The Turn to Place and the Retrieval of the Human: Heidegger's Critique of "Humanism"

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"It ought to be somewhat clearer now" writes Heidegger, in the 'Letter on "Humanism"', "that opposition to "humanism" in no way implies a defence of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas."[1] But what are the other "vistas" that are opened by this opposition to humanism? And in what does this opposition to humanism itself consist? Written in response to a letter from Jean Beaufret dated November 10th 1946 (in which Beaufret asked Heidegger a series of questions provoked by Sartre's 1945 lecture 'Existentialism is a Humanism'[2]), the 'Letter' was first published in German in 1947,[3] and in a partial French version in 1946.[4] Coming a year after the de-Nazification proceedings that had led to Heidegger's breakdown in 1945, the 'Letter' can be seen as having its origin in Heidegger's desire to rehabilitate himself and his thought through an engagement with the great figure of French existentialism (Heidegger had failed in the attempt to communicate with Sartre directly). Robert Denoon Cumming provides a lengthy analysis of the circumstances of the writing of the 'Letter', emphasising the way the 'Letter' can be seen to be tied to the particularities of Heidegger's personal political and philosophical context.[5] Cumming talks about his approach as a 'localizing' of the work,[6] making reference to the idea of an *Erörterung* (which can itself mean just 'placing', but which can also mean 'discussion' – Cumming translates it as 'localising discussion'). The focus on place and placing is reinforced by the way Heidegger himself orients the 'Letter', taking the cue from Beaufret's question regarding 'ethics', to focus on *ethos*, which Heidegger tells us means 'sojourn, dwelling-place' [*Aufenthal*], and Cumming, who draws attention to this point also, connects it with Heidegger's greeting to Jaspers on the latter's 80th birthday in 1963: "May you be able to arrive at [*gelangen*] at and abide there [*verweilen*], where your thinking has established a sojourn [*Aufenthal*] for meditation". In spite of the attention he gives to these matters, however, Cumming says little about the thematisation of place itself as that occurs in the

'Letter'. Yet it is quite clear that place pays an important role in the 'Letter' that goes well beyond its significance for any mere historical contextualisation.

The concern with topology and place underpins all of Heidegger's thinking, at least as I read matters, and does not appear only in the later thinking.[7] It is thus implicitly at issue from the very beginning, even though it only starts to become explicit in the 1930s – principally in the context of Heidegger's engagement with Hölderlin, and in the pages of the *Contributions*. Yet for much of the 1930s, and even into the 1940s, Heidegger's thinking of place, as with his thinking of so much else, remains entangled with a problematic thinking of the history of being that is all too often focussed around Germany's own precarious position in the world. It is only with the end of the War, with Germany's collapse, and also perhaps with Heidegger's own breakdown, that a clearer focus begins to emerge, and it is here that the 'Letter' is so significant.

For all that it can indeed be read as against the background of Heidegger's own attempt to rehabilitate himself in the wider philosophical world, the 'Letter on "Humanism"' is thus also part of the rehabilitation of Heidegger's thinking for himself as it emerges out of the difficulties of the previous decade or more – out of the difficulties that stem, in no small part, from *Being and Time,* and from both the success and the failure of that work. This 'rehabilitation' can be seen as also a 're-habitation', a finding again of or a returning to the proper place or 'habitus', to which Heidegger's thinking belongs – a process that can perhaps be seen as having already begun in the *Contributions* in 1936. In this respect, Cumming's invocation of the notion of *Aufenthalt* in the context of the 1946 'Letter' seems entirely correct and highly relevant, even though Cummings does not read it in the way I have here. It is in the period from the 'Letter' onwards that it becomes evident just how important place is for Heidegger, not only to his thinking of and with Hölderlin, or to his thinking of poetry and art, but to his thinking of being itself, and in a way that is no longer tied to the national-historical. Moreover, as Heidegger's thinking becomes more explicitly topological, so Heidegger comes more clearly to reject, or at least significantly to modify, some of the concepts and modes of approach of his earlier thinking – and not only those of *Sein und Zeit*.

The 'Letter on "Humanism"' thus represents a watershed in Heidegger's thinking – it is indeed a 'marker on the way' (*Wegmarken*), but an especially important one. The 'Letter' represents, in fact, the culmination of a shift that had been underway in Heidegger's

thinking, since at least the mid-1930s, and that has its origins in the failure (and I use the work quite deliberately) of *Sein und Zeit*. This shift in thinking is what Heidegger himself refers to, for the first time in the 'Letter', as the *Kehre* or 'Turn'. The 'Turn' has become something of a contentious issue in Heidegger scholarship. Sheehan argues for a strong distinction between the *Kehre*, as the turning of being itself, and Heidegger's own *Wendung*, the shift that occurs in the way Heidegger's thought is expressed.[8] One can see why Sheehan is committed to this distinction given his concern to separate the early from the later thinking, and more especially to prioritizing the early over the late (Sheehan has little time for the later thinking, and also sees *Sein und Zeit* as largely untainted by the problems that he takes to be presented by Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism and anti-Semitism in the 1930s and 1940s). Clearly there is a distinction to be made between *Kehre* and *Wendung*, but a distinction need not preclude an identity, and if, unlike Sheehan, one takes the shift in Heidegger's thinking to be a genuine turning within the original problematic of his thought, and so an intensification of, rather than a falling away from, the insights and concerns in which it is founded, then one cannot completely separate *Kehre* from *Wendung* either.

This is, in fact, my own position: because I take Heidegger's later thinking to be a continuation of the original thinking developing out of the failures that Heidegger encounters along the path of his thought and to which he responds, so I take the later thinking to bring us closer to what properly lay at the heart of that thinking all along. Of course, this way of reading also relies on the reading of Heidegger from our current standpoint as a reading that is capable of going further than Heidegger's own readings of his work. This is so for every thinker, as Heidegger acknowledged. In an important sense, the real essence of the work of any thinker can only be properly gauged by those who come after. This, it might be noted, has some significance for the reading of works such as the *Schwarze Hefte* – these offer no definitive key to the essence of Heidegger's thinking just in virtue of supposedly providing access to his 'private' thoughts, but merely offer more material to those of us have the task of interpretation before us. The question as to whether Heidegger's thinking is tainted by Nazism or anti-Semitism is not a matter merely of identifying what are taken to be Nazi or anti-Semitic passages in his work, but actually requires a more demanding task of philosophical interpretation.[9]

As I read Heidegger, the shift in his thinking that culminates in the 'Letter' is a shift that corresponds to his attempt to follow the turning of being itself. It is no accident that this idea of 'turning' has a spatial sense to it – a sense of turning round or back (one might think also of the *Sptzkehre*, the abrupt turn, that a skier might perform) – since my claim, one advanced over some years and several works (and echoing a claim originally made by Joseph Fell), is that this turning is itself a turning that belongs to place – to *topos* or *Ort* – and is also a turning back to this place which is the place of being – *die Ortschaft des Seyns*. The shift in Heidegger's thinking is thus a turn towards the explicit focus on and explication of what he calls *die Topologie des Seyns* – the 'topology of being'. The place at issue here is both the place that belongs to thinking as well as the place that belongs to being. Indeed, on my account being and place belong essentially together.

The very phrase 'topology of being' itself emerges for the first time in Heidegger's thinking at the time of the 'Letter' – even though it does not appear in the 'Letter' itself. The phrase appears in a line from one of the poems in 'The Thinker as Poet' from 1947: "...the poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of being",[10] but it also appears several times in the pages of the *Notebooks* volumes, the *Anmerkungen* or *Remarks,* from the same year, along with other key phrases such as 'place of beyng' – *Ortschaft des Seyns*. A central element in the entries from this period is a concern with the place of thinking and the place of being both as this relates to Heidegger's own thinking and to thinking and being as such. Thus Heidegger writes that: "In the summer of 1936, the bright experience of the place [*Ortschaft*] where my thinking had to stand came to me. It is this place for which I suspected I was searching in *Being and Time*. It is thus that in this summer the *Contributions* arrived".[11] He also warns that "One can work with philosophy and yet forever avoid the place of thinking...".[12] The reference to the *Contributions* is noteworthy: although that work does not make the same clear reference to topology as is evident in the *Anmerkungen* entries from 1947, the *Contributions* nevertheless seem to exemplify exactly what Heidegger suggests here: a concern with the place of thinking, and the attempt to think that place. It is, one might say, with the *Contributions*, that the idea of topology, if not the term itself, first emerges.

This concern with the place of thinking must not be read as if it were simply a way of speaking of the contextual situatedness of thought or of the situatedness of any interpretive engagement with thinking. The notions of context and of interpretive situation themselves

carry a topological significance. Not only is that significance routinely overlooked or ignored, however, but in this case to treat what is at issue as primarily about such notions is to step back from the more fundamental topology to which Heidegger's language here directs us. The place of thinking is the very place of being – and this is necessarily so once one realises that the inquiry into being can only proceed by means of an inquiry that also attends to that which thinking itself *is*. The question of being already contains the question of thinking within it just as the question of thinking carries within it the question of being. The intimate connection between the question of the place of thinking and the place of being is made quite explicit by Heidegger himself, and no more so than in the *Anmerkungen*. There he writes: "How should we attend to the carrying forward of the condition of thinking [*des Standes der Denkenden*], if we don't know the place [*die Ortschaft dieses Standes*] of this condition? This place is the truth of being [*Wahrheit des Seyns*]" – and he asks: "Who today are still wandering [*auf die Wanderschaft*] in this place?".[13]

Once place is seen as a central concept, and the turning is understood as a turning to place, then one can more clearly see why it might indeed be that the human cannot be given primacy here. The human is essentially placed – stands in an essential relation to the *Da* – and yet the being-placed of the human, being placed as such, is not identical with place. This point was already evident, though not in quite these terms, in *Sein und Zeit* and, especially, in the *Kantbuch* of 1929. In the latter work Heidegger makes the claim that "More original than man is the finitude of Dasein in him",[14] and already this can be seen to prefigure the argument of the 'Letter' even though it makes no explicit reference to humanism as such. It is this claim, and together with it, Heidegger's rejection of the Kantian claim for the priority of philosophical anthropology that was the focus for Martin Buber's critique of Heidegger in *Between Man and Man*[15] (and one can find sympathy for Buber's position at the same time as one can also understand the point of Heidegger's). Similarly, in the *Contributions,* Heidegger again emphasises the priority of Da-sein over the human, rejecting any reading that would prioritise the human as *subject*:

> If *Being and Time* says that what first becomes determinable through the 'existential analytic' is the being of non-human being, then this does not mean the human being would be what is given primarily and first of all and would be the measure according to which all other beings receive the stamp of their being. Such an 'interpretation' assumes that the human being is *still* to be understood as understood by Descartes and by all his followers and mere opponents (even Nietzsche is one of the latter), namely, as a subject. [16]

And he goes on in a way that both echoes his earlier discussions as well as presaging what is to come in the 'Letter' – including the turn towards place here expressed both in terms of the focus on Da-sein (the hyphenation reinforcing its topological component) and the 'realm' [*Bereich*] that is the 'clearing of beyng':

> The very first task, however, is precisely to discontinue postulating the human being as a subject and to grasp this being primarily and exclusively on the basis of the question of being. If, despite everything, Da-sein does gain the priority, then that means humans, grasped in terms of Da-sein, grasp their essence and their proprietorship [*Eigentumschaft*] of their essence on the projection of being and thereby, in all comportment and restraint, keep themselves to the realm of the clearing of beyng. This realm is nevertheless utterly non-human, I.e., i.e., it cannot be determined and borne by the *animal rationale* and just as little by the *subjectum*. This realm is not at all a being; instead it belongs to the essential occurrence of beyng… The priority of Da-sein is not merely contrary to every sort of anthropologizing of the human being; it even grounds a completely different history of the essence of the human being, a history that could never be grasped by metaphysics or, consequently, by anthropology. This does not exclude, but rather includes, the fact that the human being now becomes even *more* essential for beyng though at the same time less important with respect to 'beings'.[17]

In summary terms, one might say that although the question of being is only *approached* through the question of the human (since it always implicates the question of the being of the one who questions), the question of being cannot be *reduced* to the question of the human: *being is not self-identical with the human*. Moreover, once the nature of the question of being is recognised, and so also the proper relation of human being to that question, then one is forced to recognise that what comes first here is the clearing of being, the 'there' of being, in which even human being comes first to find itself.

Rather than thinking 'the human' as if it were indeed some primal phenomenon – as if it were that from which all other phenomena flow – we must think *the place* of the human, but that means first thinking *place* itself. Thinking the essence of the human means thinking place, because the being of the human is essentially placed being – it is a being given over to the 'there', to the place, as Heidegger emphasises almost from the very start. This place is not merely to be identified with the place *of* the human as if it were a place already determined *as* human. To take such an approach would indeed be to retain the commitment to a prior conception of the human when not only is the human that which is itself open to question. This already appears as a problematic feature of humanism: that it depends on assuming that which remains obscure, namely, the human itself. Moreover, the

very appearance of the human already presupposes the place of that appearance – as every appearance depends on such a place. In contrast, the human must be understood as determined *from place* and not place *from the human* – and this is so even though understanding can only approach place from and through the human and the place of the human.

I have emphasised the continuity of the 'Letter' with Heidegger's earlier thinking even as I have also singled it out as marking a key point in the shift in Heidegger's thinking towards a more explicitly topological orientation. In this respect, what occurs in the 'Letter' is a certain sort of recapitulation, as well as a clarification and explication, of Heidegger's previous thinking as much as it also points towards, and may even be said to set the framework, for what comes after. The 'Letter' stands in a particularly important relation to the essay from 1940 (which itself goes back to a lecture course of 1931), 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' – and the relation is especially illuminating since it helps to illuminate the continuity that is at issue here. 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' concerns itself with a theme that is already presaged in *Being and Time*, the question of truth. The essay ends, however, with a brief discussion of humanism and the assertion of the identity of the beginning of metaphysics with the beginning of humanism – both have their origin in the movement of human beings to a central place among beings. Yet 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' also takes as its focus an examination of what Plato presents to us as "the place of our dwelling which (in an everyday way) is revealed to us as we look around".[18] Not only is this place shown to be a place of illusion – so that our place turns out to be a place of imprisonment in which we are already cut off from what is real, cut off, one might say, from being – but that place allows access to the real only through understanding it as being that which is only secondarily real. Truth is dependent, on this account, on our relatedness to what lies beyond and outside of the place in which we immediately find ourselves. Heidegger's own thinking of truth can be interpreted as a thinking that attends, no less than does Plato, to the "place of our dwelling", but unlike Plato, Heidegger takes truth to belong to this very place. As is evident from his discussions of truth elsewhere, understood as *aletheia*, truth is not some relation to what lies beyond or outside, instead it arises in the play of hiddenness and unhiddenenss to which we are already given over – in the play of that place in which we already find ourselves. Once again, however, it is important to emphasise that this place, even though it is grasped only in and through our human being in place, is not a place that is derived from

the human nor is it reducible to the human. It stands apart from the human even though it also belongs with it.

The relation between human being and the place of being is one that Heidegger describes, in the 'Letter' and elsewhere, in terms of the idea of *Wohnen*, usually (if inadequately) translated as 'dwelling'. *Wohnen* is a term that already appears in *Being and Time* (as Heidegger points out in the 'Letter'), and *Wohnen* is also a term that has to be read as already implicated with the thinking of place. To be 'in' a place is not, as Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, a matter of mere spatial containment – the human being is not in place like one Russian doll inside another – and neither is place itself identical with simple location. *Wohnen* implies place, since 'to dwell' is precisely to stand in a certain relation to place. It is a relation of the sort that is partly what Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time* as *Care* (*Sorge*). So we can say that 'to dwell' is to attend and respond to place. However, the relation of dwelling is not merely one that requires a contain response on the part of human beings nor does it consist in such responsiveness. Fundamentally, dwelling has to be understood as encompassing the character of human being as indeed already standing in a relation to place – as essentially *placed*. Our own 'care' in respect of place is derivative of this. This prior relatedness to place can be understood in terms of the dependence of human being on place: not merely in the sense that human lives are shaped by the places in which they are lived, but in the sense that it is only in and through place that human lives take on any shape at all – that they appear as human. Such dependence is not diminished by the fact that place itself, the clearing of being, emerges only in relation to language, and so in relation to human being – human being is precisely that being whose own mode of being is bound to language. The primary event here, however, is not the appearing of human being, but of being, which is then only grasped in relation to human being. *Wohnen* is thus the term Heidegger comes to use to describe the mode of being that is human and that emerges in the event of being itself – it is also Heidegger's response, one might say, to the difficult question of the relation of being to human being. Human being, mortal being, plays a necessary role in the event of being, and yet it is not that in which the event of being is itself founded. Towards the end of the 'Letter' the question of human being is raised directly in relation to the question concerning the possibility of a fundamental *ethics* that might correlate with a fundamental *ontology*. Heidegger responds by asserting that:

Ethos means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which the human being dwells. The open region of his abode allows what pertains to the essence of human being, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, to appear…. If the name 'ethics', in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that ethics ponders the abode of the human being, then that thinking which thinks the truth of being as the primordial element of the human being, as one who eksists, is in itself originary ethics.[19]

Ethics here is not treated as the realm of prescriptive principle, but rather concerns a recognition of our own prior belonging. Such a view leads on to a very different concept of the ethical than is usually the case – one that brings us closer to the later thinking of *Gelassenheit* – though not in the sense of a mere quietism so much as of an *attentive responsiveness*. Exactly what such a topological 'ethics' might entail requires much more elaboration, but it certainly cannot be taken to simply converge with any form of reactionary politics or with any refusal of ethical concerns.

Heidegger's critique of humanism, no less than his topology, is not some later intrusion into his thinking, but has its origins in the very nature of that thinking – in its very focus on the question of being. The critique of humanism is thus as central to Heidegger's thinking as is the question of being itself. Moreover, as the latter question is increasingly comes to be understood as a question concerning the *place* of being, so what also emerges is the question concerning the place of the human – of that wherein humans 'dwell'. That the critique of humanism is indeed so central to his thought is particularly important given the way in which that critique might otherwise be seen as suggesting some connection back to Heidegger's entanglement in Nazism. In fact, Heidegger's anti-humanism predates that, and, one might argue, is itself incompatible with the "German political humanism" which Alfred Rosenberg, as Karsten Harries reports matters, took to be associated with Nazism.[20]

In this latter respect, however, even though Heidegger's anti-humanism is a feature of his early as well as later work, the way the critique of humanism is developed in the 1946 'Letter' can be seen as itself containing within it an implicit critique of some of his own earlier ideas – including ideas bound up with his own espousal of Nazism. If Heidegger's own seduction by ideology is one of the concerns to which the *Black Notebooks* may be thought to give rise, then far from being some continuation of any such ideological seduction, Heidegger's critique of humanism can be seen as implicitly a critique and rejection of ideology itself – and this remains so even though we also need to beware of the limitations of Heidegger's capacity to carry this critique through to his own self-understanding. The

critique of humanism is thus a critique of those '-isms', those 'ideologies', of which 'humanism' is perhaps the most significant and encompassing, that bedevil thought. Moreover, this sense of 'humanism' can be said to include, not only the traditional 'humanisms' with which we are familiar (not excluding the Renaissance humanism championed by Grassi), but also all of those 'subjectivisms' that, one way or another, take the human or the realm of the human as primary – which, as Heidegger puts it, make the human 'the measure'. Of these, perhaps the most pervasive contemporary examples are 'constructionism', which takes all phenomena as essentially produced by the 'human' (the human as given in terms of the social and political) and also 'scientism' or 'objectivism', which reassert the primacy of the human through their very neglect, even refusal, of it and of that to which the question of the human itself points.

For some, of course, the claim that humanism might be in any significant way problematic, that it might even be an ideology that can be connected to Nazism itself, will appear to be a dangerous and reactionary idea, and, so far as Heidegger is concerned, even to obscure the real extent of Heidegger's own political culpability.[21] Yet to be a critic of humanism is not to be a Nazi, just as to be a critic of liberalism is not, by that very fact, to be a fascist – or even a conservative. Moreover, neither humanism nor liberalism (nor either constructionism or scientism) offer an unequivocally benign face. Indeed, one of the lessons of the twentieth-century, and of the nineteenth before it as of the twenty-first after it, is that both humanism and liberalism can have anti-human and even anti-liberal consequences, may even take on anti-human and anti-liberal forms. From the perspective of the analysis offered in the 'Letter', it is precisely the metaphysical character of humanism, which also means its subjectivism, that underlies the equivocal character of humanism – and that one might argue underpins all ideologies, all '-isms'. The critique of humanism is thus itself directly tied to both the practice of and the inquiry into thinking – Heidegger's own thinking no less than thinking itself. The critique of humanism is an attempt more clearly to think what thinking *is*, and therefore, necessarily, to think the *place* of thinking – a task carried on, most obviously perhaps, in *What is Called Thinking*? in which similar themes take centre stage, and in which, even if humanism is not so directly taken up, there is also a clear focus on the problems of subjectivism and the prioritization of the human.

Why, given that the topological character of Heidegger's thinking by the time of the 'Letter' is so self-evident, has this character been so consistently and continually overlooked

or ignored? That it is overlooked and ignored seems clear. Within the existing Heidegger scholarship only a handful of thinkers have taken seriously the role of topology in Heidegger's thinking, and even fewer have attended to the topology present in the 'Letter on "Humanism"". Even when the topological language Heidegger employs is pointed out or noticed, the tendency is invariably to treat it as 'metaphorical' or 'figurative'. Yet such a response is to disregard Heidegger's own explicit warnings against such an approach. As Heidegger comments in relation to the famous claim that "language is the house of being":

> Thinking builds upon the house of being, the house in which the jointure of being, in its destinal unfolding, enjoins the essence of the human being in each case to dwell in the truth of being. This dwelling is the essence of 'being-in-the-world'. The reference in *Being and Time* (p.54) to 'being-in' as dwelling is not some etymological play. The same reference in the 1936 essay on Hölderlin's word "Full of merit yet poetically, man dwells upon this earth" is not the adornment of a thinking that rescues itself from science by means of poetry. The talk about the house of being is not the transfer of the image 'house' onto being. But one day, we will, by thinking the essence of being in a way appropriate to its matter, more readily be able to think what 'house' and 'dwelling' are.[22]

This passage not only makes reinforces the topological elements in Heidegger's thinking – and reinforces the claim that this element is already present in *Being and Time* – but it also explicitly direct attention the fact that this topology is not to be passed off as peripheral, merely 'playful', or indeed as metaphorical (as the explicit rejection of the idea of the 'transfer' of the image of 'house' indicates).

The tendency, when it is not simply overlooked, to treat Heidegger's topological language as metaphorical is symptomatic of a widespread and deeply rooted tendency on the part of philosophers to disregard the placed character of thinking, even of their own thinking, and to view place, if it is attended to at all, as a secondary, derivative, and largely irrelevant concept whose ubiquity is simply a consequence of the ubiquity of topological and spatial metaphors more generally. Philosophical thinking thus draws constantly on the language of place and yet equally constantly disregards it. It is characteristic of Heidegger's thinking, even though it might be thought to rely centrally on a range of metaphors – and especially those of space and place, that it refuses any such metaphoric readings. As such, it insists that we pay attention to the way in which the topographic itself, and the images and ideas associated with it, is at work; it requires that we do indeed 'listen to language', [23] and so attend what is given in the very Saying of language.

The refusal of metaphor – or, at least, of metaphor as it is conventionally contrasted with the literal, and so of metaphor as that which takes us away from the immediately given – does not entail the insistence on some simple linguistic univocity or determinacy. Heidegger's language is not metaphorical in this sense, and yet it always retains an essential multivocity. In Heideggerian terms, one might say that is part of the very essence of language *as* language. If there is a problem that attaches to language, a lack or neediness of language (*Sprachnot*), then it is a lack or neediness that arises from the tendency to forget the character of language as Saying, and so also to reduce language to a mere 'instrument', to a system of symbols, or even to a 'calculus'. This is an ever-present danger in the contemporary world in which language is always in danger of being emptied out, and so of being removed from the proper place in which the Saying of language sounds and resounds. In his lectures on Hölderlin's *Remembrance*, Heidegger writes: "It is enough here to consider just this: 'things themselves', before any so-called 'symbols', are already poetized".[24] If we fail to attend to the way place appears in the 'Letter', not as a metaphor, but as an originary phenomenon in itself, then we will fail to understand what is at issue in the critique of humanism, and in the insistence of looking beyond the human alone.

What then are the "other vistas" that Heidegger's critique of humanism opens up? I would argue that they are the vistas that belong to the thinking of place – the bounded openness that belongs to place. When we move beyond the narrow thinking of traditional humanism and the subjectivism of metaphysics. But this means that the critique of humanism is in no way a rejection of the human but a return to it. What is essential to the thinking of place is the thinking of the character of appearance as based in boundedness and this is what surely also lies at the heart of human being. It is not the power of the human, but the fragility and finitude of human being and this is directly connected to the topological character of the human. It is thus through the turn back to place that a turn back to the human is possible. If this is not always fully recognised in Heidegger (and to what extent it is so recognised is arguable on both sides), then this only shows how much every thinker remains to some extent blind to the full implications of their thought.

The critique of 'humanism' appears in its most explicit form in the 'Letter' form 1947. Heidegger has little to say in relation to the term 'humanism' either before or after and the term appears rarely in Heidegger's work outside the 'Letter'. Yet what is at issue in the critique of 'humanism' is clearly at work in Heidegger's early work and also in the later. The

critique of 'humanism' is directly tied to Heidegger's concern to find a way back to the question of being which he also comes to understand as a question about the place of being. That question of being and of place is seen to come prior to the question of the human, even though it is approached through the human, and even though it returns us back to the question of human. The critique of 'humanism' is closely tied to the critique of technological modernity that is also present in the early work but develops in more refined form in the later. That critique is one in which, once again, topological elements are central – the nature of modern technology is most evident in the way it seemingly brings about a change in the character of the near and the far, in the character of space, of time, and of place. This follows necessarily from the fundamental nature of the connection between being and place – to understand technological modernity in ontological terms, it must also be understood in topological terms, since the topology of being is what ontology becomes once the relation of being and place is acknowledged. Humanism plays a central role in the development of technological modernity, and yet it does so in a complex fashion. Part of this complexity resides in the fact that technological modernity seems to set the human at the centre and yet at the same time it subjugates even the human, reduces the human to that which is inhuman. To what extent does Heidegger's anti-humanism tend Heidegger's thinking towards a reactionary politics? I am not sure whether any real sense can be attached to this question. The connections between ideas are more complex than such a question seems to presuppose, and the fact that certain ideas may, in some contexts be taken to lead to one set of outcomes, but elsewhere to another, is indicative of both the indeterminacy that is characteristic of thought as well as the uncertain and serendipitous character of human lives. In an important sense, Heidegger's anti-humanism actually seems to imply a rejection of the politics that has traditionally been associated with both the left and the right; it certainly ought to force us to a more critical examination of 'humanism' and of its contemporary perpetuation.

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[1] *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.265

[2] First published as *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946).

[3] *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit - Mit einem Brief über den Humanismus* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag AG, 1947).

[4] As 'Lettre a Jean Beaufret (Fragment)', *Fontaine* 63 (November 1947): 786-804. It was not published in French in its complete form until 1953 when it appeared in *Cahiers du Sud* 319/320: 385–406/68–88. The first English translation was in W. Barrett & H. D. Aiken (eds.), *Philosophy in the twentieth century*, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1962), 290-302.

[5] See Cumming, *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, Vol 4: Solitude (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001).

[6] *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, Vol 4, p.72.

[7] For an elaboration of this claim see my *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), and *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2012).

[8] See Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2014).

[9] For a more detailed consideration of the hermeneutic issues at stake in the reading of the *Schwarze Hefte*, see my 'On the Philosophical Reading of Heidegger: Situating the Black Notebooks' in Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (eds), *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2016), pp.3-22.

[10] 'The Thinker as Poet', *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.12 – first published in 1954 in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens.* (Pfullingen: Neske 1954 – *Gesamtausgabe*, vol 13, Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983).

[11] *Anmerkungen I–V* (*Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948*), *Gesamtausgabe* 97 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2015), p.191 [§125].

[12] *Anmerkungen I-V*, p.186 [§118].

[13] *Anmerkungen I-V*, p.184 [§115].

[14] *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, 5th enlarged edn.), p.160.

[15] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.193-214.

[16] *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event),* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington*: Indiana University Press, 2012),* p.385, §271.

[17] *Contributions*, p.385, §271.

[18] 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth', in *Pathmarks*, p.164.

[19] 'Letter on "Humanism"', pp.269 & 271.

[20] See also Wolfgang Bialas, 'Nazi Ethics and Morality: Ideas, Problems, and Unanswered Questions', in Wolfgang Bialas and Lothar Fritze (eds), *Nazi Ideology and Ethics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp.23-27, for a discussion of Nazism's rejection of 'universal humanism' and its replacement by a 'biological humanism'. In *Heidegger, Art, and Politics* (p.95), Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe goes so far as to claim that "Nazism is a humanism" inasmuch "as it rests upon a determination of *humanitas* which is, in its view, more powerful – ie. more effective – than any other".

[21] Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (London: Routledge, 1995), esp. pp.160-161. Rockmore takes issue with Lacoue-Labarthe in particular.

[22] 'Letter on "Humanism"', p.272.

[23] 'Art and Space', in *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. Günter Figal, trans. Jerome Veith (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), p.307.

[24] *Hölderlin's Hymne 'Andenken', Gesamtausgabe* 52, ed. C. Ochtwadt (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1982), p.40: "Es genügt hier, nur dies Eine zu bedenken: Auch die >Dinge selbst< sind shon, bevor sie zu sogennanten >Symbolen< warden, jedesmal gedichtet."