Revenge and Nostalgia:
Reconciling Nietzsche and Heidegger
on the Question of Coming to Terms with the Past

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Abstract

In certain respects, contemporary political theory treats the politics of revenge with disdain while celebrating, and employing, a politics that is decidedly nostalgic. And yet, if we follow Nietzsche's work regarding the inherent vengefulness of nostalgic political programs, we run into an impasse. This article attempts to make plain for law and politics what is at stake in Nietzsche's concept of revenge, and how law might navigate the distance between revenge and nostalgia. The article brings the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger together in a new way by asking whether and how Heidegger's thought could suffer from a hidden vengefulness, as well as pursuing the nostalgic pose that seems to haunt Nietzsche's own drive for overcoming. Through an elucidation of the difference between nostalgia and revenge I hope to show the kind of both nostalgic and vengeful possibilities that politics holds. Moreover, thinking through nostalgia and revenge directs us to begin asking the question of law's relation to politics anew.

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There will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this without nostalgia, that is, outside of the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought. On the contrary, we must affirm this, in the sense in which Nietzsche puts the affirmation into play, in a certain laughter and a certain step of dance.
– Derrida[1]

Anyone drawn to think of politics in terms of reformatory or emancipatory struggle also does well to notice the nostalgia that often characterizes the longing to overcome present circumstances. And as nostalgic longing crystallizes into a plan for present action and reform, the character of nostalgia discloses itself as possibly tinged with revenge. Nietzsche will go further in specifying these latent "drives": he calls nostalgia *nihilism*: "a nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist."[2] Whenever one draws on "the way things used to be," we are invited to be nostalgic and to long for a time when our lives seemed more wholesome. Whenever we are so invited, we are also recruited into a political project of reconstruction of one kind or another. We are provided memories of times when things seemed simpler and more worthwhile, memories are somehow ours but that we may not have experienced personally. There is a tension between nostalgia and revenge in modern politics – one that continues to buttress or plague hopeful efforts at emancipation and reform.

False nostalgia – a yearning for a kind of home that we may have never had – is tinged with revenge insofar as the purpose for purveying such nostalgia is indistinguishable from the particular ill that the nostalgia seeks to remedy. Thus, for example, the elaboration of models of deliberative democracy is often carried out using Athenian democracy as an example of the kind of wholesome political engagement that we have lost. "That we have lost" comes to rally us against the politics of our time as dis-engaged, as lacking meaning, as lacking any sense of moving the everyday citizen beyond his or her ken. Whether Athenian democracy is the proper aim of our longings, is the source of our "homesickness" and hence the longing for our "homecoming," is a question separable from one that asks after the sense that nostalgia has when so mobilized. That is, we need to ask about the relationship between the kinds of longing present in nostalgia, and of their vengeful provenance.

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27
[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), s. 585A.

I wish to raise the question of the relation of nostalgia and revenge not only because I think its resolution is of critical import for politics, but also because it is precisely the relation between nostalgia and revenge that differentiates the thinking of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Nietzsche first articulated the way revenge and resentment sit at the base of modern thinking, of how revenge clouds and befuddles our attempts to articulate what a "human subject" is, and the way a will is implicated in the projection of truths that buttress our understandings of the world.[3] Heidegger was the first thinker to give thorough and considerable attention to Nietzsche's work,[4] and he was also the first to articulate the way homelessness and nostalgia animate who we have become.[5] Nietzsche was wary and critical of nostalgia – so how can the first philosopher to think through Nietzsche's work turn to nostalgia as an appropriate way to gather our time in thought?

Put this way, one wonders whether modern homelessness (in the sense articulated by both Hannah Arendt[6] and Heidegger) is nothing other than the resentful projection of the disillusioned (given profound expression by Nietzsche); one wonders whether there is a nostalgia free of the mobilizing tactics of modern political life. In what follows I work through the particular relation that nostalgia and revenge have, and orchestrate a confrontation of Heidegger's understanding of nostalgia with Nietzsche's understanding of revenge. And so this paper asks a set of decisive questions of Heidegger's thought: Are all nostalgic postures always already vengeful? Does Heidegger remain trapped within the final metaphysics of Nietzsche that he so carefully chronicled in the 1930s? *Or might we imagine nostalgia in a new way?*

i. Revenge

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche first develops the notion of *ressentiment*, or resentment, as that seething hatred underlying the creation of moral values in the West. Unable to bear the suffering imposed by "Masters," and yet unable to resist, the deep resentment of the "Slaves" imagines and creates a world of moral principles according to which the "Masters" can be held accountable as the perpetrators of suffering. The genesis of morals thus is not out of brotherly love but out of the cruel desire to punish and stand over others. *Ressentiment* and the creation of values is not just one aspect of the moral stock of the West, but defines its metaphysical orientation, and thus also its understanding of life and time. In the work that pushes the logic of revenge to its conclusion, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche shows that revenge underlies a "morality of pity," or a morality that finds fault with the way the world turns out, and feels anger that it could not be otherwise. This pose, of standing over and against the events of the

[3] Cf. Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. W. Kaufmann, in *The Nietzsche Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1964).
[4] Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, 4 vols*. trans. D. Farell Krell (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991); and "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'" in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young & K. Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[5] Cf. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).
[6] Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: HBJ, 1954).

world, characterizes almost all knowing and thinking in the West, defining the scientific posture towards the entities, threatening even to envelope art.[7]

In *Zarathustra* shows the great revenge that the human takes against time with his portrait of Zarathustra's attempt to overcome pity. There, Zarathustra comes to see human striving against suffering as an "ill-willing against time" in a moment when he confronts his the "spirit of gravity," the "devil" that makes all things heavy. In this confrontation Zarathustra sees that the notion of time and of the moment are interwoven into the human interpretation of "what is to be done" and why we do what we do. This interpretive insight allows Zarathustra to see that the notion of will-to-power – that every truth-claim is grounded in the will that sees it and claims it – must exhaust itself in attempting to come to terms in time with the vagaries of time. This is redemption pure and simple: Zarathustra sees (ironically) that all attempts to render suffering and seeming injustice redeemed in time is an ill-willing against time for the purpose of redeeming suffering. This "redeeming" places the human in relation to time and yet also in time, as though we stand in a relation of redemption to those things that come before. Overcoming revenge is possible *only* if the human can grasp the present moment as eternal; that is, if present moments were to repeat themselves eternally, only then would it become impossible to redeem a past event. And thus the will-to-power exhausts itself in the eternal return, a necessary consequence of a metaphysics of revenge.

Revenge creates a world by stamping becoming with the character of being, as with a foot stamping its print in the moist sand of a beach at the ocean's edge. "Being," for Nietzsche is only ever the making-sense of becoming. Nothing holds or has permanence, and the fleeting character of our temporal existence, of moment disappearing into moment, brings a resentment at the way we undergo our own existence. That is, the suffering occasioned by time's relentlessness is resented (passively), and becoming is resisted. We come to imagine "truth" as having the character of that which endures the passage of time, such that "being" refers to that which is despite the passage of time. To say that something is or has being is to set it up over and against the world of things that comes into being and passes away, i.e. becoming. The human comes into existence in this great moment of saying "No" to the passage of time and the suffering of the will. Indeed, the suffering will comes into existence *as* that which stands in the face of time, as something over and against time. The great act of revenge for Nietzsche is to set up a world – and that world is the world of the human. In setting up this world for the human, the human gives birth to itself – and it does so in revolt against the suffering of time. "World," for Nietzsche, is nothing other than the separation of the human *in* time – the distance between the dual commanding and suffering will that belongs to every human *qua* human.

The existence of a seething resentment that surfaces as revenge can be seen to characterize the drive to achieve justice, even in our day. As Wendy Brown has shown, the pursuit of justice requires an articulation of the liberal legal person as a victim, as a

[7] This is thoughtfully explored by Gianni Vattimo, "An Apology for Nihilism" *The End of Modernity*, transl J. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993).

sufferer, and justice comes only when legal persons can be so articulated.[8] Nietzsche's presentation of Zarathustra also suggests that we can find revenge in the discrete acts of human beings, but also that the vengeful elaboration of tables of values is not just a discrete act but a kind of achievement that underlies all human willing insofar as it is tinged with morality and moralizing. That is to say, that the birth of the human is the great crime, the great act of revenge – but it presupposes a "law" that the vengeful antecedently erect. It is both present in our moralizing, and yet is not simply reducible to it simply because, for Nietzsche, it is the moralizing of the herd that characterizes human beings for the most part.[9]

There is deep duplicity involved in setting up this world, as the human shrinks back from the colossal nature of its deed, and does not own up or take credit for it. Instead, the human sets up a past, honours its traditions and ancestors, and installs idols and gods as forebears and creators. In setting up this world of being human, the duplicity authorizes the invention and transference of responsibility for the suffering that befalls the human. By locating all that is permanent outside the world of becoming, the human can take constant revenge on the flux of becoming by identifying causes for suffering in those beings who do not uphold the world of permanence. We are given to understand the freedom and agency of human beings in a moral way when we understand the conditions under which we can hold them responsible. Thus we do not "find" freedom as something in the world, but postulate its existence in order to make sense of "moral phenomena" – an "act" we carry out in our daily mental perambulations through newspapers and amidst others.

> … [I]t is high time to replace the Kantian question 'how are synthetic judgements *a priori* possible?' with another question: 'why is belief in such judgements *necessary*?' – that is to say, it is time to grasp that, for the purpose of preserving beings such as ourselves, such judgements must be *believed* to be true; although they might of course still be *false* judgements![10]

Nietzsche calls this identification of the *a priori* conditions (the being stamped on becoming) nothing more than a "tartuffery" and tautology – that we look for and find the principle of freedom where we want to in order to hold up and make sense of a moral world. But to "find" the moral agent, we have to posit the will that acts, the doer behind deeds, when there is nothing that necessitates we do so other than a moral world. We presume there is a "doer" behind ever deed in order to make sense of the deed – but we do so duplicitously, Nietzsche says.[11] We give birth to freedom only to uphold our moral sensibilities.

The way we give birth to our freedom, the way we "find it" is in relation to the past as *our* past, and hence is bound up with the problem of how and why we turn to the past. Our common sense tells us that history often serves the purposes of the present; Nietzsche tells us that it is hard to understand our turning to history in any other terms.

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[8] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[9] I will return to this idea of "for the most part" at the end. I do think that Nietzsche, like Heidegger, holds open the possibility for the human to move beyond itself.
[10] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1973), s. 11.
[11] Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II, s. 11.

Our, that is Western, longing for the past, as an honouring of tradition, often takes the form of nostalgia, a bemoaning and yet celebration of what went before and is now lost. From the Greek, it is a painful longing for home, a *nostos algein*. As such a longing, our nostalgia often takes the form of a critique of who we are and how we now live, of showing our homelessness and alienation. Nietzsche demands that we be honest about the source and nature of our longings, that we recognize them for the vengeful attempt at politics that they are.

ii. The Problematic of Nostalgia as Revenge

Nostalgia surfaces in politics as a particular way of speaking about the times in which we live. More often than not, *nostalgia* is a longing for a particular set of circumstances from an age gone by; it is a *set* of circumstances because what is longed for is not simply this or that person, place or thing. What is often nostalgically longed for is a whole sense of how life was, of the way things were, of what it meant to be someone living in a given time and place. What has been "lost," then is never just one particular item, but the sensibility and worldliness that goes with it.[12] Let me give one particular example of the kind of nostalgia I am referring to, and then we can bring this way of speaking about the past into dialogue as it were with Nietzsche's infamous notion of *revenge*.

The Makah are a Native American tribe inhabiting the Pacific Northwest, and on May 17, 1999 they re-instituted the whale hunt for the first time in 70 years.[13] The Makah were diplomatic, recognizing that the international community would be worried that such an act might encourage Norwegian, Russian, and Japanese industries to attempt their own revitalization – and they only sought one gray whale, as the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service had been removed the animal from its list of endangered species five years prior.[14] They promised to take only one whale, which they did. The Makah were not interested in creating the basis for an industrialized venture, but only to revitalize a cultural tradition that might, in their words, assist them in "rediscovering the roots of lost traditions." I am not concerned here with this particular initiative; I am concerned with the response of non-Natives. For certain segments of Non-Makah culture mobilized a collective outrage when high-powered whaling boats with harpoon guns took to the waves to carry out this rediscovery.[15] The "discomfort" with the Makah carrying out a

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[12] It is too much to say that what is longed for is a world itself that has been lost. I hope to make sense of why this would be too much to say later in the paper.

[13] For background to the Makah hunt, see Robert Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt: Two Years on the Olympic Peninsula with the Makah and their Canoe* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 285.

[14] J.S. Aradanas, "Aboriginal Whaling: Biological Diversity Meets Cultural Diversity," *Northwest Science* 72 (1998): 142-45; United States National Marine Fisheries Service, *Environmental Assessment of the Makah Tribe's Harvests of up to Five Gray Whales Per Year for Cultural and Subsistence Use* (Silver Spring, MD: Office of Protected Resources, 1997).

[15] Mark Berman, "Gray Whales Still At Risk," *Earth Island Journal* Autumn 2000: 8. *The Economist* captured the event in the following terms:

> It is not uncommon...for Indian tribes to resurrect old customs and find a host of complications they had not foreseen. Like any group of humans, tribes often disagree about the virtue of their customs. And the starry-eyed encouragement of other Americans, wowed by the 'spiritualism" of Indians, can soon turn to taunts once endangered species are involved. One writer to a Seattle newspaper said the hunting crew-once idolised for plunging into cold mountain streams in the pre-

traditional exercise through modern means is instructive: were the Makah to don skins and brandish spears while using cedar carved boats the spears? What image of nature had been projected on the Makah then and there? Beyond, or rather besides, the question of legacy and tradition with which the Makah were struggling, what nostalgic "savage" did settler culture unwittingly impose and project upon the Makah? In June of 2000, effective pressure by activists resulted in an overturning of the decision to grant permission to the Makah to hunt whales, and those opposed claimed a victory for the environment and for what they dubbed "intelligent animals."[16]

Nostalgia is clearly at work here, and its duplicity is almost obvious. When the settler comes to the Makah and wonders why the gunboat does not accord with the settler's notion of Makah tradition, there is more than a subtle hint of exotic nostalgia here, a latent drive to project Indigenous people as somehow "part of nature" in some way that the settler is not. The disappointment and outrage the settler experiences is one that seeks to hold the Makah accountable, and does so with both a reminiscent and accusatory gesture. The "authorization" and "canceling" of the whale hunt by settler powers highlights what must have been the strangely distasteful desires of non-natives to "see" the natives taking up the whale hunt in some kind of "noble savage" form. When the Makah take to whaling boats with guns, suddenly settlers and non-natives became uncomfortable with their own nostalgic expectations, and were quick to respond. This is the terrain in which Nietzsche and Heidegger's work is at play. For Nietzsche sees the moralizing of the Western world as integral to its own understanding of what politics is. Heidegger sees the way that nostalgia goes to work to present the past as something lost, something to be remembered and memorialized.

In navigating between the gestures and postures of nostalgia and outrage and the thoughts of Nietzsche on revenge and nihilism, there appears an ambivalent and often troublesome place for nostalgia. Nostalgia is one way we continue to carry out our revenge, and for Nietzsche our metaphysics rests on a grand and resentful longing. Through nostalgia we vengefully create a past out of our present sufferings, a past to which we can refer and which spurs action towards a future that will redeem the present along with the past. With nostalgia we are seeking something. The human person that is the settler is also the Cartesian and Kantian subject – the human being that stands over against a world, and can act in a juridical manner to cast judgment. Nietzsche calls this vengeful stance nihilism. Nihilism is a particular evaluative stance (not just instance) toward the world as it is in the present, one that judges it as lacking in some particular way, and one that thereby seeks to create a "better world" by "improving" the conditions of this world. It is, as Nietzsche calls it, the drive to grasp all conditions of the world in terms of the knowing and willing subject, in terms of something that the subject acts upon and

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> dawn hours-were a bunch of testosterone-loaded young men who mainly wanted to shoot something.
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> The fact is that whale-hunts were once a male rite of passage, and neither hunts nor male rites are now particularly acceptable. Like those faraway members of Congress who are grappling with the white whale of impeachment, this poor and tiny tribe may now wish it had just forgotten the whole thing.

"To Catch a Whale," *Economist* 21 Nov. 1998: 31.

[16] "Court Reverses Makah Whaling Ruling," *Associated Press Online,* 9 June 2000.

justifies. No longer the purview of a deity, the world of the Cartesian subject, of the nihilist, is one where all relations are thinkable *a priori*. And for this very reason, this vengeful subject of Western thinking often speaks nostalgically of other times when the human spirit was something other and better than it is today. Recall that the nihilist is not the believer in a Great Nothing, nor even one who consciously wills nothingness. The nihilist is simply one who despairs at the present and longs to overcome it, and "judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be…"[17]

The gesturing to a homeland and its times was, *ab initio*, false in his accusing eye because the remembrance of homelands was the creative act of the resentful. Recall that "the Birth of the Human," for Nietzsche, was *and is* the Great Crime, and it presupposes a Law – which the Human subsequently authors, and then proceeds to shrink from the crime and the deed of authorship. It both *was and is* not only because it is on-going but because it does not occur in chronological time in order to "be." This is not an isolated instance for Nietzsche, one that is to be thought of as an attribute of being human, but rather the defining property of being human. The vengeful act of projecting a future by way of a past that we have invented is what it is to be human. That is, according to Nietzsche, we are locked into a sphere of ever-projecting our past onto a future, and thereby giving birth to ourselves. But all ways of giving birth to ourselves are not equal, and the particular way the Judeo-Christian world has done so is suspect in Nietzsche's eyes. It is suspect because it has created a particular kind of human being, and with it a particular logic for giving birth to itself while also deceiving itself about its provenance. This deceit conceals the great act of revenge that installs a world of being beyond becoming – and it is arguably at the core of Nietzsche's to overcome the vengefulness that defines Western metaphysics.

Despite Nietzsche's exhibition of the disturbing presence of nostalgia in our thinking, have we yet asked the question of nostalgia's provenance? Much less the question of nostalgia itself? Who are we when we speak nostalgically, and what does our speech portend? Must all of our longings end in nihilism? Are the original stories of Western nostalgia, of the Odyssey and the Exodus, part of a nihilistic heritage? And in what way does nihilism have its own nostalgic projections? As surely as the past lays claim to us, so too must we begin to think through nostalgia and the way it lays claim to our thinking.

One of the most insightful readings of Nietzsche's account of nihilism to date remains the one given by Martin Heidegger in his lectures of the 1930s and 40s.[18] There he gave thorough coverage to a thinker who had yet to be properly read, as the Nazis had usurped Nietzschean notions of the will for their ulterior political purposes. Heidegger's reading is remarkable if only for the sustained treatment he gives to the troubled notion of the will, the way "will" sits as the central and last concept of western metaphysics, and of its grounding in a temporality of revenge.[19] Heidegger's unraveling of Nietzsche's notion of

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[17] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 585A

[18] These are largely compiled in one set: Heidegger, *Nietzsche, 4 vols*, trans. D. Farell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991).

[19] Martin Heidegger, "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" in *Nietzsche, Vol. II*, trans. D. Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 220.

revenge is compelling, since Heidegger is often thought of as the thinker of nostalgia *par excellence*, and because he thinks of Nietzsche both in terms of the closing down of philosophy not only out of revenge but out of nostalgia: "Nietzsche was the last to experience this homelessness."[20] Indeed, Heidegger is the first thinker to invite us to consider the question of being not simply despite what Nietzsche says about nihilism but precisely because of it.[21] The difficult question at the core of Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche involves the question of nostalgia. For one wonders if Heidegger's own nostalgia somehow suffers the pangs of regret and resentment, if it harbours the desire and drive to return to conditions of an earlier age or even to bring about new conditions based on a fruitful and thoughtful appropriation of the old. And a lot hinges on this question for anyone concerned with the politics latent within Heidegger's thinking. Let us proceed to examine this curious tension between Nietzsche and Heidegger by asking whether nostalgia is always already vengeful.

iii. Ontic / Ontological

For Heidegger, the essence and sense of nostalgia is not itself anything nostalgic, perhaps somewhat obviously so. That the essence of a being is not itself another being seems logically true, it was only with Heidegger that we see the weighty truthfulness of this differentiation of beings from their essence as beings, a difference he calls "the ontological difference." Beginning in *Being and Time*, Heidegger begins his exploration of the ontological difference, an exploration of the differentiation between "Being and beings" that he says defines western philosophical thinking from the outset. The beings of the world (or, as sometimes translated, entities) are *ontic*, while the Being of beings is *ontological*.[22] Ontic inquiry pursues actual beings; ontological inquiry concerns the conditions of the possibility of beings as such, and is thusly synonymous with the question of Being. To ask questions "ontologically" is to ask after the conditions that must be the case in order for the beings under scrutiny to be the beings they are at all. As Heidegger shows, to ask ontological questions is not simply resume a tradition, but to ask in an originary manner – something that goes to the heart of the matter.

However, the ontological difference characterizes the history of western thought insofar as that history has elided the difference. That is, every philosophical thinker in the West, according to Heidegger, has tried to ground Being in beings by articulating the Being of beings as another being. Thus Plato sees the Being of beings as idea; Hegel sees the Being of beings as *Geist*; Nietzsche sees the Being of beings as will-to-power. Heidegger says the Being of beings is not itself a being. To even begin to ask "what is it?" presumes that it lies in relation to us as a "what" and hence as another being. And so for Heidegger the question of being, as the question we must learn to face, is one we will have difficulty posing as a question even though we can grasp the questionable character of Being. But we do well to ask what happens to this difference if it has erroneously characterized the

[20] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Pathmarks*, trans. F. Capuzzi, ed. W. McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 257
[21] Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. A. Schuwer & R. Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 150, 157-58.
[22] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), s. 3.

history of thinking hitherto? If we begin with a phenomenon in the world, and work out its character ontologically, it seems initially that we are led further and further away from the entity or phenomenon itself. For example, if we ask the question of what it is to exist as a human being (or, *Dasein* for Heidegger), we eventually come to the question of what it is to be in the world. Further, we then come to ask what it is for a world to be a world. This crux brings us to the "worldhood of the world" (the Being of the world is the "worldhood" of the world), and we find that the worldhood of the world inheres in its being *this world*…, and so we are back with the beings of this world. We are inescapably in a world.

This does not mean that the ontological difference "leads nowhere." It is truthfully the opposite, for it shows that every act of inquiry comes to be an interpretation of what it is to exist as a human being in the world. When we ask the question of nostalgia, we ask what it is in a way that takes us backwards and forwards. If we take the ontological difference as a clue to our interpretation of nostalgia, we begin with ontic nostalgia and proceed towards ontological nostalgia. This means that we take actual examples of nostalgia (ontic) and ask about the conditions of the possibility of nostalgia as nostalgia in the world. How is it possible to long for an actual past? It is possible to long for the past, but not to recreate it, simply because it would no longer be the past. In order for nostalgia to be actual, we must experience a particular loss of something from the past – and what is lost is home. Hence nostalgia as *nostos algein*, a painful longing for home. Nostalgia speaks to us by speaking of our homelessness. Alienation, distance, separation: these are phenomena that belong to homelessness for Heidegger, and give credence to his kinship with a seemingly unrelated thinker like Marx.[23] The events and artifacts of our world showcase our own alienation, our own unrelatedness to ourselves.

Ontic nostalgia is actual nostalgia, and is found in examples like the case of the settler support of Makah whaling. It also tells of settler outrage and of the distinct way that ontic nostalgia would be resentiment insofar as it not only seeks the past for remembrance or even for memorialization but to make it actual again in a redemptive form. Ontic nostalgia, then, carries the danger of becoming actual as revenge.

iv. Nostalgia

But what of situations of nostalgia where we sense a loss and an alienation even when we cannot say that we ourselves have lost anything? For example, there is nostalgia in the desire to live close to the land, to can food, to resist technological society by returning to the ways of living of the past. This nostalgia is also ontic insofar as it presents itself in the guise of actual practices, and turns us to take concrete action in the face of present circumstances. It "judges of the world as it is that it ought *not* to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist," thereby showing its vengeful and nihilistic heritage.[24]

[23] Heidegger notes that Marx is one of the first to properly characterize the modern situation as alienation, in "Letter on Humanism" in *Pathmarks*, trans. F. Capuzzi, ed. W. McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 258-59.
[24] Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 585A.

Ontological nostalgia, however, does not only gather ontic instances of nostalgia, but also moves our thinking to the conditions that allow for nostalgia to be possible at all. How is it that we can experience our own homelessness and loss and alienation in simple everyday ways without ever having experienced the loss personally? How is it that any one of us might wander into a supermarket and marvel at how far removed we seem to be from where our food originates without ever having farmed or lived close to the land? How is that nostalgia makes itself present to us in these ontic examples?

But rather than seek the source of nostalgia in another being, we can see that nostalgia, properly speaking, does not only refer to an actual moment of loss or even to an actual loss itself. Similarly, Nietzsche's characterization of revenge is important precisely because it is not only ontic but ontological: it specifies the condition of the possibility of being human rather than simply another attribute of human behaviour. If revenge is the condition of the possibility of being human for Nietzsche, nostalgia is the condition of the possibility of the thinking being (he would not go so far as say human). Nostalgia, thought ontologically, is a remembering that does not remember instances or specific practices but rather stands to memorialize in the very act of recognizing one's homelessness.

Let me take a moment to characterize how this is possible and what it looks like. In "The Question Concerning Technique" Heidegger gives a number of examples of the way technical thinking covers over any more traditional way of relating to a variety of things across the landscape.[25] He notes that the technological forester and timber-cruiser has replaced the woodsman, that the hydro-electric dam on the Rhine has replaced Hölderlin's rendering in the poem "The Rhine," and that the tourist industry keeps the Rhine river on display in a way that blocks any more traditional way of confronting it. He says there is no return to the way it was. As in Marx, the worker can experience his or her alienation and exploitation without ever recalling a time when one's labour was not already a commodity. As in Rousseau, I can recognize the unfreedom of my existence in contemporary society without ever having had a taste of freedom. This way of speaking of nostalgia, as a recognition of existing in a profoundly alienated way is an inextricable feature of the world today. To think through what it is to be human, to be a thinking being, is to think through how we are called forth to belong together and with others. "Politics" is this calling forth. Today we often think of politics in terms of how we gather to have a say over our affairs, but stumble over the import of politics simply as how it is we are called forth to belong.

[25] I re-title the essay simply because the German does not refer to "technology," but carefully refers on the one hand to the technical, technique and technicity, and to technology and the technological on the other. Heidegger is careful in specifying and differentiating. The essay on technique is published in English as "The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper Collins, 1977).

To conclude: Why Nostaligia ain't what it used to be

Just as revenge is thought non-ontically, so too with nostalgia, and it is precisely here that nostalgia shows itself capable of a remembering that is not always already vengeful. Nostalgia properly understood must avoid cascading into a political project that attempts to redeem or hold responsible. The "loss" that is made manifest by nostalgia cannot be made whole. Nostalgia properly understood is important for the political landscape of modernity because in it we experience our loss and distance from each other. Insofar as it remains possible to hearken to this loss, we stand to gain. But if we mobilize our nostalgia into political projects, suddenly we slip away from the thoughtful oasis of memorializing and bearing witness towards revenge and redemption.

Now we must also be clear about the relation of ontic and ontological nostalgia, since the distinction between ontic and ontological breaks down when we recognize that the conditions of the possibility of any discrete instance of nostalgia come to presence not in their conditions but in the nostalgic instance itself! Nostalgia always presents itself to us in the world, in relation to others in the world. By retreating to "ontological" nostalgia we are not recreating the conditions for metaphysics; rather, we aim to "think through" the kind of world and humans we must be in order for such a loss to make sense at all. And that is all that can fairly be expected.

I think we are at last in a position to give a rejoinder to Derrida's divisive and somewhat cryptic note that begins this paper. But I think Rorty self-incriminates better:

> The $32 question of whether the later Heidegger still believes there is an ahistorical discipline called "ontology" leads fairly quickly to the $64 question of whether he has a right to the nostalgia for which Derrida and others have criticized him, and to the hostility he displays toward pragmatism.[26]

I think this shows why Richard Rorty (and by extension, Derrida) misinterprets Heidegger's work after *Being and Time*. "Metaphysics" is not something that we simply leave behind, for it truly is part of the world in which we live, part of the grammar that lets beings be. It means that we are continually faced with the task of thinking through who we are and who we've become. And if we are so disposed, our "nostalgia" does not mean there can be no laughter, much less dancing. Nostalgia is not necessarily deep and dark. Ontic nostalgia thus harbours fruitful possibilities for remembrance insofar as it hearkens to its ontological mode, viz. that we are encouraged to think of loss not as a task before us to be redeemed or reckoned with through reparative action but as an opportunity for witnessing and memorializing. This cuts against the way we had characterized nostalgia at the outset, and perhaps a few words are necessary to elucidate the transformation of nostalgia, our orientation to it and to the past it presents.

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[26] Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism" in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41.

Nostalgia is often unmistakably present in vengeful politics, but not all nostalgia is characterized by revenge, nor is all revenge necessarily a mere improper use of nostalgia. But the longing for home and the sense of loss one experiences with nostalgia do often translate into activity aimed at "bringing us home" by creating the conditions of a possible homecoming ourselves. This is ontic nostalgia. But not all ontic nostalgia is necessarily vengeful, since we can ponder specific times in the past – be it the good old days or the golden age – and have a sense of loss that does not demand remedial activity. Indeed it can demand something quite other than remediation, and can simply demand something like bearing witness, listening, or remaining present and thoughtful in a world that continually puts us before likenesses of opportunities from our pasts.

But we also see those who do well to move beyond the past while safeguarding it. Consider that South Africa modeled apartheid on the reserve system in Canada, and that to date we can say that South Africa has, in many ways, more honourably attempted to come to terms with apartheid and its legacy. For all its faults, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not attempt to solve the problem of apartheid with the blunt force of legality and rights, but rather has sought to ensure that apartheid's legacy is one that will not be forgotten. In present day Germany one finds the holocaust memorialized in hundreds of different ways, from small signs in subway stations to entire city blocks turned into museum/parks. Could we in Canada ever imagine memorializing the treatment of Indigenous peoples this way? We are certainly among the worst in the world for confronting a colonial legacy with which we still live.

We need not be nostalgic in the sense of having "lost" some pre-colonial innocence, or of a homeland to which we need to return. We can be nostalgic in recognizing the way the displacement of Indigenous peoples requires something of settlers and colonial powers. It requires something other than enabling "traditional" Indigenous activities if the underlying freighted force of such enabling is only a subtle trick of revenge-taking, of setting up the Indigenous other as some kind of pure natural being from days gone by. Settler societies can remember and memorialize without sinking to such depths. Whether positive law has any place in such memorialization is doubtful, but surely a politics of the future must.