Heidegger pertinently indicated in 1951, to 'inhabit' is to be-in-the-world 'habitually'. This is essentially what he has in mind when he speaks of that which is "closest" to Dasein in *Being and Time*, and accordingly indicates why it is so methodologically important for him in this regard to situate his analysis "within the horizon of average everydayness" (94).

...because this average everydayness makes up what is ontically proximal for this entity, it has again and again been *passed over* in explicating Dasein. That which is ontically closest [proximal] and well known, is ontologically the farthest and not known at all; and its ontological signification is constantly overlooked (69).

Hence, the entirety of Heidegger's "Existential Analytic" is devoted to explicating how 'Being' is implicitly experienced and understood *in and through* Dasein's habitual way of Being-in-the-world—a way of Being that is fundamentally taken for granted and thus "constantly overlooked."

There are therefore a multitude of angles and dimensions from which the phenomenon of Being-in-an economy can be found and extrapolated within *Being and Time*. The purposes of this discussion, however, only warrants a concise look at Heidegger's thematic analysis of "worldhood," where the phenomenological horizon is precisely "that world of everyday Dasein that is closest to it"—what Heidegger calls *Umwelt*, translated as "the environment."

As the world to which I am ontically most accustomed (i.e. habituated), my environment is ontologically characterized not as some domain of extended space, but as that domain of my everyday "dealings" (*Umgang*) (95). It is, in other words, not determined by where I am in a physical sense, but by what I am doing, or "up to," practically: the world to which I am most accustomed and in which I am "at home" is mapped by practical, not physical coordinates. Thus, depending on, say, what I "do for a living," or as it is commonly called, my "occupation," my primary environment could just as well be a single plot of land in the countryside or a routine series of geographically (and culturally) disparate international airports, hotels, etc. Within any such environment, the manner in which I encounter things is prescribed by the way in which they are involved in what I do and how I "go about my business" doing it. This is why Heidegger uses the term "equipment" to refer to 'things' as they are ontologically encountered in everyday "concernful" dealings, as "the kind of dealing which is closest to us is...not a bare perceptual cognition but rather that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use" (95). As equipment, things are not encountered as merely sitting before us "present-at-hand," but are always a "being-ready-to-hand" in terms of greater totalities of things which are as a whole "constituted by various ways of the 'in-order-to'" (97).

Heidegger's word-play with the prefix *um-* is important to note here, especially between equipment as something "in-order-to" (*etwas um-zu*), and "environment," (*Umwelt*). Depending

on the context in German, *um-* can mean 'around' or 'about', but also, such as in the case with '*um zu*', imply a sense of 'in-order-to', which as Heidegger notes, implies a structure of "*assignment or reference of something to something*" (97).¹² This structuring of the environment (and ultimately the world as a whole) as a totality of assignments and references allows for a phenomenological understanding of how ready-to-hand entities are always disclosed in terms of their greater "involvements." Heidegger's illustration here is helpful, so I quote him at length:

An entity is discovered when it has been assigned or referred to something, and referred as that entity which it is. *With* any such entity there is an involvement which it has *in* something. The character of Being which belongs to the ready-to-hand is just such an *involvement...with* this thing, for instance, which is ready-to-hand, and which we accordingly call "hammer", there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement with making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection 'is' for the sake of providing shelter for Dasein (116-17).

Thus, as a translation of the somewhat un-translatable *Bewenden*, "involvement" is to be understood here as a question of what equipment is "up to" or "headed towards" within the context of its serviceability and usability. It is for this reason that Heidegger describes involvement as a kind of Being that *is* only insofar as it is, as it were, *allowed* (*freigegeben*, "freed") to be so. Something is ready-to-hand as equipment only insofar as it is involved in some project greater than itself, and this involvement is always contingent upon the manner in which an environment is configured and engaged with according to the projects of Dasein. This "projected" configuration of significant relations of engagement in which Dasein understands

¹² Unlike being present-at-hand, the ready-to-hand is not discovered by "just staring" at things (*theoria*), but rather by way of an ontological comportment that is practically oriented towards the environment. In a further play on the thematic *um-*, Heidegger calls this 'concernful' comportment, *Umsicht*: literally, a concerned "looking-around-for," or "looking-in-order-to," translated as "circumspection." This is to be contrasted with the theoretical, which, as it "just-looks" at outward appearances, is only capable of discovering things in their presence-at-hand.

itself and its "potentiality-for-Being" constitutes for Heidegger the basic phenomenon of "worldhood":

In its familiarity with these relationships, Dasein 'signifies' to itself: in a primordial manner it gives itself both its Being and its potentiality-for-Being as something which it is to understand with regard to its Being-in-the-world. The "for-the-sake-of-which" signifies an "in-order-to"; this in turn, a "towards-this"; the latter, an "in-which" of a letting something be involved; and that in turn, the "with which" of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality...The relational totality of this signifying we call "*significance*". This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is (120).

We can see then even from this brief look at his analysis how Heidegger's explicit phenomenology of worldhood articulates an implicit phenomenology of economy. This becomes clear once it is recognized that the configuration of my environment and the structuring of the "totality of involvements" that I engage in are never reducible to *my own* projects—that the inhabitable world in which I live is not simply a matter of my own intentional design. While Heidegger no doubt recognized this, he never emphasizes it as an explicit point and in fact carries out his analysis in a fashion that often obscures the importance of this fundamental a priori condition of Being-in an economy. His illustration of involvements quoted above can in this regard be misleading in that it makes it seem as if my inhabitation of the world is characterized by having complete control over the projects that mobilize and configure the instrumental relations of my environment. On the contrary, the basic means of my inhabitation are *preconfigured*, and the horizon of possibilities that I project for myself is *itself* always conditioned by this preconfiguration. Ontically speaking, I did not *devise* or even *produce* the basic forms of equipment that make up my human habitat, nor have I determined the overall technological standards or structural/systemic relations that would constitute the "referential totality" of this equipment, and I certainly have not organized the totality of involvements that

this equipment is working within as it is made readily available (hence, ready-to-hand) in my environment. To understand Heidegger's basic thought here *as* an articulation of an a priori economy, a counter-illustration may be appropriate.

I am awoken before sunrise by an alarm. The temporal structure of my day to day existence is not administered (*nemein*) by the sovereignty of the Sun, but rather by that of a "clock." I depend on this clock to provide me with "the time," which is to say, the time that has been standardized and administered by the economy in which I live and work. I am able to trust the time on this clock (which is in fact my "phone") because it is automatically updated by cell towers synchronized to atomic chronometers owned by a telecommunications company that charges me a "monthly fee" which I pay with "currency" that I earn at the job that I am trying to wake up for. These cell towers are able to operate through receiving cheap electricity from the regional dams run by a power company, which is also what provides me with the assumption that I will have instantaneous lighting upon entering the bathroom, where I will, without hesitation, relieve myself into a bowl full of water, knowing that it will leave my sight at the pull of a lever only to be replaced with more water, which I would never think of drinking or saving, or really think much of at all for that matter. What I am really thinking about is "the time" that is provided by my "phone service," and "the news" that is provided by my "radio service." How I will feed or hydrate myself, stay warm and dry, or for that matter, how exactly I will manage to travel fifteen miles through the snow and rain within the next thirty minutes are for some reason insignificant questions compared to the difference between 8:10 and 8:20, or what exactly is happening in Cairo.

Every aspect of my life, every engagement and every choice, is layered within an incomprehensible network of economic involvements, and thus what I find significant and

insignificant in this world only becomes intelligible when considered within the coordinates of the historically specific economy that prescribes where, how, (and why) I inhabit the world the way I do. These coordinates, however, were not established by *me*, or any other given individual for that matter. I did not standardize this measurement of time, nor did I design the technological infrastructure of transportation, telecommunications, and industrial production that as a whole sets the temporal "pace" of everyday life, nor did I *institute* the tradition of wage labor in which I am required to keep up with this pace so that I may "earn my living," and not "go homeless." I have been, as Heidegger would say, "thrown" into this world that has already been configured for a specific mode of human inhabitation. Finally, in my thrownness, I am not perpetually *bewildered* by the singularity of this world into which I've been thrown. On the contrary, I am utterly at-home in it—which is to say, I take it for granted.

In this state of tranquilized self-assurance the phenomenal peculiarity of my economically configured existence is concealed "in all of its obviousness." The point, however, is that this is *not* simply a reflection of my own individual naiveté or personal obliviousness. It is not a matter of me simply being more critical and "snapping out" of a self-incurred stupor. As we have already discussed, the very condition of Being-*in* is essentially one of *assumption*. To be 'in' a world *is* necessarily to take it for granted as "home." The extent to which I am incapable of taking my world for granted is the extent to which it is not *Being* my ontologically a priori 'world'. If this existential insight is to therefore be ecologically situated within the a priori condition of economy, it must be further recognized that *what* I a/effectively assume and *how* I inhabit my assumptions can never be accounted for merely in terms of my own will or intentions. Namely, the condition of Being-*in* a world that is ontologically regulated by an economy must be recognized as a condition in which my "*inness*"—my "at-homeness"—is predominantly secured

and maintained *for me*, regardless of whether I ontically "consent" to how this is effectively accomplished. Hence, regardless of whether I "know" that my way of life is predicated on a means of habitation that is in the process of eroding the possibility of sustaining human life in general, the world persists in its obviousness and placidity, and I cannot help but remain at-home in its horizon of average everyday concerns.

The basic a priori alethiological structure of Being-in an economy thus becomes visible: I am 'in' an economy to the extent that I am at-home in the world that it provides, and the extent to which I am at-home in this world is the extent to which I take it for granted and hence the extent to which it remains a/effectively insignificant and thereby "proximally and for the most part" concealed. Moreover, because I have inherited my habitat and not created it, and because its management and configuration (economy) is always already beyond my control and authorship, I have virtually no concrete sense of how the average everyday world it a/effectively provides is ontologically *singular*. Namely, I have no a priori means by which I can a/effectively experience how ontologically unique and specific my average everyday experience of the world really *is*, and in that same regard, experience the extent to which it is *finite*. If the present crisis is precisely one that concerns the finitude of this everyday world that I take for granted, then its ontological unconcealment can only truly 'take a/effect' *at* this fundamental level of my everyday existence. Thus, the extent to which I cannot help but remain at-home in this world is the extent to which this crisis will remain proximally and for the most part concealed.

This is where ecology becomes explicitly a question of practice, as the problem is, again, not an epistemic one: I am for all intents and purposes already '*convinced*' that the situation is catastrophic. The task is—as Žižek would perhaps phrase it—to convince "reality itself" of this truth. Hence, if I am to truly allow this crisis to presence in my world, I must not merely

recognize how I am at-home in this world and how this state of Being is entirely contingent on a means of habitation that has itself reached its breaking point—I must actually *engage* the world on these terms so as to practically *disrupt* the everyday placidity of my economically habituated existence, thereby ontologically *submitting* my Dasein to the un-settling reality that I already have purportedly consented to. Upon this ontological commitment to ecological crisis, the political question becomes no longer how to "raise awareness in our community," or "make our community more sustainable." It must rather be a question that fundamentally asks how a community can commit itself to this very engagement in the disclosure of crisis—or, likewise, how communities can be formed through the a/effective rupturing of our economically sanctioned ontology.

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