

Logos-Ethos-Mythos: Heidegger's Dweller and Lopez's *Arctic Dreams*

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Abstract: This paper tries to shed light upon Martin Heidegger's thoughts concerning the crisis of homelessness which the thinker calls THE plight. Heidegger's insights concerning language guide the course of the exposition. Aside from Heidegger, it examines Barry Lopez's book *Arctic Dreams*, specifically the chapter entitled "The Country of The Mind" as a complementary resource for grounding the main points discussed in the paper. It is an exposition concerned with the relationship between logos, ethos and mythos. The paper is a reflection on the relationship between these three words, which can hopefully provide a compass, resting neither simply on an axiology nor an occidental or oriental metaphysics, that may serve as a guide in gaining a renewed ethical way of being in the world. Ultimately, it shows that the questions which have been confronted by environmental ethics is essentially the question concerning our response to the primordial givenness of our place in the fourfold and our hearing of the silent voice of language.

Keywords: Heidegger, environmental ethics, logos, mythos, Eskimo

Introducing a Heideggerian Perspective for Environmental ethics

It is beyond doubt that, that this century is an age grounded on the scientific will to know and the capitalistic urge to manage and optimize the utility of resources—both human and non-human. Concretely manifested in the technological colonization of almost all aspects of life, science, specifically the mathematical reduction of beings to the calculable and controllable has proffered us with a world of unprecedented efficiency and profitability. Such a reductive comportment towards the world and beings in general, however, must not be carelessly dismissed as an historic inevitability guaranteed in advance by the first steam engine. Beyond the pragmatic and scientific advancements that the world have witnessed and experienced after the Industrial Revolution, a more primordial occurrence grounds our age. This primal occurrence draws away from ordinary thought, for thinking, in its customary sense, can only deal with what it has, beforehand, set-up for itself. This primal occurrence holds sway in every epoch of human civilization and in the current age of modern technology, it manifests itself in oblivion and withdrawal.

The modern-technological framework has destined the way we see beings—as objects to be dominated and measured. In our ceaseless efforts to secure our place on our own planet, we have, be it wittingly or unwittingly, alienated ourselves from the very earth which sustains our existence. In establishing our dominion over the non-human, human existence itself has been reduced to a repetitive, laborious and frenzied grind. We toil, secure, excavate, produce and build in order to give

some semblance of meaning and direction for our own anxious relationship with everything around us, above and below. It seems, however, that no matter what we build and fortify for ourselves, such grand monoliths that showcase the power of human reason don't seem to provide us with any essential and secure grounding on this earth. If anything, it only seems to expose more loopholes and deficiencies in our methods of conquest (eg. The Holocaust, Hiroshima, Global Warming, AIDS, AH1-N1, etc.). It seems that the more forcefully we stamp our presence on the earth, the earth withdraws from view and hides its essential character from us.

This phenomenon of being alienated from the very place that we dwell is truly uncanny, especially for the thinker Martin Heidegger. What is most “thought-provoking”¹ in the current age of modern technology for Heidegger, is that behind all this clamor for knowledge and frenzied odysseys for security, we remain homeless; not just in the practical sense, but in the essential sense of being oblivious to our own abode, which is none other than the earth under our feet. This modern scientific-epistemological agitation is symptomatic of a deeper and more dangerous insecurity that is driven by a destining that holds sway in the age of modern technology which destines man to reveal the real *En-framed*, calculated, ordered, stockpiled and ready on-call.² It may be argued, therefore, that this phenomenon of

¹Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address” in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1966. and Martin Heidegger’s “What is Called Thinking” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1977. (Heretofore, references to the essay “What is Called Thinking shall be abbreviated as WT).

²Cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1977. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as QCT).

“earth-ly oblivion” is the phantom that any ethics that concerns itself with the environment wishes to demystify, evaluate and understand. The question to ask at this point is this: if all branches of environmental ethics are principally concerned with man’s relationship with the natural world, then does it not follow that, fundamentally speaking, the questions that permeate all spheres of environmental ethics (animal rights, land ethic, biocentric ethics, deep ecology, etc.) is essentially the question which concerns the primordial meaning of man’s dwelling in the world? If so, then it seems all the more necessary that thinkers that aim to forge a genuine philosophical understanding of environmental crises engage Heidegger’s thoughts on what it means for human beings to dwell on earth.

A person is homeless when he does not have a home to dwell in, a bed to rest his head upon and a roof to shelter him from the changing seasons. However, in our age, do we not have a lot more than a bed and a roof? Is it not that some of us even own more than two houses; even vacation houses and condominium flats? Despite this, the philosopher Martin Heidegger ardently holds that we remain homeless, that we do not dwell in our home—in the essential sense. He holds that *the* plight that haunts the age of modern technology is that of a loss of autochthony or rootedness.³ For him, this is the primordial and thus essential impasse of our age. What does this rootedness mean? None other than *belonging* and *dwelling* on

³Cf. Martin Heidegger’s “Memorial Address,” In *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. New York: Harper Torchbooks. 1966.

earth, under the sky, awaiting the divinities as mortals.⁴ To ask what we ought to do for the environment, therefore, is essentially to ask what it means *to dwell*.

The renowned environmental philosopher Robin Attfield contends that, “Without some kind of ethic (a theory of right and responsibility) and some kind of axiology (value-theory), we lack guidance and direction for tackling problems, whether global, environmental or otherwise.”⁵ The ethic that Attfield calls for is a standard, a protocol by and through which, we, as human beings can proceed with our lives in an ethical fashion specifically with regard to our relationship with nature. In another book he says:

It is often argued that the entire biosphere should be cherished, and sometimes, as by Leopold, that its beauty, stability and integrity should be preserved for its own sake. People are usually ready to recognize that it should be cherished in the interests of humanity, including future generations; while some would add here the interest of other species, as all these too depend on its preservation. Besides this instrumental basis (which may not call for the biosphere to be preserved exactly as it is), others attach to it aesthetic, and sometimes religious value, and some regard it as a living organism, “Gaia”, with an interest in self-maintenance and an intrinsic value of its own.⁶

It is therefore logical to hold that if one is to propose an ethic for the environment, then it must necessarily rest on a metaphysics and an axiology and as in the case of most religious countries, a theological presupposition, which can

⁴Heidegger discusses the “fourfold” more extensively in the essays, “The Thing”, “poetically man dwells” and “Building Dwelling Thinking”. I shall not be going deep into discussing this aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy and shall only mention it in passing in the interest of the primary exposition that is concerned foremost with language.

⁵Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of the Global Environment*. Indiana: Purdue University Press. 1999, 27.

⁶Robin Attfield and Katharine Dell, eds. *Values, conflict and the environment*. 2nd. Ed. Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company. 1998, 27.

serve as a normative standard for human comportment in his environment. Erazim Kohak postulates an interesting view in a chapter of his book *Embers and the Stars* entitled, "A Man's Place In Nature," where he characterizes the human being's nature as a dweller as the "intersection between the temporal and the eternal," having the capacity to see value in beings consequently allowing them (beings) to transcend the perishing and passing of time through an act of love.⁷

Whatever way we decide to see our place in nature, one thing remains as an obvious presupposition, and as such, is usually taken for granted. It is that before we can even talk about an ethics, an axiology or a metaphysics with regard to the environment, we are and have been, since the beginning, *dwelling* on the earth. The Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* names this as the primordial and necessary presupposition for the possibility of fundamental ontology—*Dasein* as being-in-the-world, as Care and Temporality. *Dasein*, thrown in the world, encounters beings meaningfully, ready-to-hand, circumspected. *Dasein* stands out *ek-statically* as the temporal horizon for the revealing of Being. The Heidegger after the turn (*die Kehre*), shall renew and revise the term and primarily define *Dasein's* being as a mortal *dweller*—that we are what we are, insofar as that we, as mortals, stand under the sky, await the divinities and stand on the earth.

The next logical question then is this: Can we gather from our primordial situation the essential meaning of our stay here on earth? This rest of the exposition will attempt to shed light upon Martin Heidegger's thoughts concerning the crisis of

⁷Cf. Erazim Kohak, "A Human's Place in Nature," in *Embers and the Stars*. Illinois: Chicago University Press, 1987.

homelessness which the renowned thinker calls *the* plight. Heidegger's insights concerning *language* will guide the course of the exposition. Aside from Heidegger, I shall take Barry Lopez's book *Arctic Dreams*, specifically the Chapter entitled "The Country of The Mind" as a complementary resource for grounding the main points that shall be discussed in the paper. In sum, the purpose of this paper is to show how Heidegger, by listening to the essential *Saying* of language, was able to blaze a trail for genuine and critical thought concerning the essential meaning of man's dwelling here on earth. It is an exposition concerned with the relationship between *logos, ethos and mythos*. It shall be argued that a reflection on the relationship between these three *words* can provide us with a compass, resting neither simply on an axiology nor an occidental or oriental metaphysics, that may guide us in gaining a renewed and a "more ethical" way of being in the world. Ultimately, it shall be shown that the questions which have been confronted by environmental ethics is essentially *the* question concerning our response to the primordial givenness of our place in the fourfold and our *hearing* of the silent voice of language.

Pingok

*"In language, the earth blossoms toward the bloom of the sky."*⁸

Barry Lopez, in his chronicle of his journey in the arctic Eskimo island of Pingok, a region few miles north of the Alaskan peninsula, brilliantly narrates his

⁸Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," In *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 99. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as NL)

extraordinary experience with the Eskimo dwellers native to the land. Pingok island gets its name from an Inupiatun word for “a rising of earth over a dome of ice.”⁹ From the name itself, we can gather the interesting affinity between the land and the language that speaks of it. Not simply because the word accurately captures the description of the landscape, but from here, we see how the landscape shapes the very utterance that responds to the opening that wells up before it which it beholds in silent and heedful reverence. The name for the land serves as a tribute to the unfolding of the reality which presents itself to the natives. Lopez adds that “the very order of language, the ecology of its sounds and thoughts, derives from the mind’s intercourse with the landscape.”¹⁰ As Heidegger says, “by virtue of the gift of the word, there is.”¹¹ This does not mean that the word brings beings into being from nothingness. Rather, it is primally the word that lets what *is* to presence, i.e. *to be*. It means that the word is the essential relation that allows, gathers and shelters the being in unconcealment, allowing it to shine forth in its presencing as it is. Kockelmans writes that “the original word which expresses a being does not only play an essential part in the process in which this being is discovered; its name also preserves this being in its discovered openness.”¹²

⁹Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. 1986, 235. (Heretofore, references to this book shall be abbreviated as AD)

¹⁰*ibid.*, 249.

¹¹NL, 88.

¹²Joseph J. Kockelmans, *On the Truth of Being*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1984, 148. (Heretofore, references to this book shall be abbreviated as OTB).

Lopez expounds that in exploring such a native, self-contained, pure culture, it is very important to get a hold of the local dialect. “A local language discriminates among the local phenomena, and it serves to pry the landscape loose from its anonymity,” he explains.¹³ Heidegger, in *The Thinker as Poet*, mentions something about how language, especially poetic language serves as the topology of Being, announcing its whereabouts.¹⁴ Heidegger holds that every poetic utterance is a thoughtful unconcealment of Being. Such that for the Ancient Greeks, he says, poetry was also a mode of *poiēsis*—a bringing forth into unconcealment; that is before it was drowned out by *technē*. Poetry, in its essential sense, says, that is for Heidegger, lets something lie before in its essence. It is a freeing saying, that derives its meaning from the Greek word *legein* which means *to lay*.¹⁵ *Legein* is where the term *Logos* comes from. Thus, we can say that *logos as legein* properly understood is a letting-lie-together-before. He adds:

...*legein*, to lay, by its letting-lie-together-before means just this, that whatever lies before us involves us and therefore concerns us. Laying as letting-lie-together-before [beisammen-vorliegen-Lassen] is concerned with whatever is laid down as lying before us....What lies together before is stored, laid away, secured, laid away, secured and deposited in unconcealment, and that means sheltered in unconcealment. By letting things lie-together-before us, *legein* undertakes to secure what lies before us in unconcealment.¹⁶

¹³AD, 233.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Thinker as Poet,” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 12. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as TP).

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Logos,” In *Early Greek Thinking*. trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco. 1975, 60. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as Logos).

¹⁶ Logos, 62-63.

Thus, the utterance of the word is essentially a sheltering that gathers everything and safeguards them in unconcealment. The *logos* safekeeps beings in their essential unfolding, freeing them into their essence. In his “Letter on Humanism,” the familiar line, “Language is the house of Being, in its home man dwells,”¹⁷ encapsulates this idea. Man takes residence in the house of Being by way of language that shelters and keeps their relation. Similarly, in “Identity in Difference,” Heidegger, points out how language is the “most delicate vibration holding everything within the suspended structure of appropriation.”¹⁸ The event of Appropriation, where both man and Being meet each other in their essential unfolding is none other than the poetic Saying of language. It is the clearing, lighting (*Lichtung*) that lets beings shine in unconcealment. Hence, it is of utmost value that we see how an aboriginal, native language, concretely shows how this relation may be accomplished. And so, we ask, how can a local language be poetic?

If we conceive poetry exclusively, in the formal sense, composed with rhyme and written in verse, then we may never see Heidegger’s point. In the Introduction to *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter notes that poetic saying is not confined to verse, such that any prose can be poetic as well, while a poem in verse poem may not necessarily be poetic. Hence, there must be something more

¹⁷Martin Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” In *Basic Writings*. trans. David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1977, 193. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as LOH).

¹⁸Cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity,” In *Identity and difference*. trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969.

essential to the poetic utterance other than its form. At the same time, if we understand language as a mere tool for expression, as a faculty of human intellect, then we are prone to miss Heidegger's point. As we have seen, language for Heidegger, taking from the original sense of *legein*, lets-lie-before. For Heidegger, it is language that speaks, and man listens to language.¹⁹ J.L. Mehta, taking off from Heidegger, says in his book, "Language is the chime of stillness that differentiates thing from world, allowing things *to thing* and the world *to world*."²⁰ The peal of stillness, that Heidegger speaks of in his essay *Language*, is the Saying of language. "Only as men belong within the peal of stillness are mortals able to speak in their own way in sounds."²¹ Language in the poetic sense, may be in any form, be it verse or prose, and even silence. Lopez recalls how Eskimos are wont to talk inside their houses while sitting beside the windows, with their flickering eyes fixed in the horizon, as if their thoughts moved with the land's contours and the changing of seasons. Here, silence speaks and beings are allowed to appear. Lopez also tells a story about how American painters that go to the island meet the land and allow themselves to be claimed by its "powerful, beguiling, frightening, arresting and incomprehensible mystery;"²² allowing the land to speak to them. "The face of God,"

¹⁹Martin Heidegger, "Language," In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 190. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as Language).

²⁰J.L. Mehta, *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 223-224.

²¹Language, 207.

²²AD, 230.

they said.²³ It is the acceptance of the mystery of the land and its inexhaustible richness that “ironically” makes it easier to approach. Contrast this to the “statistical-scientific” attitude that pervades our age.

Lopez explains further, “In the face of rational, scientific approach to the land, which is more widely sanctioned, esoteric insights and speculations are frequently over-shadowed, and what is lost is profound. The land is like poetry; it is inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life.”²⁴ Heidegger also speaks about this relation between the land (being) and poetry. Being speaks poetically and man furnishes his relation with it through heedful listening-saying. The human person does not bring about the emergence (*phusis*) of Being; he is used and claimed to utter its happening. In the essay *A Dialogue on Language*, Heidegger compares the poet to Hermes, the divine messenger, whose task was to bring tidings to mortals after he has listened to the gods. “Man is man insofar as he is needed and used by the two-fold (world-thing, Being-being) that is sheltered in language; he is man insofar as he hears and responds to language.”²⁵ Thus, if we are to see this in Lopez’s account, we find how the land calls for man’s response—that he allows what shows itself be seen from itself as it itself. This essentially phenomenological description of the experience of the painters and the native inhabitants of the land exhibits in classic

²³AD, 230.

²⁴Ibid., 245-246.

²⁵Martin Heidegger, “A Dialogue on Language,” in *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 32.

Heideggerian fashion, the essential belonging of man to his dwelling place. We recall Aristotle's account of Heraclitus, warming himself by the fire, disappointing his guests that expected him to be in a state of deep thinking, only to find him by the stove, warming his hands by the fire; and Heraclitus says, "Here too, the gods are present." This statement from Heraclitus clearly shows how the poet and the thinker essentially comport themselves toward that which presences. In *poetically man dwells*, Heidegger defines poetry as the upward glance that measures the *dimension*—where mortality reveals its essence and the divinities shine as divinities.²⁶ "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."²⁷

Thus, it is the poetic appreciation and revelation of the land that shelters the essential Saying and consequently, man's dwelling. Terms such as poetic dwelling, belonging, hearing, listening, Saying, letting have surfaced at this point. The next section shall try to examine the relationship between these "Heideggerian" key concepts in the hope of arriving at the essential meaning of *logos* for Heidegger. The next part of the discussion shall be conducted in the same manner as the preceding one, that is, as a dialogue between Lopez and Heidegger with a new element added in the mix—the myth as *mythos*—the telling word.

²⁶Martin Heidegger, "...poetically man dwells..." In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 221.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 218.

Pingok-Logos

“A man in Anaktuvuk Pass, in response to a question about what he did when he visited a new place, said to me, ‘I listen, that’s all.’ I listen he meant, to what the land is saying. I walk around in it and strain my senses in appreciation of it for a long time before, I, myself ever speak a word. Entered in such a respectful manner, he believed, the land would open to him.”²⁸

At this point, we might be getting the impression that Heidegger is doing nothing but proposing a sort of “pseudo-respectful” way of seeing the world; a romantic sentimentalizing that projects *poetry* upon the landscape. To hold such a view, again, misses the entire point of Heidegger. Lopez states that “language is not something that man imposes on the land; but rather, it evolves in his conversation with the land.”²⁹ Again, the idea that language is not a tool of subjectivity resonates here. We, as dwellers, listen first, before we speak. We merely echo the *stillness*. “Human existence is needed and used as the historical clearing through which *phusis* can manifest itself as articulated by *logos*, but human existence is not the source of *phusis* or *logos*.”³⁰ Hence, if ever an artist or a poet does ever work with a particular landscape, it is the landscape that essentially maintains the relation. That is why for Heidegger, a work of art *gathers* the fourfold.³¹ Being speaks with the silence of language and man listens. This listening moves man in proximity to the

²⁸AD, 230.

²⁹Ibid., 249.

³⁰David Macauley, ed. *Minding Nature: The Philosophers of Ecology*. New York: The Guilford Press. 1996, 68.

³¹Cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” In *Poetry, Language and Thought*. trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971.

essential nearness of his dwelling place. Speaking belongs to man as heirloom, and his conforming to language's speaking establishes his place in the *event*. It is not simply the utterance of inner emotions or a representation by way of a concept or an image.³² Heidegger explains that "To say, related to the Norse *saga*, means to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lighting and concealing it."³³ Thus every poetic and essential Saying is essentially a *laying* that *lets-lie-before*, sheltered in and by Itself. *The essential being of language is Saying as Showing*.³⁴ Every spoken word of mortals is a counter-saying, a response that allows that which lies before to presence and be heard. This *logos* sets everything free, abiding in themselves as the beings (things) that they are. It is a movement of freedom that liberates the "thing" from the tyranny of *Enframing*.

Thus, every essential Saying is a *hearing* (hören). It grants the hearing, and thus, the speaking, of language solely to those who belong within it.³⁵ This listening or hearing (hören) implies that he who hears *belongs* (gehören) to the matter addressed. Therefore, we, as mortals, under the sky, on the earth, awaiting the divinities, *belong* to the essential Saying by way of *hearing*. George Joseph Seidel summarizes Heidegger's point this way:

³²Language, 193.

³³NL, 93.

³⁴Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," In *On the Way to Language*. trans. Peter D. Hertz. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1971, 123. (Heretofore, references to this essay shall be abbreviated as TWL).

³⁵TWL, 124.

Language belongs primarily to being. It is language that speaks, as Heidegger says over and over again. Man speaks inasmuch as he hears, to the extent that he has heard the command of the silent, i.e., the voice of being which is language. Man speaks only to the extent that he belongs to (gehört), coordinates himself with language. This coordination is hearing. And this becomes successful coordination insofar as it truly belongs to this silent language of being. As Heidegger says, “Language speaks in that as a pointing which extends to all areas of the presencing, it allows every presencing thing to appear and shine before us. We learn in terms of authentic language to the extent that we ‘let it have its say’.”³⁶

To truly belong, and thus to dwell, entails listening, not in the passive sense; but in the sense of a *letting, allowing, freeing* that engenders the sheltering of things in the essential being; that is as sites for the fourfold. “Language is, as world-moving Saying, the relation of all relations. It relates maintains, proffers, and enriches the face-to-face encounter of the world’s regions, holds and keeps them, in that it holds—Saying—in reserve.”³⁷ The *logos* for Heidegger is the most essential and simplest testimony about man’s dwelling. It is the primordial *gathering* that brings being into their own and lets man dwell in the most essential and thus important way.

Lopez constantly emphasizes the critical necessity of being able to understand the regional dialect in surveying the land. He says, “The Eskimo language reaches its apogee in describing the land and man’s activity in it...It is out on the land, in the hunting camps and traveling over the ice, that the language comes alive.”³⁸ Benjamin Lee Whorf, he says, characterizes an Eskimo dialect

³⁶George Joseph Seidel. *Martin Heidegger and the Pre-Socratics*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press. 1964,140. (Heretofore, references to this work shall be abbreviated as HPS).

³⁷NL, 107.

known as “Hopi” as a language that projects a world of movement and changing relationships; a dialect rich in verbs and poor in nouns. However, unlike Whorf, Lopez does not hold that language is a “projection” of human reason unto the landscape; rather for him, it evolves with his conversation with the land. It is borne out of a mutual *belonging* that brings both land and dweller each into their own. More than a world view, it is primordially a *shelter*. Mehta amplifies this point by holding that, “Language is essentially mother-tongue, dialect, the language of home, so regarded, itself a home for man.”³⁹ The Word *gives*. We are reminded here of Heidegger’s analysis of Stefan George’s in his essay “The Nature of Language”. Precisely, “where the word fails, no thing may be.” The word retains the thing, a being within itself, as itself.

*The being of language—the language of being.*⁴⁰ The *logos* expresses both language and being. When we go through a river, we go through the word “river.” There is no semiotic dichotomy between the signifier and the signified. The word *is*. It *shows* what presences and calls man to listen to its silent call for its poetic, heedful utterance. The nearness that we have been trying to uncover from the beginning is language itself. It is due to its simplicity and inconspicuous nature that hides its essence from the man of the age of modern technology that language has deteriorated into mere signification and code. It no longer harbors a shelter for man for man has been ordered on stand-by to order and calculate beings, no longer

³⁸AD, 249.

³⁹Mehta, 228.

⁴⁰NL, 76.

allowing beings to remain in their essence; that is their essential presencing (*Anwesen*) as things that gather the fourfold. However, as Hölderlin writes, says Heidegger, “where the danger grows, the saving power also.”⁴¹

How can we recover? It seems that the blind drive of the modern epoch is a juggernaut compared to the meek shepherd of Heidegger. When Hölderlin spoke of “homecoming”, he meant humankind’s return to its original proximity to the origin that “gave” to the Early Greeks their encounter with the original presencing of entities.⁴² This is Heidegger’s hope as well. His turn to language and the poetic is an attempt to bring us back home. It is a courageous undertaking that is not readily acceptable for the kind of societies that men have managed to put up for themselves since the Enlightenment. Be that as it may, it is nonetheless foolish to push blindly forward with the way that we moderns carry ourselves in our home given the most obvious concern that is environmental destruction. No amount of calculation can patch up the hole in our ozone layer. No degree of scientific advancement can recover what is most essential.

It is foolish to refuse healing. However, it is also true that the modern man never feels ill for just around the block, a 24-hour drugstore has a remedy for every kind of illness. The question, however is, does a drugstore, even with the most extensive inventory, have a pill for the modern “amnesia”—the oblivion—*the* plight?

⁴¹Cf. “The Question Concerning Technology.”

⁴²Macauley, 69.

As in amnesia, recovery takes time. Memory entails patience. Homecomings call for preparation.

Where have we wandered to in our exposition? We stated a simple case. Man no longer *dwells*, essentially speaking. And we said that language provides us a clue in unlocking the underlying principle within this paradox. We are preparing for a homecoming. Now, we venture into a neighborhood akin to the neighborhood of *logos*. The way of the myth—*mythos*.

Pingok-Logos-Mythos

“Heidegger says that the original poetizing is a mythologizing (Sage) of the unconcealedness of things, the truth of things, Being. Myth as this original language of Logos in its intimate connection with being is of Being. The two belong together. In an authentic sense this original creative language is being. For the essence of language is nothing else but being itself.”⁴³

For Heidegger, there is no essential dichotomy between *mythos* and *logos*. Despite the fact that it is customary for the modern paradigm to pit myth against reason, Heidegger conceives of the two as complementary if not identical. He succinctly defines their relation as such:

Myth means the *telling word*. For the Greeks, to tell is to lay bare and let appear—both the appearance what has its essence in the appearance, its epiphany. *Mythos* is what has its essence in its telling—what appears in the unconcealedness of its appeal. The *mythos* is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which lets man think of what appears, what is in being. *Logos* says the same, *mythos* and *logos* are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such....On the contrary, the early Greek thinkers used them in the same sense (Parmenides Fragment VIII). Historians and philologists, by virtue of a

⁴³HPS, 151.

prejudice for modern rationalism imagine that mythos was destroyed by logos. But nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god's withdrawal.⁴⁴

The common conception of myths is borne out of the tradition of scholarly mythology. Myths for us are fantastic stories about heroes and anti-heroes that poets and storytellers of ancient times used to entertain a crowd. They reflect the world of imagination and fantasy; and thus, cannot be afforded a place in the scientific and 'levelheaded' dimension of reason and logic. It is but a place of refuge when one cannot bear the 'reality' of life. Myths are nothing but castles in the sky, whimsical inventions of a creative master storyteller for an eager crowd...or in our time, mere campfire stories for children.

Nonetheless, Heidegger believes that if we listen to what is essential, we may be able to discern something more essential regarding the meaning of myth and its relation to language. The primordial relation between the myth and the word illuminates a way by which humankind may once again dwell in the nearness of what is nearest. We said that it is by letting beings lie forth in the open that mortals concur with the original Saying of Being (*homolegein*). Mortals are *appropriated* in the *event* (*Ereignis*) when poetic Saying reigns and things *thing* and the world *worlds*. Having heard the summons, mortals are released into the realm nearness.

⁴⁴Martin Heidegger. "What is Called Thinking," In *Basic Writings*. trans. Davide Farrell Krell. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. 1977, 351-352.

Language, interpreted from its ontological root is *logos*, original creative poetizing—myth.⁴⁵

Barry Lopez notes that more than the physical and geographic topography, a mythical landscape is fused in the Eskimo's environment. This *spiritual* landscape indelibly underlies all stories that Eskimos tell when they narrate stories about their experiences with the land. It is as if, there is always a *beyond* that grounds and sustains what the senses perceive and the mind understands. However, for the scientist that goes there to observe and apply his theories, such a landscape is, as we have said, nothing but useless ramblings of the imagination. He writes:

A belief in the authority of statistics and the dismissal of Eskimo narratives as only “anecdotal” is a dichotomy one encounters frequently in arctic environmental assessment reports...developing the “statistical picture” of a landscape. The Eskimos’ stories are politely dismissed not because Eskimos are not good observers or because they lie, but because the narratives cannot be reduced to a form that is easy to handle or lends itself to summary. Their words are too hard to turn into numbers.⁴⁶

We can imagine here a tall, Caucasian scientist, glasses, backpack, laptop and all, sitting with the village elders, pretending to be interested in their stories, wishing that they would just give him the data he needs to write his report. The destiny of *En-framing* blinds men to the *telling that shows*. He only has an eye for numbers. As Max Planck would say, “That which is real, is that which can be measured.” Myths are fiction for the scientist. But for the elders and the inhabitants, these myths and stories are their moral, topographical and religious compass.

⁴⁵Mehta, 149.

⁴⁶AD, 242.

These myths are borne out of the landscape that has spoken and continues to speak to them. These narratives are the landscape—they show, they let-lie-before what is unconcealed and concealed. They allow the known to be known and the unknown to remain withdrawn and kept in the shelter of mystery. It is this *spiritual landscape* that the myth speaks of that makes a mere location, a *place* for the natives. The landscape is suffused with memories and experiences that the Eskimo keeps and shelters in every *telling* of a story. These stories keep them close to that which is near—an experience that we no longer come across. These stories attach the people to the land, as if with luminous fibers that is in uncanny harmony with the *topographical poetry*. This is how they dwell in their home. Through the intersection of the mythic and physical landscape, the native dwellers achieve a congruent relationship with the land.⁴⁷

Joseph Campbell, a famous scholar of ancient myths, was asked by Bill Moyers in an interview this question, “So we tell stories to try to come to terms with the world, to harmonize our lives with reality?”⁴⁸ Campbell replies by saying that aside from giving clues concerning the spiritual potentialities of human life, myths tell a person where he is. Myths give you a perspective. It affords you a place in the landscape. Accordingly, Campbell tells us that through the myth, the human person becomes situated, rooted and harmonized with the cosmos—with the order. The frenzied clamor for knowledge, NASA’s space explorations and the geneticist’s

⁴⁷AD, 266.

⁴⁸Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*. ed. Betty Sue Flowers. New York: Doubleday Publishing. 1988, 5. (Heretofore, references to this book shall be abbreviated as Myth).

mapping of the human genome are not, for Heidegger, Lopez and Campbell, the way by which man can find his true place in the world, or the universe for that matter. For a person that has been claimed by the silent and the near, these exploits are but peripheral spheres of a more essential freedom. The freedom to be what one truly is—that is, a mortal, under the sky, on the earth, awaiting the divinities. It is no wonder that Heidegger was taken aback in a *Der Spiegel* interview when he was shown a picture of the earth from outer space. For him, that is not how we experience the earth. We experience the earth as the ground that sustains us and nourishes each living organism that springs from its bosom. We experience the earth as nearest, and thus, farthest from thought. Yet, through the essential Saying of language in the poetic *telling*, we may once more experience the earth as *earth*. We may once again be sustained and grounded by it. We may once again, as Johann Peter Hebel writes, with our roots, rise out of the earth and bloom into the ether.⁴⁹ The myth indigenizes the human experience and brings it near to what is nearest once again. To listen to the *telling word* is to be *appropriated* and to *belong* in the essential *gathering*.⁵⁰

At this juncture, we see how language and myth can provide us a ground for a genuine relationship with our home. By way of the essential Saying that *shows and tells*, we are provided with a natural compass that can enable us to navigate our place in the world. Hence, language and myth furnishes for us a guide

⁴⁹Cf. Memorial Address.

⁵⁰Cf. Logos.

concerning the way that we, as dwellers ought to conduct ourselves in our abode. *Mythos* and *logos* are essentially intertwined with an *ethos*—an understanding of what it means to dwell in the world.

Pingok-Logos-Mythos-Ethos: Heidegger's Ethics for the Environment

"It is not by rejecting our humanity, but by reclaiming it that we find our place in nature as dwellers."⁵¹

It may seem at this point that this paper has been a romanticization of a supposedly pragmatic discipline known as environmental ethics. However, if we allow ourselves into the path of thinking, as Heidegger has shown us, we discover something more basic and thus more essential than the solutions that sustainable development, the Montreal Protocol, or any environmental movement for that matter may have laid down the table for us. The particular concerns of these movements are only symptoms of a more serious illness. We have called this *the* plight. This plight is what Heidegger has brought to our attention. It is what he calls, *most thought-provoking*.⁵² Most thought provoking for Heidegger is that we have forgotten how to dwell. We have overlooked what is closest and what demands most thought. Every illness springs from a virus that pervades one's surroundings. In the essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger has named this *Ge-stell*. The cure lies at hand. However, the body has developed an allergy for the

⁵¹Cf. Embers and the Stars.

⁵²Cf. What is Called Thinking.

antibiotic and so; it goes about its business, numbed by the “security” of *calculative thinking*. Herein lies the paradox and thus the matter to be tarried.

Heidegger writes, “If the name ‘ethics’, in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that ethics ponders the abode of man, then, that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who *ek-sists*, is in itself the original ethics.”⁵³ This is from his “Letter on Humanism.” In his later writings, he shall refine his conception of man from one who *ek-sists* to one who dwells. Be that as it may, the main idea remains intact. For Heidegger, the matter of ethics is more fundamental than, for instance, Kant’s categorical imperative. It is simply the way by which man carries himself in his abode (*Haltung*). The ethical is primordial in the sense of being concerned with the most basic fact of our existence—that we-are-in-the-world. Bruce Foltz amplifies this point:

Ethics is the bearing within all the comportment [Verhalten] that belongs to this abode [Aufenthalt] in the midst of entities...Ethics is the understanding of what it means to dwell within the midst of beings as a whole. And thus concerns our bearing and comportment, as a whole, towards beings...this *ethos* or abode is precisely “the place of dwelling” the open region within which we dwell.⁵⁴

Campbell notes that indigenous groups have unwritten, understood rules by which people live. There is an *ethos*, an understanding that “we don’t do it that way.”⁵⁵ The myths that are sustained in these communities are the organic

⁵³LOH, 234-235.

⁵⁴Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics and the Metaphysics of Nature*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. 1995, 168.

⁵⁵Campbell, 10.

contracts of this *ethos*. Myths carry the potential to perform a normative function where the human person precisely becomes what he is supposed to be by virtue of the *telling word*. These myths however, are nothing but the form in which the essential *Saying* and *hearing* of the *logos* takes place. "It is a timeless wisdom esteemed by all people, an understanding of how to live a decent life, how to behave properly towards other people and toward the land."⁵⁶ This nameless wisdom springs from the silent stillness of language's speech. This nameless wisdom is Being's call to man. To heed this call is essentially to be ethical, that is, to dwell poetically. For Heidegger, an *ethos* is a genuine world constituted by the cherishing, saving and caring for of things. Dwelling is essentially both a saving (*retten*) and a conserving (*schonen*).⁵⁷ Saving and conserving does not simply mean saving something from ruin; these two essentially means, "setting something free into its own presencing."⁵⁸ Consequently, both *logos* and *mythos* are the primordial and thus essential sites for such a freeing act. It is by virtue of heedful-thoughtful-saying that the human person can *let beings be* and remain *open to its mystery*.⁵⁹

The plight of homelessness is the plight of dwelling. To ponder this makes it a misery no longer. An ethic that is concerned with finding man's essential place in

⁵⁶AD, 268.

⁵⁷Foltz, 166.

⁵⁸Macauley, 150.

⁵⁹This is essentially Heidegger's definition of "Gelassenheit" or *releasement*. Cf. "Memorial Address."

nature must listen to the call of what lies most near. If ethics is the endeavor that's aims to answer the question of what it means to be human, then Heidegger is telling us that we need not postulate any more complex and "philosophical" theories in order to arrive at an answer. We need only to listen. We only need to let language speak. To be ethical is to dwell poetically as mortals, under the sky, on the earth, awaiting the divinities. To be ethical means to learn how to dwell. The various environmental problems that this generation faces are symptoms of a deeper and more potent disorder. Climate change, for instance, is not simply a problem for the scientist, but a problem for humanity, essentially understood as dwellers. The threat of extinction posed by environmental degradation finds its roots in the ontological comportment of man towards the earth. It is, in other words, an issue that concerns modern man's *ethos*. To be ethical is to ponder our abode. And pondering our abode is the foundation of dwelling. The crisis of homelessness is a crisis that destines man into a way of being that does not allow things to be things and the world to be world. This letting is a freeing that allows the splendor of the simple to beguile, to amaze and to provoke. Once, provoked, thought is delivered into its essence and poetry holds sway.

Put simply, the essence of dwelling lies in the poetic responding as the heedful and thoughtful Saying that lets beings free into their own presencing. To dwell is to become open to the event of presencing of beings, consequently fulfilling our essence as true and free dwellers of the earth. Thus, poetic dwelling consists of the primordial character of ethics as the way we carry ourselves in our abode.

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