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Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy on Community

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Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy on Community
PHI 7999 MA Thesis

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-69081-9
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-69081-9

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Abstract

This project will be an examination of the concept of community as it relates to ethics in the works of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy. I will examine Heidegger's thought concerning community and ethics, then the reception of that thought in the secondary literature. I will then examine Nancy's thought concerning community and ethics and his thought's reception in the secondary literature. The critical portion of this project will be an evaluation of Nancy's critical relationship with Heidegger's thought. I will clarify and defend Nancy's arguments against Heidegger's thought. I will also support solution that Nancy proposes. Finally, I will attempt to resolve a criticism commonly launched against Nancy: that his thought fails to engage concrete politics precisely where it must. I will argue that Nancy's thought does indeed engage the concrete by encouraging the development of a praxis, comportment or lifestyle amongst its recipients. Nancy's thought engages us in a dialogue. This dialogue is something which can, and does, continue outside of our relationship with the texts we read, potentially affecting the way we relate to others in our everyday lives.

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Introduction

This thesis will explore the concept of community in the thought of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy, specifically focusing on the relationship between Nancy's thought and Heidegger's, as well as providing a critical appraisal of Nancy's thought. As will be shown, both thinkers treat community as an ontological structure. They are concerned with that which underlies and makes possible particular 'communities' and the implications of those structures. Nancy's project, though deeply based in Heidegger, differs from Heidegger's in that Nancy refigures Heidegger's project, specifically expanding his notion of being-with, making it the most primary structure of being. Ethical implications are apparent in the works of both thinkers. In Heidegger's writing, the possibility of an ethics is troubled by the brevity and indeterminacy of his treatment of the subject, as well as by discussions of 'the people' and 'destiny' which some commentators find very problematic. The ethics which can be drawn from Nancy's work is also troubled with the problem of indeterminacy, which is frustrating to commentators, some of whom charge him with failing to engage politics even though his project calls him to do so. I will attempt to defend Nancy on this point, drawing on his concept of writing, and his description of individual relationships in his discussion of love, as possible ways of engaging politics.

The thesis will be split into three chapters. The first will contain an exegesis of Heidegger's thought on community, followed by a survey of the secondary literature concerning Heidegger and community and ethics. The second chapter will contain three parts: first, an exegesis of Nancy's thought. Second, a survey of the secondary literature concerning Nancy and ethics. Third, an assessment of Nancy's relationship with and criticisms of Heidegger's thought. In the final chapter, I attempt to defend Nancy's project, by providing an account of what 'engaging politics' could mean in his system.

1. The Concept of Community in Heidegger's thought

This chapter will contain two sections. The first (I) will serve as an exegetical examination of the key concepts related to the topic of community in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The second (ii) will deal with several criticisms and defenses of Heidegger on the topic of community and ethics within the secondary literature.

I. Exegesis: Heidegger's account of Community

I will consider portions of §§ 25 – 27, 60 and 74. Throughout the bulk of the first sections, and partly through the others, Heidegger is trying to figure out what 'I' or 'We' mean in terms of fundamental ontology. Is not the 'I' a self-evident concept? What could be more fundamental, especially after the cogito? One could ask 'It is me?', 'something that is mine?', 'an apperception', 'that which I know exists, even if all else is doubtful?' For Heidegger, the 'I' is not so simple or given. He approaches this question of the 'Who?' of Da-sein in its everydayness¹.

He explores this question in §§ 25 – 27 of *Being and Time*. At the outset of these sections he reminds us of the placement of the question of the 'who' of Dasein within the discussion of Being-in-the-world. “By directing our researches towards the phenomenon which is to provide us with an answer to the question of the 'who', we shall be led to certain structures of Dasein which are equiprimordial with Being-in-the-world: *Being-with* and *Dasein-with* [*Mitsein* und *Mitdasein*]. In this kind of Being is grounded the mode of everyday Being-one's-Self [*Selbstein*];”². His inquiry here proceeds as suggested above. Heidegger rhetorically asks “... what could be more indubitable than the givenness of the 'I'?”³. He reviews characterizations of the I as self, subject, apperception. The problem with each of these

1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 149, SZ 114; Hereafter *B&T*.

2 Ibid. Heidegger also emphasizes that being-with is equiprimordial in other sections such as his introductory comments on Being-in-the-world at *B&T* 78 – 79, SZ 53. The question of the 'who' of Dasein is not some separate phenomenon but is rather one of three constitutive elements of the Being-in-the-world structure.

3 *B&T* 151, SZ 115.

seemingly obvious answers is that they present the self as a thing, something present-at-hand⁴. This cannot be the case since Dasein is characterized by different modes of being than present-at-hand beings. Heidegger proposes examining Dasein existentially⁵ to bypass this problem:

If the 'I' is an Essential characteristic of Dasein, then it is one which must be Interpreted existentially. In that case the 'Who?' is to be answered only by exhibiting phenomenally a definite kind of Being which Dasein possesses. If in each case Dasein is its Self only as existing, then the constancy of the Self no less than the possibility of its 'failure to stand by itself' requires that we formulate the question existentially and ontologically as the sole appropriate way of access to its problematic⁶.

Heidegger is here drawing on the argument made at the outset that “*The 'essence' of Dasein lies in its existence*”⁷ and that since Dasein is Being-in-the-world we must investigate its constitutive elements to try to understand Dasein. The 'Who?' of Dasein can only be understood in terms of what it does in the world, whether that be in relation to objects or Others.

Heidegger examines Dasein's everyday relations with Others. Heidegger writes: “We shall approach this phenomenon by asking *who* it is that Dasein is in its everydayness⁸. Others are encountered in the work-world but not as simply other objects in the work-world: “The Others who are thus 'encountered' in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such 'Things' are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others – a world which is always mine too in advance”⁹. The entities encountered, other Dasein, are neither present-at-hand nor ready-to-hand. They

4 I shall clarify presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand. On presence-at-hand see *B&T* 67, SZ 42 where he stipulates the term to describe the kind of being of beings unlike Dasein (objects considered in some abstract fashion). On readiness-to-hand see *B&T* 98, SZ 69 where he describes it as the kind of being a useful object has amidst a totality of useful objects (hammer to drive nails into wood to build a house). Our everyday relations to things is typically in terms of their readiness-to-hand – that is, to using them for some purpose which they fit into – not in some theoretical consideration of their kind of being (presence-at-hand).

5 The ontic/ ontological and existential/existentiell distinction is clarified at *B&T* 33, SZ 12 – 13. Ontological/ existential refers to structures of being while ontic/ existentiell refers to particulars (the ontological underlying and making possible the ontic).

6 *B&T* 152 – 153, SZ 117, Heidegger's emphasis.

7 *B&T* 67, SZ 42, Heidegger's emphasis.

8 *B&T* 149, SZ 114, Heidegger's emphasis.

9 *B&T* 154, SZ 118.

are another kind of being, “... they are there too, and there with it”¹⁰. Since they are different kinds of Beings, they require a different comportment¹¹. Others encountered in the world are there 'too' and there 'with' Dasein. The 'with', Heidegger argues is “something of the character of Dasein” and the 'too' signifies that the Others are the same kind of beings, that is “... circumspectively concerned Being-in-the-world”¹². What this means is that Dasein exists as 'with' Others. What one might call the I/ Other relationship would be for Heidegger not one of separation – where each 'I' would be an isolated being which then chooses to connect to 'Others'. Rather, 'I' and 'Other' are already 'together' because of the kind of Being that Dasein has. Lawrence Vogel describes the ontological interrelation as a 'We'¹³. Heidegger says: “By reason of this *with-like* [*mithafen*] Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [*Mit-dasein*]¹⁴. It is not about separate individuals sharing the world but rather each Dasein is 'with' prior to any sharing. The 'we' precedes any 'I' that may be possible¹⁵. The following passage illustrates the point quite well: “Even Dasein's

¹⁰ Ibid, Heidegger's emphasis.

¹¹ Along with the elements of Being-in-the-world (in-the-world, being-in, and the 'who') there are three modes or comportments, that is, ways of being towards other kinds of beings: care [*sorge*], concern [*besorgen*] and solicitude [*Fürsorge*]. Of these Heidegger says: “Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analysis as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude*” (*B&T* 237, SZ 193). Care is Dasein's being 'ahead-of-itself' in the world, being able to project itself onto possibilities; concern is its 'being-alongside and using useful objects in the world. Finally, solicitude is Dasein's mode of being-with Others.

¹² *B&T* 154, SZ 118.

¹³ Lawrence Vogel, *The Fragile "We": Ethical Implications of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994); hereafter *Fragile 'We'*.

¹⁴ *B&T* 154 – 155, SZ 118, Heidegger's emphasis.

¹⁵ The question of the 'I' or self in Heidegger is broad and complex, I will not delve into it deeply here as it would take too much time away from the present inquiry. The self for Heidegger is 'worldly', that is “Dasein finds 'itself' proximally in *what* it does, uses, expects, avoids...” (*B&T* 155, SZ 119, Heidegger's emphasis). The self is what is constituted by the ways in which one takes up one's Being-in-the-world (be it the objects of the work-world or solicitude in the with-world). One might say 'you are what you do'. Nancy argues that “... to be, for *Dasein*, means to bring its Being into play, exposing it to having-to-be (and not to becoming) what it is, since it 'is' its 'to-be' or its 'ex-Being,' its Being-outside-of-itself” (Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Being-With of Being-There,” trans. Marie-Eve Norin, *Continental Philosophy Review* 41/1 (2008): 1-15; hereafter “The Being-With of Being-There”). An excellent text in this regard is Francois Raffoul's *Heidegger and the Subject* (François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*, trans. David Pettigrew and Gregory Recco, (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1998); hereafter *Heidegger and the Subject*). Of the self in Heidegger Raffoul writes: “... this proper selfhood of man ... is not situated either in consciousness or in a particular I (any more than in a you or a we), and thus it is, in short, not of the order of egohood, but is instead to be thought as belonging to Being (*Seyn*) and appropriation (*Eigentum*), in no way diminishes the importance of the problematic of the

Being-alone is Being-with in the world. The Other can *be missing* only *in* and *for* a Being-with. Being-alone is a deficient mode of Being-with; its very possibility is the proof of this”¹⁶. Similarly, Heidegger argues that one can 'be alone' while in a crowd, but only as a modification of the prior 'with'. This is all to emphasize that the 'with' of Dasein is not based on any ontic events but is ontological.

The question now turns to how being-with occurs in everyday life. Heidegger argues that Dasein's relation to others involves a different comportment than that which is exercised towards objects (see footnote 10). It is worth considering the translators' note concerning solicitude. It states: “‘*Fürsorge*’ is rather the kind of care we find in ‘parental care’ or ‘taking care of the children’, or even the kind of care which is administered by welfare agencies”¹⁷. The note explains what *fürsorge* generally means in common usage which helps understand what Heidegger is trying to describe here. In the majority of the relationships of solicitude described by Heidegger the other is related to through some object being taken care of. The Other is not related to in the same way that we relate to ready-to-hand Beings, but is related to through them. Food is prepared for the Other, clothing cleaned, houses built. The relationships just described are also mostly top-down relationships – parent-child, teacher-student, nurse-patient – where one is in a superior or dominant position over the other. I take care of the sick family member by bringing food, changing bandages, bedding. Heidegger discusses two main modes of solicitude: deficient or indifferent and positive. He says that for the most part the indifferent modes characterize everyday being-with. These are described as: “Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not ‘mattering’ to one another ...”¹⁸. Of the positive mode he says there are two extremes: leaping in and leaping ahead. Of the former he says “It can, as it were, take away

‘Who?’ The question of the ‘Who?’ is kept as such, if we understand that it does not open onto a pre-given or pre-constituted ego but onto a dimension (Being as appropriating event, or *Er-eignis*) from which man comes to his own being-a-self” (*Heidegger and the Subject*, 25). Heidegger is attempting to reject a thought of the self based in the metaphysical history of substance and subjectivity. This self [subject] would be separate, self-identical. Instead we could call Heidegger's self an ‘existing’ or ‘existential’ self; it is its playing out in the world, not some self-identical being appropriating otherness to itself.

¹⁶ *B&T* 156 – 157, SZ 120. Heidegger's emphasis.

¹⁷ *B&T* 157 footnote 4.

¹⁸ *B&T* 158, SZ 121.

'care' from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can *leap in* for him". This is a relationship of domination (tacit or explicit) where the Other's care is taken over. Finding someone who is troubled by their inability to complete a task I would leap in and do it for him, giving him the completed product or result afterwards. For example, a parent completes a school project for their child. The Other likely learns nothing and remains dependent. Again, Heidegger argues that this mode characterizes Dasein's everyday interactions. Finally there is leaping ahead, described thus: "... there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [ihm *vorausspringt*] in his existentiell potentiality-for-Being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. This kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care – that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a 'what' with which he is concerned"¹⁹. A friend is depressed; the typical response would be to do something to cheer him up. That would be leaping in because the Other is related to in terms of some object(s) which I am taking up in his place. Instead of helping the Other face the source of his problem I simply distract him with some object or task (going drinking, playing a game). Instead, if I find a way to bring the Other to find a resolution to his problem, to face himself – be it through a conversation, gesture, or a 'slap in the face' –, that would be leaping ahead. This leaping ahead relationship is the only mode of solicitude which is directed to the Other in himself rather than to some object which mediates. This relationship also seems to carry the teacher-student connotation in that one Dasein is clearly educating another²⁰. However it is slightly different. This education is of a liberating kind, and is potentially reciprocal. In leaping ahead I am teaching the other to free himself, after which he will presumably be on 'equal footing' and capable of returning the gesture should I ever need such aid (which is likely to happen since these moments are

¹⁹ B&T 158 – 159, SZ 122, Heidegger's emphasis.

²⁰ Robert Dostal's essay "Friendship and Politics" (Robert Dostal, "Friendship and Politics: Heidegger's Failing," *Political Theory*. 20/3 (August, 1992): 399-423; hereafter "Friendship and Politics") is critical of any possible understanding of friendship in Heidegger especially due to the prevalence of the teacher-student connotation. I will argue that there is something more subtle going on in Heidegger and that all friendship is in some way pedagogical. This will be considered more fully below.

only existentiell modifications of one's Being-with²¹). This is an important point for a possible defense of Heidegger which will be dealt with below.

Heidegger next discusses what he calls 'being for the sake of others'. This is a parallel structure to 'for the sake of which'²². Just as Dasein's Being-in structure ontically occurs in terms of 'for the sake of which', Dasein's Being-with structure ontically occurs in terms of 'for the sake of others'. Because Being-with is part of Dasein's being "... Dasein 'is' essentially for the sake of Others"²³. Each of my projects and goals in the world is formed both by the for the sake of which (concerning objects) and being for the sake of Others (those who I am with because of the kind of Being that I am). Just as being alone is simply a modification of Being-with, so would isolating oneself from others be simply a modification of being for the sake of Others. Because of this 'being for the sake of Others' structure, Dasein already has an understanding of others. Heidegger says: "... because Dasein's Being is Being-with, its understanding of Being already implies the understanding of Others"²⁴. Further, because one's being is Being-with, any understanding of self must be based on this²⁵. I come to know myself through my daily interactions, the many particular ways that my Being-in-the-world plays out (both the work-world of ready-to-hand Beings and the with-world of Others). If 'I am what I do' (I am a carpenter because I learned woodworking), then another dimension of me is determined by how I relate to Others (the arguments, opinions, trends, fashions that I accept, reject, appropriate, modify).

Of course for Heidegger the everyday way that Being-with plays out is one where a deep understanding of the self is missed or avoided. Everyday Dasein is concerned with its situation in

21 *B&T* 168, SZ 130.

22 For the sake of which has to do with how Dasein formulates projects to be accomplished by working with ready-to-hand entities. Each object is used for some purpose (towards-which), forming a continuous chain of connections. However, 'before' any of these connections is "... a 'towards-which' in which there is *no* further involvement" (*B&T*, 116 SZ 84). This primary 'towards-which' pertains to Dasein, the Being which projects itself as possibilities in the world. All the 'towards-which' take their departure from the 'for the sake of which' which is Dasein's Being.

23 *B&T* 160, SZ 123.

24 *B&T* 161, SZ 123.

25 Heidegger says "Knowing oneself [*Sichkennen*] is grounded in Being-with, which understands primordially" (*B&T* 161, SZ 124).

relation to Others: "... there is a constant care as to the way one differs from them, whether that difference is merely one that is to be evened out, whether one's own Dasein has lagged behind the Others and wants to catch up in relation to them..."²⁶. Everyday Dasein is concerned with distantiality [*Abständigkeit*] – the distance between itself and Others –, averageness – maintaining a uniform field of what is normal behavior, belief – and leveling down [*Einebnung*] – the 'dragging down' and simplification of anything new and exceptional to the level of averageness. There is a tendency towards equalizing or removing this distance, making equal, which Heidegger argues means that: "It [Dasein] itself *is* not; its Being has been taken away by the Others"²⁷. Any uniqueness or exceptionalness would be ironed out due to distantiality, leveling-down and averageness. There is no particular Other here dictating some uniformity; rather it is everyone and no one, a faceless 'the they' [*das Man*] (public opinion, fashion). He says: "We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back..."²⁸. Dasein is 'disburdened' [*Entlasten*], able to move easily through prescribed paths and actions, not having to forge its way. This description of everyday Being-with is why Heidegger earlier argued that solicitude typically takes deficient or indifferent modes, and even when it takes a positive mode, tends towards leaping in – relating to the Other through some object, not directly to the Other as such. This is not to say that there is no possibility of anything deeper – he has hinted at it in such modes as leaping ahead. And further: "Neither the Self of one's own Dasein nor the Self of the Other has as yet found itself or lost itself as long as it is [*seiend*] in the modes we have mentioned"²⁹. Everyday Dasein is in a sort of 'limbo' of Self. So what of this 'finding' one self and how does the Other fit into this? Related to this Heidegger says: "Of course it is indisputable that a lively mutual acquaintanceship on the basis of Being-with, often depends upon how far one's own Dasein has

26 B&T 163 – 164, SZ 126.

27 B&T 164, SZ 126.

28 *Ibid.*

29 B&T 166, SZ 128.

understood itself at the time; but this means that it depends only upon how far one's essential Being with Others has made itself transparent and has not disguised itself"³⁰. Finding oneself forms the basis for mutual relationships, but again, what does this 'finding oneself' mean if one is typically 'the they'? Does one somehow choose to not be this way? No, rather, one modifies one's relationship with 'the they'. Heidegger says "*The 'they' is an existentielle; and as a primordial phenomenon, it belongs to Dasein's positive constitution*"³¹. The 'they' is not some fallen state of humans in modern society, not something that can be remedied by some romantic return to simpler, pastoral existence. The they is ontological. It is the way entities with Dasein's kind of Being exist in the world given their Being-with structure. Because of this, Heidegger argues: "*Authentic Being-one's-Self does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from the 'they'; it is rather an existentiell modification of the 'they' – of the 'they' as an essential existentielle*"³². Authentically Being-one's-Self is an ontic modification of one's Being. It is neither permanent nor lasting. It is a tenuous moment of resolution that must be maintained by great effort.

Later in the text Heidegger discusses another mode of solicitous Being-with akin to leaping ahead: being another's 'conscience'. This is also closely related to authentic Being-one's-self. Of being another's 'conscience' Heidegger says: "This distinctive and authentic disclosedness, which is attested in Dasein itself by its conscience – *this reticent self-projection upon one's ownmost Being-guilty, in which one is ready for anxiety* – we call '*resoluteness*'"³³. On hearing the call of conscience, Dasein can choose to 'face' its ownmost Being-guilty and move forth. Anticipatory resoluteness is resoluteness 'qualified' by an anticipatory relation towards death³⁴. This resoluteness towards one's Being is

30 B&T 162, SZ 125.

31 B&T 167, SZ 129, Heidegger's emphasis.

32 B&T 168, SZ 130, Heidegger's emphasis.

33 B&T 343, SZ 297, Heidegger's emphasis.

34 Resoluteness is projecting one's Self on one's Being-guilty which calls one forth to one's possibilities. Being-towards-death enters here. Death as the possibility of no longer being-there is the most extreme possibility of Dasein. One must stand in an anticipatory relation towards death. Heidegger writes: "Thus only as *anticipating* does resoluteness become a primordial Being towards Dasein's ownmost potentiality-for-Being. Only when it 'qualifies' itself as Being-towards-death does resoluteness understand the 'can' of its potentiality-for-Being-guilty" (B&T 354, SZ 306, Heidegger's

precisely what modifies the everyday, lost Being-in-the-world of Dasein to become authentic. Now, Heidegger feels it is necessary to point out that “Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so that it becomes a free-floating 'I' ... Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concerned Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others”³⁵. This newfound comportment is what allows Dasein to exercise the extreme positive mode of solicitude: leaping ahead. Furthermore, it allows for another mode: “When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another”³⁶. It is important to note here that Heidegger has put conscience in scare quotes, which suggests that in this instance he is using the word somewhat analogically. Clearly one cannot be a conscience since conscience itself is a voiceless call from the self back to its ownmost Being-guilty. What he is suggesting is that resolute Dasein is capable of engaging in a relationship with an Other where the relationship is directed to the Other in himself. In such a relationship, each Dasein is able to engage with the other concerning the most fundamental aspects of their Being. Rather than engaging in action with the other in terms of possibilities already decided on by the they, one engages the other as him or herself, allowing him/ her to recognize him/ herself as potentiality and to recognize the importance of bringing that potentiality to some resolute fruition. If I can call another Dasein to face this kind of thinking I have achieved the same result that conscience does.

These areas of *Being and Time* deal with the ontological aspects of what I am calling community in this thesis. There are some aspects of the above discussion which deal with ontic modifications and the way(s) these structures can play out ontically; nevertheless, the focus is primarily on the ontological. Both the ontic and ontological are modes of community or politics (a point which will be

emphasis).

35 *B&T* 344, SZ 298, Heidegger's emphasis.

36 *Ibid.*

emphasized below with Nancy). Later in the text Heidegger engages in some more overt discussions of community or politics. In this regard I will principally be examining § 74.

At this point in the text, Heidegger is investigating historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*]³⁷. In the present section he is elaborating on his previous assertion that Dasein is historical in its Being³⁸. He does this by examining anticipatory resoluteness. He asks what are the factual possibilities upon which resolute Dasein can choose? These cannot be given generally but are rather part of the particular context in which each Dasein is thrown. Just as one cannot step outside the context the they provides to create one's Self, one must take one's bearings from the historical context into which one is thrown³⁹.

Heidegger argues:

The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*. In one's coming back resolutely to one's thrownness, there is hidden a *handing down* to oneself of the possibilities that have come down to one, but not necessarily *as* having thus come down⁴⁰.

Fate [*Schicksal*] is the term Heidegger uses to identify these possibilities Dasein hands down to itself. Every Dasein exists in a historical context but resolute Dasein is fateful in relation to its context. Resolute Dasein is fateful because it takes up its context for itself. Though one does not have to take up heritage as it has come down, one is restricted to the heritage one is thrown into. Another dimension of resolute Dasein's relation to its historical context appears when Heidegger considers Being-with in this regard. He writes: "But if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny* [*Geschick*]. This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people"⁴¹. Destiny could be described as the way a 'people' takes up the context into which it is thrown. A 'people' can resolutely choose on some path and

³⁷ Heidegger concludes after examining different types of historical Beings that Dasein itself is primarily historical. Objects are historical because they were once part of a context of ready-to-hand Beings used by a Dasein who is no longer in the world.

³⁸ *B&T* 431, SZ 379.

³⁹ *B&T* 435, SZ 383.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *B&T* 436, SZ 384, Heidegger's emphasis.

pursue it, making their destiny happen. Though the possibility is there for critical appropriation of one's context, the way Heidegger describes this leaves little room for leeway. I don't have a lot of say in the way my culture is or how it operates. I am simply born into it and become part of it. It is at least in principle possible to be skeptical about one's culture, but the extent to which one can 'step outside' one's context seems extremely limited. This creates potentially troubling consequences for how different cultures interact. 'My culture' is necessarily exclusive, it sets itself apart from those 'others'. In some cases such exclusiveness becomes extremely violent. One would like to know what Heidegger would say about cultural biases and conflicts between cultures. Do cultures interact, inform, change each other? Is there possibility for overcoming conflicts between cultures without the elimination of one or the other? Unfortunately, Heidegger does not approach these questions in this text. For some commentators, Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi party is especially troubling when considered in relation to his discussion of 'people' and 'destiny'. I will deal more explicitly with this concern and return again to the question of destiny at the outset of the following section.

Heidegger spends a fair amount of time in this chapter discussing how authenticity relates to Dasein's historicity. When resolute Dasein takes up its context it enters into a “*repetition* of a possibility of existence that has come down to us”⁴². This repetition is a “going back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there”⁴³. However, the repetition is not a simple abandonment to the past as past. Heidegger calls it a “*reciprocative rejoinder* to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there” and says that it is “made *in a moment of vision*”⁴⁴. Neither advancing what is past, nor abandoning one's self to what is past; the reciprocative rejoinder is some sort of response to a Dasein which has-been-there, taking up their context which I have handed down to myself and which will eventually be taken up by some other Dasein in the future⁴⁵. In resoluteness Dasein can recognize

42 B&T 437, SZ 385, Heidegger's emphasis.

43 *Ibid.*

44 B&T 438, SZ 386, Heidegger's emphasis.

45 Lawrence Vogel interprets these passages thus: “Though Heidegger calls this critical reappropriation a 'repetition' of

its heritage and appropriate it in a more primordial fashion than the inauthentic way the they does. Though I am limited in my choices by the historical context, I, as resolute, can at least make the choice. The sections on historicity are grounds for serious criticisms of Heidegger. Lawrence Vogel, for example, considers Heidegger's arguments on historicity as potential grounds for serious criticisms. An assessment of the critical reception of Heidegger's thought will be left for later in this chapter.

This concludes the exegetical examination of the key sections from *Being and Time* that will be used in this thesis. I shall now move on to consider some criticisms and defenses of Heidegger concerning ethics and community in the secondary literature.

II. Critical Reception in the Secondary Literature

In this section I will consider five critics of Heidegger. This should be sufficient to demonstrate some general arguments concerning Heidegger on community and ethics which serve as background information for the issues specific to Nancy's relationship to Heidegger.

First I will review Heidegger's concept of destiny and how it relates to a people [*Volk*]. I will then briefly consider the question of Heidegger's Nazi involvement. The concept of destiny, briefly outlined above, is the answer to the question 'what provides the practical framework in which resolute Dasein can choose?'. Destiny is the word Heidegger uses to describe a resolute people, seizing on its possibilities and working towards some goal together. Destiny is related to the historical context a people exists in; one's language, political values, the technologies used in one's community, mating rituals, clothing trends, sayings and colloquialisms are all part of the context in which resolute Dasein operates. Dasein cannot choose its context any more than it can choose thrownness. However, Heidegger does emphasize that there is some room for variety in how one appropriates one's heritage.

I will now consider Heidegger's Nazi involvement and how it relates to his thought. It must be

one's heritage (SZ, 386), he does not mean an imitation of what has already been but rather a recovery of what is worth preserving and nourishing" (*Fragile 'We'*, 52). Through the reciprocative rejoinder "... one appreciates the opportunities one's tradition affords as well as the limitations it imposes" (*Ibid*).

said at the outset that this project is not specifically concerned with these issues, thus it cannot be drawn too deeply into them. The goal of this project is to provide an account of Heidegger's thought concerning community, consider Jean-Luc Nancy's relationship to Heidegger's thought and provide a critical assessment of Nancy's thought. Given the clear connection to Heidegger's thought expressed in Nancy (see below) it is necessary to consider whether Heidegger's thought was in some way implicated in his Nazi involvement. If fundamental ontology is somehow 'contaminated', then this has implications for Nancy's work. Hence I will focus only on whether Heidegger's thought, particularly *Being and Time*, is somehow implicated in his Nazi involvement. Julian Young in his book *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism*⁴⁶ explicitly takes up this question (though not in relation to Nancy). I will concern myself with the main argument of Young's work, focusing on two main points. Young concludes "None of Heidegger's philosophy, I have argued, is implicated, either positively or negatively in fascism"⁴⁷. I am concerned with Young's arguments concerning positive implication and negative implication in *Being and Time*. Positive implication would mean that Heidegger's philosophy directly implied fascism or fascist doctrines, while negative implication would mean that Heidegger's philosophy offers no strong or insufficient resistance to fascism⁴⁸.

First, the positive implication critique seems to arise from §74 during the discussion of fate, destiny and the people. The context in which one exists is the framework in which one operates. This is the context of present-at-hand entities in the work world, and the with-world of other Dasein. Young writes "Our fundamental commitments as to what is worth doing constitute a cultural 'heritage' (BT 383-6) into which we are simply 'thrown'"⁴⁹. One cannot separate one's self from this context. Young rightly points out that in respect to destiny, the modes of authenticity and inauthenticity are "... modes

46 Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997); hereafter *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*.

47 *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, 214.

48 *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, 54 – 55.

49 *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, 62.

of inhabiting a common tradition, a shared thrownness”⁵⁰. If one's destiny is decided beforehand, this seems to imply some sort of relativism or determinism – in that one's values are simply causally linked to one's historical context. This could imply fascism if one's cultural context is one in which authoritarian government exists. One lives and works for one's people, taking up the possibilities open to them (In Heidegger's case, certain political choices, one of which was fascist). Such a determinism, even if there is a direct link to fascism, is not the case though. Young points out that “The work [*Being and Time*], that is, in so far as it touches on the practical life, operates on a second-order, a meta-level. It tells us where we are to look to discover a content for authentic life – to 'heritage' – but it does not tell us what we will find there”⁵¹. As I clarified above, one's historical context is taken up, though not necessarily as it is handed down. That one must operate within one's context does not preclude a variety of possible ways of taking up that context. It is at least possible to be critical of one's heritage – perhaps even to the point of rejecting it. If one's culture is going down the path of monstrous violence against another, one does not have to follow. For Young, these arguments are sufficient to reject what he calls the positive implication critique.

The question of whether Heidegger's work is negatively implicated in fascism – that is, provides insufficient defense against it – is multifaceted. Young considers charges of 'empty decisionism', 'moral nihilism', 'relativism', and finally whether some general morality might be gleaned from *Being and Time*. What critics call Heidegger's decisionism, in Young's words, is: “first of all, the 'nihilistic' view that there are no values of content, only of style. Secondly, it is a particular view of the kind of style that is found to be 'valid'. ... It is the decisive, imperious, resolute, passionate, the violent”⁵². The charge is that Heidegger presents a lifestyle which extols resolute decision which is empty of content. Young argues that this is a shallow reading of Heidegger, since Heidegger clearly provides the grounds

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 73.

⁵² Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 81.

for content in the discussion of historical context. Heidegger does not tell us what choice to make but he does give an account of how we come to have options. Young writes “Thus the situation is that while *Being and Time* does not articulate a set of contentful ethical norms, it does offer individual Dasein a directive according to which it can determine its ethical norms for itself”⁵³. The charge of moral nihilism is that Heidegger relegates morality to the realm of ‘the they’. This would mean morality is some leveled down code of action used by Dasein to disburden itself. Since this is inauthentic, the implication is that all morality is considered inauthentic by Heidegger. Authenticity liberates Dasein from the restrictions of the they, and presumably, its morality. What remains to replace this? The charge of moral nihilism is that nothing remains to replace this. Young argues that this is not an accurate reading. He writes: “what *Being and Time* assigns to the domain of inauthenticity is not morality *tout court*, but only a degenerate form of the moral life. In so far as *any* moral theorist would want to distinguish genuine from merely conventional morality, there is nothing that is morally nihilistic about Heidegger's critique”⁵⁴. In Young's view, Heidegger is not morally nihilistic because *Being and Time* does not relegate morality as such to the realm of inauthenticity, just some types or ways of approaching it. The relativism charge asserts that Heidegger's theory of truth is relativistic. The problem arises because Heidegger links truth to Dasein. Young writes: “If truth is dependent on Dasein does this, Heidegger asks, mean that ‘all truth is “subjective”’? Not at all, he replies, if ‘subjective’ means ‘left to the subject's discretion’. On the contrary, ‘only *because* “truth”, as uncovering, *is a kind of being which belongs to Dasein*, can it be taken out of the subject's discretion’ (BT 227)”⁵⁵. Truth is dependent on Dasein, not in the sense that each Dasein can somehow arbitrarily choose some truth.

⁵³ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 83.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 88. Young further argues that “Authentic Dasein's seeing is not a seeing of the kind of person to be, for it is *already* ‘resolutely’ (though not inflexibly) committed to a given kind of life, to being a particular kind of person. Its seeing rather, is a matter of seeing what the appropriate thing is for such a person to do in this particular concrete situation. One sees, for example, not that being a good parent is the thing to do, but – creatively, originally and in a way no rule can determine – what it is that constitutes being a good parent here and now” (pg 92, Young's emphasis).

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 95, author's emphasis.

Rather, truth is a mode of Dasein's being. Dasein must be there, recognizing the context around it, how different entities interact in that context, in order for truthful assertions to be made. To assert 'the hammer is for pounding nails' requires a context where the tools involved function together and that Dasein recognizes this.

Using the above three discussions as a base, Young then moves to deny that Heidegger's work is negatively implicated in fascism by outlining the possibility of a general morality. He believes that if there is some general moral framework in Heidegger then that can be used to resist fascism. Young believes such a morality can only be gleaned from § 26⁵⁶. This, of course, is the section containing the account of liberating solicitude or leaping ahead which I discussed above. For Young,

Enough, however, has been said, I think, to make it clear that this relationship counts, in anyone's book, as a *moral* relationship. For what it amounts to is the fundamental Kantian principle of respect: never treat humanity either in your own person or that of another as a mere ends, but always as an end-in-itself. Heidegger makes it quite explicit that this principle is binding upon, constitutive of, authentic Dasein: when, and only when, resolute, he says, does Dasein 'let the others who are with it "be" in their ownmost potentiality-for-being' (*B&T* 298)⁵⁷.

Further "It seems, therefore, that there is, after all, a universal morality built into *Being and Time*"⁵⁸. This principle is based on the fact that authentic Dasein is capable of recognizing others as potential recipients of solicitude. Young writes: "It [authentic Dasein] sees the other person, that is, as a *person*, for its 'understanding' is not covered over by the veil of 'idle talk'"⁵⁹. This basic morality is sufficient for Young to deny that Heidegger's thought is negatively implicated in fascism.

As I said at the outset of the discussion of Young, the treatment of the topic of Heidegger and

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 102.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 104.

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 104. Young later argues that the Leaping in/ Leaping ahead distinction can be described in terms of private and public morality. One cannot leap in for everyone, in fact most of the relationships one would have would be at best leaping in. Young writes: "Rather it [leaping in] is the relation in which, in the conditions of modern society, authentic Dasein necessarily stands to the majority of the other Dasein it encounters. Authentic Dasein, that is, in virtue of its ontological clarity, treats the others it encounters with the kind of negative respect that is constitutive of the recognition of the other as belonging to the category of Dasein. With regard to those with whom it has a direct, personal relationship – the circle of its '*du*' relationships, its friendships – authentic Dasein evinces not only the negative respect due to the world of Dasein at large, but also 'positive' respect, the active relationship of 'letting be' of authentic care" (106).

⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 103.

Nazism can here only be brief. I believe the points I have chosen to focus on are the most essential to this project and thus the limitation is justified. Since Nancy's thought is explicitly linked to Heidegger's, it is important to clarify that Heidegger's thought itself is not linked to either Nazism in particular or fascist thought in general. I accept Young's arguments as sufficient to show this. Nevertheless, I believe there is still an issue concerning how different culture's interact. Heidegger does not explicitly deal with this topic in *Being and Time* which is a weakness. Presumably one can make an analogous case to Dasein's relationship to its destiny. The landscape of cultural interaction is a historical context and one which could be taken up in a variety of ways. Nevertheless this is merely a possibility. One has to wonder what would be expected given that the majority of everyday existence is lived as disburdened, following the lead of the they. Though different cultures could be related to in a variety of ways, one can fairly expect that the everyday way would be characterized by stereotype, intolerance, suspicion, perhaps even hatred and violence. Though I agree with Young in concluding that Heidegger's work is not positively or negatively implicated in fascism, I find this treatment of cultural interaction to be insufficient. A similar issue surfaces for Nancy which I will deal with below.

Next I will consider Robert Dostal's arguments from his essay "Friendship and Politics" Heidegger's Failing'. I will highlight two main points from this essay: first, Dostal's argument that Heidegger presents no fruitful basis for friendship and second, that Dasein is presented as a solitary or lonely subject regardless of the ontological character of Being-with. Of the first, Dostal argues:

The failing, which I here point out, is not that Heidegger provides no extensive treatment of friendship, but rather that he provides little place for this phenomenon. He recognizes that living together or "Being-with" (*Mitsein*) is a central aspect of human life. However, the way in which he characterizes the forms of living together is incompatible with politics because he inadequately provides for friendship in the strong sense as well as for the necessary and important political relationships between citizens, friendship in a much weaker sense.⁶⁰

Dostal provides a thorough reading of Heidegger on the concepts of Being-with, the they, and leaping in/ ahead. He argues that Heidegger's system allows for an ethics and even presents the possibility of

60 "Friendship and Politics" 399 – 400.

friendship but fails to do so adequately⁶¹. He makes this judgment by comparing Heidegger to the Aristotelian analysis of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He writes:

Were we to contrast Aristotle's treatment of *philia* with Heidegger's treatment of *Fürsorge*, we would note at least two significant differences. Political relationships or friendships, which are important (but not the best) goods for Aristotle, are considered inauthentic by Heidegger. And the best friendship of virtue, according to Aristotle, requires that friends be more or less equal. As is well known, Aristotle discusses three general sorts of *philia*, a term rather too narrowly translated as 'friendship.' These include friendships of pleasure, of interest or utility, and of virtue or excellence. The last is complete in a way that the other two are not. Political life depends on friendships of the second kind, although the best friendships are not political. Friendships of virtue include those between parent and child, teacher and student, but these are not the best, for they lack the equality required. In short, Heidegger denigrates political friendship as inauthentic and does not see the need for equality and reciprocity among the best friends⁶².

Political friendships, or friendships of utility in Aristotle, are inauthentic for Heidegger because they would fit into the realm of everyday work concerning ready-to-hand beings and the everyday ways Dasein relates to Others. Heidegger has already argued that the everyday modes of Being-with are deficient and says that "The Being-with-one-another of those who are hired for the same affair often thrives only on mistrust"⁶³. Nevertheless, in the same paragraph Heidegger discusses the possibility of these co-workers becoming "*authentically* bound together"⁶⁴. As Young pointed out above, the solicitude presented in leaping-in is a kind of negative respect for others. In everyday situations authentic Dasein cannot have leaping-ahead relationships with everybody, but it can live in a respectful manner with those others by recognizing and treating them as others. Dostal presents insufficient evidence to make the claim that all political friendships would be considered inauthentic by Heidegger. A slightly less strong version would be acceptable: all political friendships not based on a solicitude which is concerned with the Other as such are inauthentic. Heidegger might want to say 'inauthentic political friendships are inauthentic while authentically grounded ones are a different story.' Now, the ideal friendship for Aristotle is a reciprocal good will⁶⁵ which is concerned with the other in him or

61 "Friendship and Politics" 407.

62 "Friendship and Politics" 407 – 408.

63 *B&T* 159, SZ 122.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, pp. 935 – 1126, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. W.D.

herself, not over any incidental quality⁶⁶. This is what distinguishes it from friendships of pleasure and utility (where the focus is on something incidental – the pleasure or usefulness each participant gets out of it⁶⁷). It is also based on an likeness in virtue⁶⁸, though there is allowance for friendship between unequals (parent-child, teacher-student, and also in terms of loving). Concerning the latter, Aristotle argues that friendship is more about loving than being loved and that through this unequals can be equalized⁶⁹. Presumably, the more perfect individual in loving the less perfect one helps him/ her better him/ herself over time. This does carry connotations of pedagogy but also carries with it all the other elements (tenderness, affection, sharing) which Dostal seems to think exemplify full friendship over the mere teacher-student friendship. Dostal is correct to note the parallel between leaping ahead and the teacher-student type of relationship. But again, I believe Dostal misses some subtle points both in Aristotle and Heidegger here. As I pointed out above, there is within Aristotle a discussion of friendship between unequals where the inequality is equalized and there is no reason to doubt that this constitutes the full friendship that Dostal wants. It is arguable that, given the similarity of leaping ahead and being another's conscience to Aristotle's description of friendship between unequals, the potential for full friendship is contained in the discussions considered from *Being and Time*. The second main point of Dostal's argument that Heidegger's conception of friendship never reaches the full depth he desires is that there is no reciprocity. I would argue that we can again find a parallel between Heidegger and Aristotle here. At one point in *Being and Time* Heidegger says that "Of course it is indisputable that a lively mutual acquaintanceship on the basis of Being-with, often depends on how far one's own Dasein has understood itself at the time"⁷⁰. Further, as was pointed out in the first chapter, authentic

Ross, (New York: Modern Library, 2001); hereafter *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a 5.

66 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1157b 4.

67 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a 15 – 20.

68 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156b 6.

69 *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1159a 35.

70 *B&T* 162, SZ 125. Similarly "Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another..." (*B&T* 344, SZ 298).

Being-one's-Self is an existentiell modification of the they. Dasein's structures remain the same, merely undergoing a temporary ontic change or shift in comportment. What this means is that authenticity is tenuous. The resoluteness involved can slip away. One must constantly remind oneself, or be reminded, of it. When one reaches another (via leaping ahead) in a moment of authentic Being-one's-Self, one enters into an unequal relationship where, hopefully, the inequality will be equalized. The other helps me recognize 'myself' once more. One also begins a reciprocal action for it is likely that sometime later one will need such help from the Other.

A portion of Julian Young's analysis is illuminative here. He speaks of leaping-in in terms of letting be. This letting be takes two forms: passive and active. Of the passive, he says "Letting the other be is simply a matter of refraining from acting towards her in any way that hinders the achievement of her own autonomy"⁷¹. He identifies passive letting be with deficient solicitude (leaping in). Of the active he says:

Yet there is another, much more active, meaning Heidegger gives to 'let it be'. This is the meaning (one, we will see, that becomes centrally important to later Heidegger) according to which the sculptor 'lets be' the figure that lies slumbering in the block of marble: he lets it *come into* being. In so far as Heidegger is talking about authentic solicitude, it may correctly be pointed out, it is this second 'positive' letting be he has in mind: authentic Dasein is engaged in intense soul-to-soul confrontation with the other, a confrontation in which it 'lets be' the other's 'ownmost potentiality-for-being' by 'co-disclosing this potentiality' through becoming 'the "conscience" of the others' (BT 290). In the intimacy of authentic friendship each helps the other extract himself from inauthenticity through intense 'communication' (BT 384) concerning conformism, freedom, 'guilt', the meaning of 'heritage', 'destiny', the 'world-historical Situation' and so on⁷².

Examples Young proposes are, of course, the teacher promoting autonomy, but also the friend who knows how to listen⁷³. Dostal's teacher-student problem – though shared by some others as will be seen below – is not agreed on by all commentators. I will defer my final commentary on this topic until I deal with Francois Raffoul below.

Dostal's other point is to consider Dasein's 'loneliness'. Even though Heidegger emphasizes

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 104.

⁷² Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 105.

⁷³ Heidegger, *Philosophy, Nazism*, 103.

several times that authentic modifications do not separate Dasein from Others but rather allow Dasein to enter into positive solicitous relationships with them, Dostal believes that the overall emphasis in discussions of authenticity is towards isolation. Death as one's ownmost nonrelational possibility is the ground of authentically Being-one's-Self. The modes of solicitude opened up by authenticity also suggest a focus on the Self. I can only leap ahead for the other if I am first resolute in my own Being. Through authenticity Dasein is made capable of engaging others in a relationship which Dostal argues is strictly of the teacher-student model, but there is no necessity of actually following through on this. Resolute Dasein does not need the Other, does not have to leap ahead or be another's conscience; it is merely capable of it. I argued that a reciprocity of leaping ahead could develop. However, given the tenuousness of authenticity, that is merely one possibility and one which requires supplementation of Heidegger's text. I am in agreement with Nancy here, who argues that even though leaping-ahead can be read as a deep form of loving, "The analytic of being-with remains a moment, which is not returned to thematically, in a general analytic where *Dasein* appears first of all and most frequently as in some way isolated, even though Heidegger himself emphasizes that there is solitude 'only *in* and *for* a being-with'"⁷⁴.

I will next consider Lawrence Vogel's *The Fragile 'We'*. First, Vogel aims to clarify Heidegger's stance that morality is inauthentic. Vogel argues that this stance does not preclude an ethical framework. He then goes on to propose three possible ethical interpretations of *Being and Time*, the existentialist, historicist and cosmopolitan.

Vogel argues that Heidegger "demotes morality tout court to the domain of 'the anyone' and asserts that our common sense interpretation of guilt and conscience as moral phenomena is 'inauthentically oriented' (SZ, 281)"⁷⁵. He finds this troubling since it seems that the authentic

⁷⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Shattered Love," in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp 82 – 109; hereafter "Shattered Love", 104, Nancy's italics.

⁷⁵ *Fragile 'We'* 14 – 15.

individual should be in line with what he calls the morally conscientious individual who “lifts himself above the prevailing expectations of the group in order to do justice to other persons in light of a higher standard than what is publicly expected and respectable”⁷⁶. Vogel then considers what Heidegger could mean by morality which Heidegger considers inauthentic. Vogel is unwilling to accept the simple answer that morality here is equivalent to custom, meaning that morality would be doing what they prescribe. While this would clarify Heidegger's point, it presents a too simple picture of morality and of Heidegger's position on it. Vogel writes “he [Heidegger] argues that moral conscience as such, even in its more sophisticated, reflective, autonomous, and 'postconventional' forms ... 'springs from the limitations of the way Dasein interprets itself in falling’”⁷⁷. Moral conscience is concerned with balancing actions based on some principle outside of Dasein (such as a religious code of conduct). An individual who lives by it is not taking up his/ her existence as a whole (that is, through the full disclosedness of care through anticipatory resoluteness) but is falling back on a guiding principle or code. “The conscientious person, on Heidegger's reading, is a moral accountant who treats life as a business, forever worrying about whether he has covered the moral costs”⁷⁸. Vogel argues that while Heidegger rejects morality as described above as inauthentic, this does not preclude the possibility of some form of morality based on fundamental ontology. He then proceeds to propose three possible ethical readings, evaluating their respective strengths and weaknesses.

The first is the existentialist, which draws from Sartre. Given that the world is arguably meaningless, the codes and practices of various societies are essentially groundless customs. Yet the individual must make choices, and this is one's responsibility. “Freedom does not refer to the possibility of choosing between good and evil but to one's responsibility for creating standards in the first place, since there are none to be found prior to the willful act of valuation”⁷⁹. If Heidegger's system

⁷⁶ *Fragile 'We'* 15.

⁷⁷ *Fragile 'We'* 18.

⁷⁸ *Fragile 'We'* 19.

⁷⁹ *Fragile 'We'* 30.

leads to an ethics of this sort it is subject to accusations of nihilism and action for action's sake⁸⁰. Vogel argues that if we stick to a reading of *Being and Time* that focuses on the individualization and separation suggested by Heidegger's account of Being-towards-death then this ethics is susceptible to the above criticism. "Because there is no ontological room at the level of authenticity for the experience of obligation, morality appears as just one among many inauthentic possibilities I may or may not appropriate. The only imperatives binding on me are those that I invest with authority on the basis of groundless resolve"⁸¹. The only way out, Vogel argues, is first to recognize the sections where Heidegger argues that authenticity does not close off one's Being-with⁸² and to bring historicity into the picture. Vogel writes "*Authentic Being-unto-death* exists in a vacuum unless it is understood in the context of '*authentic historicity*'"⁸³.

The historicist interpretation focuses on the discussion of Historicity. Dasein is thrown into a context which provides it with the factual possibilities upon which it can choose. Vogel writes:

That Being-in-the-world as a whole is a groundless ground does not make Dasein's choices arbitrary, for plausible possibilities emerge from a concrete situation in which one is caught up. History is not something over and against a subject but is the lived context from out of which one's limited possibilities emerge⁸⁴.

Now, resolute Dasein appropriates or hands down to itself its context in a critical fashion (not necessarily as it is handed down) so there is some amount of flexibility here. However, this proposed solution falls victim to the same problem that the existentialist interpretation did: arbitrariness⁸⁵. One's context provides one with a focused field of possibilities to project one's self onto but it provides no basis for judging those possibilities in comparison to other historical contexts. Vogel writes:

⁸⁰ *Fragile 'We'* 38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Such as being another's conscience, leaping ahead, that authentically Being-one's-Self allows Dasein to authentically be with Others and structures I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis. Vogel writes "Yet Heidegger insists time and again that the nonrelational individuality occasioned by authentic freedom-unto-death does not leave Dasein a worldless subject 'floating above' the world or over against a neutral field of facts upon which it must project meaning arbitrarily" (*Fragile 'We'* 47).

⁸³ *Fragile 'We'* 48, Vogel's emphasis.

⁸⁴ *Fragile 'We'* 50.

⁸⁵ *Fragile 'We'* 54.

If Heidegger's ontological analysis provides no guidelines except the imperative to be resolute, it appears to make room for any possibility whatsoever because it precludes none absolutely. Even if the individual is subordinate to a communal destiny, the notions of good and evil, right and wrong, to which he is subject have no transhistorical, cosmopolitan status but must be understood as historically specific idols of 'our' tribe. On the historicist interpretation of *Being and Time*, there is no prescriptive independent of the heritage in which one stands – and the 'prejudices' that govern it – to judge whether one set of idols or ideals is better than others⁸⁶.

The next move, to attempt to resolve this problem, is to introduce a focus on Being-with to the interpretation.

In the cosmopolitan interpretation, Vogel argues that it may be possible to find another kind of moral conscience different from the general one Heidegger dismissed as inauthentic. Rather than having the self subordinate its ends to a pre-given code or principle, this moral conscience would involve “an attunement to the particularity of others, to others *as* truly other, stemming from an awareness of the singularity of one's own existence”⁸⁷. This is an orientation which would “let others be' in their freedom for their own possibilities and to allow one's own self-understanding to be informed by theirs”⁸⁸. Vogel believes that it is possible to read liberating solicitude (leaping ahead and being another's conscience) as this kind of orientation. He responds to the argument that authenticity through Being-towards-death suggests a solitary individual by reminding us of Heidegger's reminders that authenticity does not close off the self but rather opens it to the possibility of relating to others in themselves in the first place. And that is precisely what is special about liberating solicitude: that it pertains to the existence of the other and not some object. Vogel writes: “To care not only about *what* the other is concerned with but, more fundamentally, about the other's *existence* itself is to direct oneself toward the other's freedom for his own possibilities”⁸⁹. Vogel then notes that this relationship is analogous to the teacher/student or therapist/ patient type and further notes – parallel to Robert Dostal – that this lacks the reciprocity essential to relationships of love and friendship⁹⁰. However, he then

86 *Fragile 'We'* 66 – 67.

87 *Fragile 'We'* 70.

88 *Fragile 'We'* 71.

89 *Fragile 'We'* 74.

90 *Fragile 'We'* 75 – 76.

suggests that liberating solicitude “... constitutes the core of what it means to treat another as an *end-in-himself*”⁹¹ and proposes that if this is the case then we could imagine a mutual and reciprocal leaping ahead based on several Dasein authentically sharing a common cause⁹². Finally, he considers some possible problems with this interpretation⁹³. The final consideration – and one which he noted in the introduction of the book – is particularly interesting since it is one shared by several 'defenders' of Heidegger, including Nancy, is that the cosmopolitan interpretation “... does not faithfully represent Heidegger's intentions and, furthermore, requires a supplementation of his analysis in several respects”⁹⁴.

François Raffoul in his essay 'Heidegger and the Origins of Responsibility'⁹⁵ argues that a rethought version of responsibility can be gleaned from Heidegger. This responsibility is based on facticity. “Dasein is that entity for which and in which Being is at issue. Being is given in such a way that I *have* to take it over and be responsible for it”⁹⁶. As thrown, Dasein exists between its birth and death. It cannot get behind either to grasp its Being as a whole. Instead it must exist as to-be or having-to-be. Conscience calls Dasein to face this, and this is what Being-one's-Self is – owning up to the responsibility of the to-be. Raffoul writes “... I am responsible because I am thrown in an existence that

91 *Fragile 'We'* 78.

92 *Fragile 'We'* 79.

93 First is the difficulty of engaging in relationships of liberating solicitude necessarily limits it to very few. One cannot, it seems, create a political order out of this since, for the most part, one's everyday relationships would remain at the inauthentic level – though Vogel argues that “... even inauthentic encounters are altered by the authentic individual's recognition that other persons are *possible* 'objects' of liberating solicitude” (*Fragile 'We'* 82, Vogel's emphasis). This is the same argument presented by Young. Second is whether the possibility of engaging in liberating solicitude has any imperative force. That is, just because authentic Dasein can leap ahead, does it actually have to? Vogel is unable to give a categorical yes to this, instead offering this: “Even if I am not obligated to approach all other persons by *actually* helping them to be free for their own possibilities, I may be obligated to not treat others in a manner that is inconsistent with their *potential* for authenticity” (*Fragile 'We'* 90, Vogel's emphasis).

94 *Fragile 'We'* 7. Christopher Fynsk in “The Self and Its Witness” (Christopher Fynsk, “The Self and Its Witness,” in *Heidegger: Thought and Historicity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp 28 – 55; hereafter “The Self and Its Witness”) admits that “I hope to force the analysis of Dasein at one of its most uncertain moments and to bring forth a dimension, largely veiled in Heidegger's text, of what he describes as the uncanny opening of thought” (Self and Its Witness 28 – 29. Nancy, upon presenting a sympathetic reading of *Fürsorge* also admits that he is “Betraying in part the Heideggerian description” (IC 103 – 104).

95 François Raffoul, “Heidegger and the Origins of Responsibility,” in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 205 – 218; hereafter “Origins of Responsibility”.

96 “Origins of Responsibility” 207, Raffoul's emphasis.

I have to answer for. So that to be thrown (facticity) and to be called (responsibility) are one and the same phenomenon”⁹⁷. He then argues against those who would accuse Heidegger's description of Dasein as being egoistic or solipsistic. That Dasein is Being-for-the-sake-of-itself is an ontological claim and “Because of its ontological scope, *Dasein's for-the-sake-of-itself in principle includes the possibility for Dasein to concern itself for others in their Being*”⁹⁸. Raffoul emphasizes that it is essential to remember that we are dealing with the ontological here. In order to understand the place of the other in Heidegger's project “the question of the other cannot be posed on an ontical but rather an ontological level”⁹⁹. We are not considering ego's here but rather beings who are always already with others.

Dasein can consequently never get hold of itself outside of this primordial dispersion in some simple unity or identity. Even in the unity that is proper to it, Dasein cannot be thought outside of this (existential) stretching, which primordially disseminates its Being. This accounts for Dasein's Being-with: it is not that there is Being-with, because there are others, but on the contrary, there are 'others' only because Being-with essentially belongs to Dasein ... It is this primordial dispersion that accounts for the essential openness and exposure of Dasein to the other¹⁰⁰.

Since one is called to be responsible for one's own Being, and since Being-with is part of one's Being, this responsibility has a connection with others. Raffoul argues “Dasein relates to itself not as an isolated individual but as openness to the whole of beings”¹⁰¹. Because responsibility is what is most fundamental for Dasein – its Being-one's-Self, authenticity – it becomes clear why relationships of liberating solicitude are possible only after Dasein has 'faced itself'. One must be responsible, that is, recognize one's Being and what it means to take up one's Being, in order to try to help others face this too. One lets the other be as other.

Raffoul's argument is similar to Vogel's cosmopolitan interpretation and thus the question arises as to whether his argument is susceptible to or capable of answering the problems with the

97 “Origins of Responsibility” 212.

98 “Origins of Responsibility” 213.

99 “Origins of Responsibility” 215.

100 “Origins of Responsibility” 216.

101 “Origins of Responsibility” 217.

cosmopolitan interpretation. It should be kept in mind that Raffoul's project here is "to begin unfolding what I would call here 'the origins of responsibility'"¹⁰². The work is presumably preparatory, and even if complete would only provide a grounds for ethics (an ontological, not ontic project). By grounding responsibility in this interpretation of facticity and conscience, Raffoul is able to elaborate an ethical framework without modifying or supplementing Heidegger's text in the way Vogel had to in order to suggest a moral conscience. However, liberating solicitude may still appear limited to what we have called the 'teacher-student' model ('pedagogical' relationships where one member is in an elevated position over the other). Opponents could likely argue that this model of relationships does not account for love and friendship and reciprocity (as Dostal and Vogel point out). Raffoul might reply that such ontic considerations are secondary to the project of an originary ethics or something of the sort but that response evades the problem. That there are grounds for ethics in *Being and Time* is clear; the problem is what form that ethics will take. If it only considers relationships like the teacher-student model to be exemplary or authentic, then it clearly misses or dismisses other types of interaction. These other types of interaction seem, in a common sense way, to be exemplary of the authentic life as well.

I shall now take some time to comment on the objection that leaping ahead presents a too-narrow view of human relationships. Robert Dostal argued that leaping ahead could at best describe a relationship like that between a teacher and student. Dostal further argued that the exemplification of a teacher-student type of relationship presented a view of human relationships that was too narrow because it excludes the mutuality that is required for friendship. I presented a brief section from Young who argues that the 'letting be' of leaping ahead can be both passive and active, and that the teacher-student model is not the only model that leaping ahead exemplifies. Friendship can, and I would argue must, be based on mutual, active 'letting be'. Understanding this is simply a matter of not mistaking 'letting be' for some sort of professional or emotional distance. Indeed, letting another be can be a

¹⁰²"Origins of Responsibility"205.

matter of extreme intimacy and mutual respect. There is a deep difference between the letting be of a professional educator, and the letting be of a loving other, though both are 'pedagogical' in their own way. I am a good friend by being concerned for my friend's well being, whether that be concerning practical matters or matters of personal significance. I do what is best for the friend by not trying to solve the friend's problems or direct his/ her life. The other does the same for me. This kind of relationship implies a kind of 'pedagogy', though not of the kind where one participant possesses knowledge being given to the other. Rather it is a mutual learning based on the shared 'letting be'. In my analysis the teacher-student 'problem' is short sighted on two counts. First, it does not delve deeply enough into Heidegger's analysis. This is because it mistakenly interprets the significance of leaping ahead. Second, it does not delve deeply enough into the idea of friendship, since it fails to see that good friendship has 'pedagogical' tendencies.

That an ethics in Heidegger is always a groundwork or originary is a common theme among his defenders. Raffoul seems content with it. Another figure, Jean Greisch in "The 'Play of Transcendence' and the Question of Ethics"¹⁰³ concludes that "In truth, the metaphysic of Dasein has the possibility conditions of an ethics in view from the start, even if it does not concern a ground-laying of morals in the usual sense."¹⁰⁴ Miguel de Beistegui in "*Homo Prudens*"¹⁰⁵ says "Thus in Heidegger there always will have been a place for ethics, a space for the properly human time of action and decision, as the fragile and always threatened time within which man lives ... Indeed, ethics no longer gestures toward a morality of good and evil, of the will as a capacity to choose between good and evil, or even as the ability to obey a law as the universal law of reason. Freedom is here entirely disconnected from the will

103Jean Greisch, "The 'Play of Transcendence' and the Question of Ethics," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, trans. Andrew Mitchell, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 99 – 116; hereafter "Play of Transcendence."

104"Play of Transcendence" 114 – 115.

105Miguel de Beistegui, "*Homo Prudens*," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp 117 – 131; hereafter "*Homo Prudens*".

and rearticulated along the lines of an ontological power..."¹⁰⁶. The problem this raises is that Heidegger appears to be stuck in the ontological, unwilling to discuss how this ethics might play out ontically. This eventually becomes a problem Nancy is faced with in his own philosophy.

Frank Schalow in his "Freedom, Finitude, and the Practical Self"¹⁰⁷ argues that any ethics to be gleaned from Heidegger must be understood as a praxis. Noting that Heidegger is against the theory-praxis distinction, Schalow argues that "By inverting this priority and allowing what has been subordinated under the heading of 'praxis' to come to the foreground, Heidegger can elicit the constellations of issues – freedom, transcendence, historicity – which shape the landscape of the question of being"¹⁰⁸. His argument is based on noting certain similarities and differences with Kant. Both seek to ground ethics in freedom, though Heidegger's way of formulating the concept of freedom is "... defined in its alliance with finitude"¹⁰⁹ where Kant's is formulated as a metaphysical concept in some way prior to its embodiment. Ethics in the works of Heidegger is a praxis because freedom is tied up with finitude. It is the activity of Dasein – or Dasein taking itself up as an acting being – grounded in a being responsible to one's own potentiality and to the potentiality of Others. This in some way answers the objection that Heidegger fails to provide concrete or normative ethics. The type of ethics envisioned here is precisely the type which does not provide a rule-book for action but rather seeks to prepare the person to be able to engage situations according to their individual ethical requirements¹¹⁰. Finally, ethics conceived as a praxis does not preclude general guidelines (such as 'let the other be as

¹⁰⁶"*Homo Prudens*" 128.

¹⁰⁷Frank Schalow, "Freedom, Finitude, and the Practical Self: The Other Side of Heidegger's Appropriation of Kant," in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 29 – 41; hereafter "Freedom, Finitude, and the Practical Self."

¹⁰⁸"Freedom, Finitude, and the Practical Self" 29.

¹⁰⁹"Freedom, Finitude, and the Practical Self" 32.

¹¹⁰Nancy concurs, saying "there is no 'morality' in Heidegger if what is meant by that is a body of principles and aims for conduct, fixed by authority or by choice, whether collective or individual. But no philosophy either provides or is by itself a 'morality' in this sense. Philosophy is not charged with prescribing norms or values: instead, it must think the essence or the sense of what makes *action* [*l'agir*] as such, in other words, of what puts action in the position of having to choose norms or values" (Jean-Luc Nancy, "Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics,'" in *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, ed. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew, trans. Duncan Large, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 65 – 85; hereafter "Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics'").

other) but does require some indeterminacy (one must fill in the blanks as one goes).

Since the problem of the indeterminacy of practical implications is, as we will see, a thorn in Nancy's side as well, it is worth providing some extra commentary on the problem as it relates to ethics in Heidegger's thought. The thinkers that argue for an ethical reading of Heidegger agree that such a reading does not provide much in the way of concrete guidance. The lack of concrete guidance in Heidegger arises from his rejection of morality as inauthentic. Recall Vogel's explanation: both conventional morality and moral conscience (which takes morality as a calculating and balancing of accounts) are considered inauthentic. Heidegger cannot provide particular rules since that would be precisely what he is against. What this leaves is something which, I would argue, most closely parallels an Aristotelian type of ethics, at least insofar as Aristotle acknowledges the necessity of accepting indeterminacy when dealing with moral virtues. Two points from Aristotle are significant: first, that virtue is learned by doing, not taught in some abstract fashion¹¹¹, and second, that the very topic is such that only general things can be said of it. He writes:

But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we have said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, and more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine and navigation¹¹².

The navigational metaphor is quite apt here. Navigation requires a variety of tools and skills, a compass, a map, the ability to read both, familiarity with terrain and others. Even one of the tools and skills involved is complicated, requiring knowledge and practice to master. When reading a compass one picks a destination (be it a point on a map or simply a direction, say northeast). One then adjusts a

¹¹¹Aristotle writes that "... the virtues we get first by exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a 33). Also interesting in this regard: "... moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit)" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a 16 – 17). The concept of ethics as an *ethos* is particularly important for ethics in Heidegger and Nancy.

¹¹²*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a 1 – 10.

turntable which is around the needle case till the destination direction lines up with the direction of travel arrow. Then one simply turns the whole compass till the north point of the needle lines up with north on the turntable, at which point northeast will be the direction that the direction of travel arrow is pointing. The point is that these are general guidelines which must be applied to each particular situation anew. To adequately use this basic knowledge about a compass one needs to know where one is in the first place, as well as where one is going. A map helps, as well as the ability to read it (magnetic north and grid north are not always identical, sometimes one must calculate declination and adjust the turntable a few degrees east or west to get an accurate reading). Being able to recognize landmarks helps also. Then there is always the possibility of metal deposits throwing the reading off. Practical tasks have, as Aristotle would say, little fixity. I could describe how to start a fire by rubbing sticks together, but actually doing it – even though I have the knowledge and skills – requires that I read the situation and adapt to it (perhaps the wood is slightly damp, there is a strong wind, or I am particularly tired). Even a master of a particular craft produces different results in each case. The same is true of ethical considerations. I might want to say 'it is good parenting to learn to let go, the child must fall down to learn to run'. Nevertheless, one could easily think of an example to disrupt that rule: perhaps you are walking along a rocky trail atop a steep hill. There is wisdom in the suggestion of 'letting go' but it is a matter of reading each situation and judging what degree of 'letting go' is appropriate.

However, Aristotle does proceed from there to write a very long book on ethics. He is true to his principle: he presents general discussions of various virtues designed to help people learn to habituate themselves to those virtues. Heidegger, on the other hand, does not write an ethics book. All we get is a basic ethical framework, and at that, one which must be extracted from his work with great effort and some supplementation. Some present it as something like Kant's categorical imperative. Other Dasein are not to be treated as ready-to-hand entities; as others, they occupy a different sphere – Being-with.

Therefore, Dasein has a different comportment towards others than it does towards tools and objects: solicitude. Solicitude can occur in different ways, though in each case the other is recognized as different from objects. Of course in leaping ahead that difference is more actively engaged. The question has two facets: is this basic ethical framework sufficient, and should a more concrete account be provided? In a sense, answering one question answers the other (if the framework is sufficient, then presumably no further concrete account is necessary, likewise, if more concrete descriptions are needed, presumably the framework is insufficient). However, even if the first question is answered 'yes', there still seems to be some gravity to the second question. Technically Aristotle's general framework – that moral activity is vague, and thus teaching it is a matter of giving general discussions designed to allow each student to learn to approach each situation – is sufficient. Nevertheless, we appreciate the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I cannot look there for answers to specific ethical problems but I can learn something about how to approach them.

Given the trajectory of the existential analytic, the basic ethical framework Heidegger presents is sufficient. What I mean by that is that it does not betray his rejection of conventional morality or moral conscience. Nor does it leave an abyss in its place. The injunction to treat other Dasein with at least some baseline amount of respect (leaping in) and potentially relate to them in terms of themselves (leaping ahead) is powerful and meaningful. Heidegger also leaves open each Dasein's historical context as a potential grounds for situating one's morality. It is indeterminate – though rightfully so – but not to such a degree that nothing can be drawn from it. Much can be drawn from it (I could imagine a variety of different interpersonal situations and how they might change based on whether members are acting with solicitude or not, or whether leaping in or ahead). It provokes us to develop an ethos. Nevertheless it would be useful to have even some strictly hypothetical concrete explorations of this. *Being and Time* is a work of ontology, however; Heidegger would simply say such explorations do not belong there. The question is 'should' there be something more concrete here. Perhaps but perhaps that

is precisely what it is up to us to fill in ourselves. It is up to us – each Dasein – to come to recognize these phenomena and develop our ethos based on this basic ethical framework. I will return to this theme when dealing with Nancy. The same problem of indeterminacy and practical implications arises in his works.

2. Community in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy

This chapter will be split into three sections. The first (I) will be an exegesis of the topic of community in the works of Jean-Luc Nancy. The second (II) will examine Nancy's relationship with Heidegger's thought. The third (III) will explore Nancy's reception in the secondary literature.

I. Community and Related Concepts

I will be considering two books from Nancy: *Being Singular Plural*¹¹³ and *The Inoperative Community*¹¹⁴. By way of introduction I will emphasize a point concerning Nancy's style of writing. Writing for him is a project, an imperative. The concepts he is attempting to articulate are, in his view, only articulable in terms of a differential interplay of words and voices. Being is essentially being-with – that is, a plurality of interrelated singularities – and so any attempt at 'describing' that structure must instead be an embodiment of it.¹¹⁵ Nancy writes:

(By the way, the logic of 'with' often requires heavy-handed syntax in order to say 'being-with-one-another.' You may suffer from it as you read these pages. But perhaps it is not an accident that language does not easily lend itself to showing the 'with' as such, for *it is itself the address and not what must be addressed*)¹¹⁶.

Christopher Fynsk in his foreword to *The Inoperative Community* comments:

There is no language for what Nancy is trying to think that does not at some point inhibit this

¹¹³Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, ed. Erner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery, trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Byrne, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000); hereafter *Being Singular Plural*. This is a collection of essays, the main one being of the same title as the book.

¹¹⁴Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); hereafter *Inoperative Community*.

¹¹⁵Since to describe it would be to attempt to fix an identity on 'something' which does not have identity in the usual sense but is what it is only as being-with, that is as a singular being which is, in its very being, related to the plurality of beings.

¹¹⁶*Being Singular Plural* xvi, my emphasis.

thought, re inscribe it in the classical conceptual systems Nancy is trying to work past. This tension keeps us from seizing too easily upon the formulas with which Nancy seeks to define his notion of difference. What Nancy is pointing to can be glimpsed only in the movement of his text and the wake of his conceptual labor¹¹⁷.

It is not unusual to find thoughts and formulations repeated in slightly different ways throughout each text. I hope to provide a coherent account of his arguments and concepts without doing too much injustice to his style of writing.

Nancy's work on community is deeply rooted in Heidegger. The connections and differences between Heidegger and Nancy will be discussed more deeply in the following section. Nevertheless, it is worth introducing this connection here as it aids in understanding Nancy. For Nancy, Heidegger's fundamental ontology is "that which has put us on the way [*chemin*] to where we are"¹¹⁸. Nevertheless, he is far from mirroring Heidegger. He is engaged in a radical rethinking of Heidegger. He seeks to "refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis* that goes along with it) with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins, from being-with*"¹¹⁹. And thus Nancy's ontology, though rooted in Heidegger, is a way of "thinking against or beyond Heidegger himself"¹²⁰. Given that Being-with is for him the most fundamental structure of Being (or is Being, as he will suggest), the discourse on other topics – language, ethics and politics, community, finitude – also changes.

I will proceed by separately discussing individual themes and concepts in Nancy. By approaching individual themes and concepts separately, I do not intend to present them as separate entities. Interconnection is the essence of what Nancy is working on, thus these concepts are closely

¹¹⁷Christopher Fynsk, "Experiences of Finitude," in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. vii – xxxv; hereafter "Experiences of Finitude", ix.

¹¹⁸Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Being Singular Plural" in *Being Singular Plural*, ed. Erner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery, trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Byrne, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000) pp. 1 – 100; hereafter "BSP", 26, Nancy's emphasis.

¹¹⁹*Ibid*, Nancy's emphasis. Similarly in "Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics'" Nancy, while offering some concluding remarks about ethics in Heidegger writes: "To be rigorous the analysis would need to proceed as far as plural singularity as a condition of ek-sistence" ("Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics'" 83).

¹²⁰"BSP" 93.

related to each other. I present them separately only as an attempt to simplify their presentation.

Being-Singular-Plural

What Nancy is exposing with this formulation is a fundamental ontological claim. He argues that "... the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself"¹²¹. He does not think we can talk about singular beings in terms of substance or identity as these terms are rooted in a tradition which emphasizes separation between beings¹²². Nancy instead, like Heidegger, argues that there is no isolated, individual being. One could only be 'isolated' because of a prior relatedness. Nevertheless, this is a departure from Heidegger in that Nancy is expanding being-with to include all of being. This is precisely the reworking of being-with discussed above. Nancy argues that being-with is what constitutes Being. He writes "*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as co-essence" and further "if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the 'with' that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition"¹²³. He is careful to emphasize that the with is not something added onto Being, for he argues that this was one of Heidegger's errors¹²⁴. What this means is that all of being is an interconnected web of singular beings – singular in that they are 'this being here'. Each being is singular-plural because it is what it is only through the relationship it shares with the rest of Being. He writes: "The togetherness of singularities is singularity 'itself.' It 'assembles' them insofar as it spaces them; they are 'linked' insofar as they are not unified"¹²⁵. This is not a melting pot. All are linked together but all are not unified or subsumed. Since Being is being-with, Nancy is able to include non-human beings in his discussions¹²⁶.

121"BSP" 28 – 29.

122He writes: "But singularity never has the nature or the structure of an individuality" (Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Inoperative Community," in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, Trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) pp. 1 – 42; hereafter "IC", 6).

123"BSP" 30, Nancy's emphasis.

124He writes: "Even Heidegger preserves this order of succession in a remarkable way, in that he does not introduce the co-originary of *Mitsein* until after having established the originary character of *Dasein*" ("BSP" 30 – 31).

125"BSP" 33.

126An objection raised against an ethics in Heidegger by Sonia Sikka (Sonia Sikka, "Kantian Ethics in Being and Time," *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 31 (2006): pp. 309-334), is that even if we grant a reading where Heidegger proposes ethical relationships with Others, he excludes animals from any sort of ethical consideration. Nancy's ontology,

Meaning, Origin and Finitude

Nancy argues that we are meaning. This is not to say that humans occupy some final position as the meaning of Being. Rather, he is arguing that "... we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate"¹²⁷. Meaning is a function of Being playing out in (or as the playing out of) everyday singular-plural existence. Meaning is the circulation of Being, and "... *we* are this circulation"¹²⁸. Events occur; we observe, participate, are formed by the interplay of being, and we speak of it; we give it meaning. In this sense one is an origin. Being an origin means that, as a singular locus, I am 'touched' by the plurality of beings and give meaning by my act of perceiving, understanding, relating to that plurality. I am an origin in that I am a point where the meaning of being occurs. One encounters others¹²⁹ as other origins. Nancy writes: "The origin is together with other origins, originally divided."¹³⁰. Each time we encounter an other, we encounter another singular-plural being which is an 'access to the world'. This other is meaning in the same way that I am. Nancy's discussion of the origin is rooted in Heidegger's notion of finitude. Nancy's version of finitude is formulated thus:

We only have access to ourselves – and to the world. It is only ever a question of the following: full access is there, access to the whole of the origin. This is called 'finitude' in Heideggerian terminology. But it has become clear since then that 'finitude' signifies the infinite singularity of meaning, the infinite singularity of access to truth. Finitude *is* the origin; that is, it is an infinity of origins. 'Origin' does not signify that from which the world comes, but rather the coming of each presence of the world, each time singular¹³¹.

at least in principle, seems capable of avoiding this problem because it includes non-human beings in the sphere of Being-with. For example: "Whether an other is another person, animal, plant, or star, it is above all the glaring presence of a place and moment of absolute origin" ("BSP" 20). Also, in "Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics'" Nancy writes: "It also will be necessary to 'bring to language' the Being or the ethical sense of non-human beings" ("Heidegger's 'Originary Ethics'" 83).

127"BSP" 2.

128*Ibid*, Nancy's emphasis.

129Nancy emphasizes that we can no longer talk of a capitalized 'Other' since that capitalization signifies a logic of identity and separation which is contrary to his understanding of Being-with. He wants to reject the I – Other distinctions that represent humans as distinct, separate entities. Instead he wants a 'lowercase other', which, he argues, more accurately suggests the shared nature of being ("BSP" 11). This does not do away with all concepts of the individual, rather it seeks to understand the individual as a being that is already connected with other beings in such a way that its individuality is what it is only through this interrelation.

130"BSP" 13.

131"BSP" 15, Nancy's emphasis.

As a being which is a locus point of the plurality of Being, I am a singular origin of the world. I, in the ways I interact with and come to understand the plurality 'make' meaning. My finitude is my limits – existing here, between birth and death, already 'with' – and the grounds of my possibilities (as an origin). Each moment is an event of meaning – I take up and relate to this plurality, giving it some significance. Of this, Fynsk writes:

Nancy's gesture consists in carrying this thought of the finitude of Being – its eventual, singular character – back into the questions opened in the existential analytic of *Being and Time*. ... he tries to think the event wherein a determination of what it means to be comes about and beings come into their presence (*Ereignis*, Being's advent), in relation to the movement in which existence is delivered to itself in its freedom and comes to know itself in and as an exposure to an alterity that it draws out and communicates.

And further:

By emphasizing the singular nature of the event wherein Dasein opens to Being, Nancy brings forward Being's necessarily multiple, differential character: if the articulation of Being is always singular, Being cannot be One, and it cannot be thought simply as gathering or collecting¹³².

Being is always relational here, and thus so is meaning. In the preface to *The Inoperative Community* Nancy calls finitude our lacking any substantial or infinite identity. Instead we are the sharing of this lack of identity¹³³. We share through the event of being, that multiple and differential interplay which we are and which we give meaning. Death and birth are at stake here, and, as for Heidegger, they are the horizons of our being which we cannot appropriate. Finitude is precisely existing as between birth and death, that is, as a singular-plural entity which must take up its being. To 'take up' one's being means to seize upon the field of possibilities in which one exists (to choose a path).

Since death cannot be appropriated, it cannot be used to finalize one's existence (to sum it up, give it an overall identity¹³⁴). Death, Nancy argues, ruptures subjectivity. He writes: "If the *I* cannot say that it is dead, if the *I* disappears in effect in *its* death, in that death that is precisely what is most proper to it and most inalienably its own, it is because the *I* is something other than a subject. All of

¹³²"Experiences of Finitude" xii – xiii.

¹³³Jean-Luc Nancy, "Preface" to *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, Trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) pp xxxvi – xli; hereafter "Preface", *IC* xxxviii – xxxix.

¹³⁴"IC" 15.

Heidegger's research into 'being-for (or toward)-death' was nothing other than an attempt to state this: *I* is not – *am* not – a subject¹³⁵. Death and birth, both 'inalienably' my own are not events I can experience, thus the 'I' is not something self-enclosed. Radically essential moments of my existence are inaccessible to me. Nancy, along with Heidegger, argues that this conception of death and birth shatters the subject – at least the subject as thought of as self-identical and self-enclosed. The self is turned outside itself. Nancy writes:

A community is the presentation to its members of their mortal truth ... It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth, and only the community can present me my birth, and along with it the impossibility of my reliving it, as well as the impossibility of my crossing over into my death¹³⁶.

Death and birth are linked to community in that it is community which gives one access to what is otherwise inaccessible. Furthermore, death cannot give identity to any politics or community (because, again, that would be imposing a single identity on something which is essentially plurality). But finitude does expose us to what is at stake in our being: that we exist as being-with. Nancy writes:

Community does not sublate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition. It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a *finite* community. In other words, not a limited community as opposed to an infinite or absolute community, but a community *of* finitude, because finitude 'is' communitarian, and because finitude alone is communitarian¹³⁷.

As finite, each person is open, linked, singular-plural, exposure. This is why community is the exposition of finitude (since it is the playing out of the multiplicity that singular-plural being is).

Politics and Political Philosophy

Nancy works with a distinction between politics and the political (*la politique* and *le politique* respectively). Of these he says: "The political is the place where community as such is brought into play"¹³⁸, and describes politics as the various ways that our underlying being-with is acted upon. Fynsk

135"IC" 14, Nancy's emphasis.

136"IC" 15.

137"IC" 26 – 27, Nancy's emphasis.

138"Preface" xxxvii.

likens this to the ontic/ ontological relation, that is, the political underlies and makes possible politics¹³⁹. Nancy's argument, especially prevalent in 'The Inoperative Community' is that whenever we craft a politics which supposes a rigid or ossified essence or identity for the community we are going against what community itself is (i.e. The political). He writes: "But I start out from the idea that such a thinking – the thinking of community as essence – is in effect the closure of the political. Such a thinking constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, whereas community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence inasmuch as it is *in common*"¹⁴⁰. Nancy argues that it has been the tendency of our 'political programs' to put community to work, that is, to realize some essence. He traces this tendency back through philosophy's relationship to politics. After referencing Aristotle's notion of man as a 'political animal', Nancy argues that political philosophy believes "... that *logos* is the condition of community, which, in turn, is the condition of humanity"¹⁴¹. The task of *logos* would be to discover and assign some universal structure to the community. It would be the job of philosophy to manage the city because philosophy knows what is best. In doing so, Nancy argues, political philosophy covers over the essence of community. Simon Spark argues that political philosophy has "... an understanding of the political as the will – and that is also to say the imperative – to realize an essence-in-common (a community, even) on the basis of a figure of that in-common"¹⁴². Community as being-with as a sharing of origins is contrary to any single identity. And since political philosophy seeks to craft cities following one principle, it fails to see and passes over community itself.

139"Experiences of Finitude" x. However it must be emphasized here that Nancy is not working with these terms as a distinction, but as a relation. As Fynsk rightly notes what Nancy is doing here is marking both a gap and a bridge (*Ibid*). The political and politics are not held apart so that one can engage in ideal speculation about the political without ever having to get messy in politics. Rather, politics and the political are already in each other as they are separated. James Gilbert-Walsh concurs on this point (see James Gilbert-Walsh, "Broken Imperatives: The Ethical Dimension of Nancy's Thought," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 26/2 (2000): pp. 29-50; hereafter "Broken Imperatives", 36 and footnote 15). See also Simon Spark's '*Politica Ficta*' (Simon Sparks, "*Politica Ficta*," in *Retreating the Political*, co-authored with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Simon Sparks et al., (Warwick Studies in European Philosophy, London: Routledge, 1997), pp. xiv – xxviii; hereafter "*Politica Ficta*", . xvii.

140"Preface" xxxviii, Nancy's emphasis.

141"BSP" 23.

142"*Politica Ficta*" xxiv.

Nancy writes: “In this sense, philosophical politics regularly proceeds according to the surreptitious appeal to a metaphysics of the one-origin, where, at the same time, it nevertheless exposes *volens nolens*, the situation of the dis-position of origins”¹⁴³. Whether these political projects are well intended, benevolent or overtly totalitarian makes little difference. So long as they ignore or are blind to the being-with structure of being they do violence. This is essentially Nancy's complaint against communism¹⁴⁴. In the face of this Nancy argues that what is needed is not a new politics but a “... reconsideration of the very meaning of 'politics' – and therefore, of 'philosophy' – in light of the originary situation: the bare exposition of singular beings”¹⁴⁵. Nancy calls the reconsideration of politics a new 'first philosophy' which is an ontology. Of politics in this sense he writes:

Philosophy needs to recommence, to restart itself from itself against itself, against political philosophy and philosophical politics. In order to do this, philosophy needs to think in principle about how we are 'us' among us, that is, how the consistency of our Being is in being-in-common, and how this consists precisely in the 'in' or in the 'between' of spacing¹⁴⁶.

Following this he introduces his proposed 'refiguring' of fundamental ontology that was discussed above. What is needed is not a new politics but a new ethos, praxis, ethics¹⁴⁷. It is a task of thinking, and, he argues, “Philosophy is, in sum, the thinking of being-with”¹⁴⁸. This thinking, this being called to thinking is an imperative. Community, being-with enjoins us to think it. Nancy writes: “... it [modern anxiety over society] reveals that the 'sociality' or 'association' of humans is an injunction that humanity places on itself, or that it receives from the world: to have to be only what it is and to have to, itself, be

143“BSP” 24.

144In the opening pages of 'The Inoperative Community' Nancy acknowledges that communism “... stands as an emblem of the desire discover or rediscover a place of community” (“IC” 3) that is beyond the restrictive or unjust elements associated with capitalist societies. Nevertheless “... there is, namely, no form of communist opposition ... that has not been or is not still profoundly subjugated to the goal of a *human* community, that is, to the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence *as community*” (“IC” 2). Essentially this makes the same error as the politics it tries to replace. All political models which subject community to realizing an essence are 'totalitarian' in Nancy's analysis (“IC” 3).

145“BSP” 25.

146“BSP” 25 – 26.

147Nancy writes: “There is no difference between the ethical and the ontological: the 'ethical' exposes what the 'ontological' disposes (“BSP” 99).

148“BSP” 31.

Being as such”¹⁴⁹. Be according to the kind of Being that you are, that is, acknowledge and embody the kind of being that you are: a singular-plural being. What actual shape could this take? Nancy gives a group of negative definitions here¹⁵⁰:

This means nothing short of a transformation in the relation [that we name] 'politico-philosophy': it can no longer be a matter of a single community, of its essence, closure, and sovereignty; by contrast, it can no longer be a matter of organizing community according to the decrees of a sovereign Other, or according to the *telos* [fins] of a history. It can no longer be a matter of treating sociability as a regrettable and inevitable accident, as a constraint that has to be managed in some way or another. Community is bare, but it is imperative¹⁵¹.

The topic of ethics in Nancy's thought, along with criticisms and defenses of it, will be dealt with more thoroughly in the following chapter.

The Center for Philosophical Research on the Political

The Center for Philosophical Research on the Political was launched in November 1980, following a conference titled 'The Ends of Man: Spin-offs of the Work of Jacques Derrida.' Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe participated in the conference and organized the Center as a result¹⁵².

Nancy's paper at the conference, “The Free Voice of Man”¹⁵³, attempts to find an ethics in Derrida's work. What would Derrida's answer be if, like Heidegger, he were asked to 'write an ethics?' Nancy believes he can draw something like an imperative based on difference from the many instances of *il faut* ('it must' or 'it is necessary') in Derrida. What he finds is an *il faut* which cannot be proven. This is an overturning of what Derrida would consider the typical philosophical approach to ethics – philosophy posing a *telos* and crafting some theoretical means of attaining that¹⁵⁴. Instead he argues that

¹⁴⁹“BSP” 35.

¹⁵⁰It is arguable that only negative definitions could be given since any positive determination of what a possible 'politics of community' might look like would presumably violate itself by posing an essence. Thus refusing to 'paint a picture' is the difficult but responsible way to approach this matter. However, this does not necessarily mean that the entire project is strictly negative (this will be returned to below).

¹⁵¹“BSP” 35 – 36.

¹⁵²For a detailed account of the conference and genesis of the Center, see Nancy Fraser's “The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?” (Nancy Fraser, “French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?” in *Working Through Derrida*,. Ed. Gary B. Madison, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993) pp. 51 – 76; hereafter “French Derrideans”.

¹⁵³Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Free Voice of Man,” in *Retreating the Political*, co-authored with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Simon Sparks et al., Warwick Studies in European Philosophy, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 32 – 54; hereafter “The Free Voice of Man”.

¹⁵⁴“The Free Voice of Man” 37.

his *il faut* is an ethics which blurs, or takes place on the basis of the blurred line of the theory/ practice distinction. Nancy writes:

This would be a duty which, whilst still remaining a duty, would *decidedly* (there would be nothing undecidable here) turn aside from the philosophical duty that philosophy has always deduced or wanted to deduce from theoretical reasons - and, even better, a duty which, while remaining a duty, would decidedly turn aside *from* philosophical duty, that is to say, from this obligation and from this end that philosophy always gives itself on the basis of the Aristotelian model: namely, *sophia* as supreme *praxis* of *theoria*, or *theoria* as the very *praxis* of *sophia*¹⁵⁵.

This is an activity which does not submit itself to a distinction between theoretical and practical, but presumably that does not mean it does not contain either, but simply has a different relation to them than the picture of the Aristotelian model being presented. Nancy likens this to "... a continuation of the Heideggerian motif of thought as doing or acting"¹⁵⁶. This theme plays out throughout the work of the Center and Nancy's work on community.

Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe present the goals of the Center in its opening address. A primary concern of the center is to consider the relationship between philosophy and the political. Here they are already working with the politics/ the political 'distinction'. Thus, the goal of research on the political means that it will distance itself from strictly empirical or non-philosophical accounts¹⁵⁷. But, they argue, "It is neither the lofty claim of some philosophical privilege (or of the privilege of philosophy), nor, even less, the pure and simple renewal of the classical appropriation of the political by philosophy"¹⁵⁸. The goal of philosophical research on the political is to "... rigorously account for what we are calling the essential (and not accidental or simply historical) co-belonging of the philosophical and the political"¹⁵⁹. This is an interrogation of politics thought of as the realization of an essence. It is not so much concerned with particular philosophies of politics but with what they believe has been the

¹⁵⁵"The Free Voice of Man" 38, Nancy's emphasis.

¹⁵⁶"The Free Voice of Man" 40.

¹⁵⁷Their reason for this is twofold: first, they are not experts in politics and second, they do not believe the answer – if there can be one – lies in the 'empirical' approach (see Jean-Luc Nancy, "Opening Address to the Center for Philosophical Research on the Political" in *Retreating the Political*, co-authored with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, ed. Simon Sparks, trans. Simon Sparks et al., Warwick Studies in European Philosophy, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp 107 – 121; hereafter "Opening Address").

¹⁵⁸"Opening Address" 108.

¹⁵⁹"Opening Address" 109.

guiding principle of philosophical politics, and what this means for philosophy and the political. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe describe the history of philosophical politics as the 'closure of the political'. This closure is based on the fact that politics which seek to realize an essence ignore, overshadow, or miss, the essential openness of being, of the communities which they treat as works. Politics, as such, closes the political. They believe this calls for a 'retreat of the political', which has a twofold sense:

This phrase is taken here in at least two senses: first, withdrawing the political in the sense of its being the 'well-known' and in the sense of the obviousness (the blinding obviousness) of politics, the 'everything is political' which can be used to qualify our enclosure in the closure of the political; but also as re-tracing of the political, re-marking it, by raising the question in a new way which, for us, is to raise it as the question of its essence¹⁶⁰

Following this Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe are quick to note that this is not an 'apolitical' project. The project both rigorously interrogates the political and, they hope, will raise "... questions which ought to disturb the politics of the Prince just as much as the principle of the political"¹⁶¹. They acknowledge that any 'forays' outside the political – that is any attempts to provide some concrete account, side with some particular ideology or other – will be politics of domination. So it cannot be a matter of providing something like a 'politics of difference,' since that would violate itself. Rather, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's project is a deep interrogation of the political itself (acknowledging of course the relationship it holds with politics) that somehow provides, at the very least, a critical framework which 'arms' one against politics of domination. Whether this is 'concrete enough' will become a serious issue for critics (this point will be considered in the following section).

Community

Community for Nancy is a way of articulating the being-with structure also described as being-singular-plural. Nancy will say that community means that "... there is, therefore, what might be called, in a rather inappropriate idiom, an originary or ontological 'sociality'..."¹⁶². It is important to note that

¹⁶⁰"Opening Address"pg 112.

¹⁶¹"Opening Address" 113.

¹⁶²"IC" 28. Community is based on finitude, not sociality. To restrict it to 'sociality' would be inappropriate since community is broader than that one element. Nevertheless the idiom is useful in that it emphasizes that all relationships deemed 'social' are ontologically based and not the product of some contract.

sociality is in quotation marks, which suggests a certain reserve. Nancy does not want to limit the concept of community by associating it with one specific mode of being – sociality, ethics, commerce, or others. He is simply using one term in a phrase to suggest what he is trying to explain, but warning us to be careful with the quotation marks. By using the word community to discuss this ontological structure, Nancy seeks to emphasize that community is not something created or secondary to human existence, but rather is a structure of our existence – he would argue the most primary structure. Community is not created, “... one experiences or one is constituted by it as the experience of finitude”¹⁶³. One of his primary goals in *The Inoperative Community* is to argue that by reaching an understanding of community as an ontological structure, we can recognize the dubiousness of accounts of sociality or community which present it as a project or a work. He writes “Community understood as work or through its works would presuppose that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible (in sites, persons, buildings, discourses, institutions, symbols: in short, in subjects)”¹⁶⁴. When community is 'put to work' in this way, a single essence is imposed on something which is, ontologically speaking, a plurality. Simply put such projects are contrary to being. Though the terminology is abstract, there are serious practical implications. As said above, any politics which seeks to impose essence onto community is essentially totalitarian. There is of course some matter of degree here: “By inverting the 'principle' [being-with, community] stated a moment ago, we get totalitarianism. By ignoring it, we condemn the political to management and to power”¹⁶⁵. It is worthwhile to take a moment to clarify what Nancy means by Totalitarianism. Nancy uses the term to signify some ordering or putting to work of being-in-common towards a single purpose, ideology, worldview, narrative. A plurality of differing and interacting viewpoints is forced to some arbitrary unity (whether this be some tyrant's hunger for power, a vision of a 'people's destiny', nationalisms). As

163“IC” 31.

164“IC” 31.

165“Preface” xxxix.

will be shown below, this view does not preclude cultures and nationalisms; it simply cautions us against letting these narratives be used to justify the exclusions and violence associated with totalitarianism. One could call this objectionable or wrong on Nancy's view because it violates the essentially open, polyphonic structure of Being. Being-in-common or community is not a multiplicity of interacting singularities coalescing into a unity. Anything that tries to force such a unity is essentially violent, is totalitarian.

One could say that a politics is only totalitarian if one recognizes being-with and seeks to impose one's will upon it anyways. When one ignores the significance of being-with, one sees community as a project to be organized. Things must be ordered efficiently, uniformly. In either case the difference that is community is subordinated in a more or less violent fashion. Community is not a project to be completed but is an 'incompletion'. Nancy means "...incompletion' in an active sense, however, as designating not insufficiency or lack, but the activity of sharing, the dynamic, if you will, or an uninterrupted passage through singular ruptures"¹⁶⁶. These are 'inoperative' or 'unworked' communities. What he means by these terms is precisely this recognition of community as being-with and a refusal to impose some ossified identity upon it. An 'unworking' community is not one which does not cohere or function but is one in which the essence of that community is not stipulated in a rigid sense (except, perhaps, to say that its essence is being-with). This concept of community does not preclude 'cultures' or 'cultural identities'. Rather, it refigures our understanding of those concepts. Being a member of a culture is not simply adherence to some set of rigidly defined characteristics. Nancy would argue that being a member of a culture is being part of an open interplay amongst other members and with other cultures. Nancy discusses this in an essay titled 'Eulogy for M    ', which I will discuss in more detail below. Nancy argues that it is our task to think community rather than work it. This is done by thinking community as a task, though not in the sense of a goal to be accomplished but rather

¹⁶⁶"IC" 35.

as something ever-unfolding (an activity, a praxis). He writes “It is a task, which is different – an infinite task at the heart of finitude”¹⁶⁷.

Literary Communism

Throughout 'The Inoperative Community', Nancy makes reference to a task of writing, and specifically to 'Literary Communism'. At the point where he brings up this subject, he is considering the status of communication, in light of the being-with structure he is disclosing. Communication, considering the implications of being-with and community, becomes a sharing of singularities. Communication becomes not a transmission of data from one subject to another subject but is recognized as the playing out of singular being's shared existence. Nancy believes this calls for a *praxis* or “An ethics and a politics of discourse...”¹⁶⁸. Further, he writes: “This is nothing other than the question of *literary communism*, or at least of what I am trying to designate with this clumsy expression: something that would be the sharing of community in and by its writing, its literature”¹⁶⁹. And again later, when considering what the political could mean in terms of his thought on community, he again emphasizes the imperative to write:

'Political' would mean a community ordering itself to the unworking of its communication, or destined to this unworking: a community consciously undergoing the experience of its sharing. To attain such a signification of the 'political' does not depend, or in any case not simply on what is called a 'political will'. It implies being already engaged in the community, that is to say, undergoing, in whatever manner, the experience of community as communication: it implies writing. We must not stop writing, or letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself¹⁷⁰.

In the essay 'Literary Communism' Nancy discusses the task of literature as one of interrupting myth. The essay begins with a quotation from Georges Bataille “Literature cannot assume the task of directing collective necessity”¹⁷¹. Literature's task is not to craft narratives which tell us how to live our

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸“IC” 26.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.* In another place Nancy will write “‘Literary communism’ is named thus only as a provocative gesture” (IC, 80). He does not want the term to be taken in the usual way one would understand ‘communism’ and ‘literature’, though there is some ‘homage’ being paid to both here.

¹⁷⁰“IC” 40 – 41.

¹⁷¹Jean-Luc Nancy, “‘Literary Communism,’” in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, Trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhey, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp 71 – 81;

lives. Rather, literature's task is to interrupt those narratives, to interrupt myth. Myth is an origin or identity story, some narrative or writing which defines 'us', a people. In place of this, literature interrupts and calls us forth to an unworked community. This writing, Nancy will later argue, though carrying obvious political implications, is not meant to found a new politics. Rather, "it defines at least a limit, at which all politics stop and begin"¹⁷². It does not found a politics, but it does at least mark a kind of political activity. Of this he writes:

'Literary communism' indicates at least the following: that community, in its infinite resistance to everything that would bring it to completion (in every sense of the word '*achever*' – which can also mean 'finish off'), signifies an irrepressible political exigency, and that this exigency in its turn demands something of 'literature,' the inscription of our infinite resistance¹⁷³.

Literary communism is resistance to totalizing narratives, operational models of society, any putting to work of community. It is not a politics in that it does not stipulate mores or practices (except perhaps the bare imperative to resist putting community to work). Nevertheless, it is political in that it calls one forth to recognize that one's being is being-with and to recognize the 'political' implications of that. Christopher Fynsk comments: "The 'cultural politics' in question would seek to let the 'unworking' communication of community occur, or prevent its inhibition, even by a 'democratic' politics of consensus that cannot tolerate a 'communication' that speaks to an experience of community as difference"¹⁷⁴. Surely, the way one treats difference, others, conflict and other issues must change radically when one understands community in terms of a prior, ontological structure, rather than as an accidental creation or contract. And this understanding cannot be legislated but only learned through open discourse, communication, the praxis of writing that Nancy calls for.

The task of writing becomes quite important here. 'We must not stop writing' Nancy tells us. Why? It is because writing becomes the place where ethics and politics play out for Nancy. Nancy argues that because being's structure is being-with, and consequently all beings are interconnected,

hereafter "Literary Communism", 71.

¹⁷²"Literary Communism" 80.

¹⁷³"Literary Communism" 80 – 81.

¹⁷⁴"Experiences of Finitude" xxvi.

there can and should be no single worldview imposed. Rather a plurality of voices in dialogue and competition should be what occurs. For politics and ethics, this has a simultaneously enticing and frustrating consequence: ideals like plurality, equality and justice seem absolutely essential, but at the same time, resisting rigid worldviews forces one to be indeterminate. One cannot give rules or guides for action since those are the impositions one is trying to avoid. But something must be said, we must write. Writing, considered as a political and ethical task is the place where, I will argue in the concluding chapter, Nancy's theories can become concrete, not as specific guidelines, but as the dialogue spawned by his own work, others around him, his readers and his commentators.

Love

Nancy begins his discussion of love in the essay "'Shattered Love'" with a curious consideration of thought's relation to love. More precisely, he considers the phrase 'thinking is love'. Here, he articulates a description of thinking which resonates with and clarifies some of his ideas, discussed above, about the imperative to think and write community. He writes: "Thinking does not produce the operators of a knowledge; it undergoes an experience, and lets the experience inscribe itself. Thought therefore essentially takes place in the reticence that lets the singular moments of this experience offer and arrange themselves"¹⁷⁵. Thought is a letting be of experience (not in the sense of passivity, but in the sense of openness to that experience). What the thought of love calls for is a similar reticence. Nancy believes love cannot be thought of as one thing but is a plurality of 'shatters'. Nor can these 'shatters' be grouped, rated or otherwise hierarchized. The reticence called for is also a generosity: "the generosity not to choose between loves, not to privilege, not to hierarchize, not to exclude"¹⁷⁶. Nancy then briefly examines Plato's *Symposium* as an exemplar of this thinking, though in a qualified way¹⁷⁷.

¹⁷⁵"Shattered Love" 84.

¹⁷⁶"Shattered Love" 83.

¹⁷⁷He argues that the *Symposium* "... is more than any other the dialogue of Plato's generosity" ("Shattered Love" 85). The dialogue allows a plurality of versions of love to play out on equal footing. Yet, in the final analysis "... the *Symposium* also exercises a mastery over love" (*Ibid*). He believes that this is the closest thinking has come to a true 'thinking of love': approaching the openness it calls for but in the end still hierarchizing.

Nancy argues that philosophy exists in a continuous attraction to thinking of love and simultaneous failure to truly reach it. He argues that this is because of a certain way of thinking of the concept of the subject. The subject as that which, through dialectical moves, appropriates otherness to itself, maintaining itself, does not recognize the essential openness of being-with. The heart, and love play out as exposure, not appropriation. Love and thought are matters of openness to the interplay of being, and a thought which attempts to think love as a single identity sublating love to itself simply misses and overshadows much of what takes place in such phenomena. He writes: “The heart exposes the subject. It does not deny it, it does not surpass it, it is not sublated or sublimated in it; the heart exposes the subject to everything that is not its dialectic and its mastery as a subject”¹⁷⁸. We are still capable of talking about a 'subject' of love here, just in a qualified way; one where the subject recognizes itself in and as the exposure that love discloses.

Love cuts across, breaks into, breaks open the subject. Nancy writes:

It presents this to it: he, this subject, was touched, broken into, in his subjectivity, and he is from then on, for the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly. He *is*, which is to say that the break or the wound is not an accident, and neither is it a property that the subject could relate to himself. For the break is a break in his self-possession as subject; it is, essentially, an interruption of the process of relating oneself to oneself outside of oneself. From then on *I* is *constituted broken*. As soon as there is love, the slightest act of love, the slightest spark, there is this ontological fissure that cuts across and that disconnects the elements of the subject-proper – the fibers of its heart¹⁷⁹.

One could read the break as a moment of realization that each subject is given sooner or later. One is 'broken into' and exposed to the outside, the plurality that one exists as part of. Of course one is already being-with, but that does not mean one already recognizes this. The history of thinking subjectivity as a self-enclosed being speaks to the fact that the logic of being-with is easily missed. Though one exists as being-with one can easily not recognize this. A moment of love shatters this self-enclosure and presents the possibility of recognizing the significance of the 'ontological fissure'. One is not really 'cut open' because one is already open. Nancy writes: “Love cuts across finitude, always from the other to the

¹⁷⁸“Shattered Love” 90.

¹⁷⁹“Shattered Love” 96, Nancy's emphasis.

other, which never returns the same – and all loves, so humbly alike, are superbly singular. Love offers finitude in its truth; it is finitude's dazzling presentation”¹⁸⁰.

Love has another function apart from exposing finitude. Nancy talks of the utterance of love, 'I love you', arguing that it lets a law appear. He writes: “... it lets a law appear, the law of the given word: that this must be”¹⁸¹. He goes on to say that this does not mean that love must be fulfilled, for the promise made can just as easily be broken: “The promise must be kept, and nonetheless love is not the promise *plus* the keeping of the promise”¹⁸². What he is getting at here is that what is central in love is the utterance, the promise itself – calling singularities forth to their exposure, to their being-with – and not some fulfillment. The law of love is to be open to singular-plurality. One must recognize oneself as already being-with and all the implications that go along with that. Loving, indeed being, becomes not a matter of subsuming otherness but rather standing in an open, relational way with others.

Though Nancy's description of love calls for us not to hierarchize between types of love, there is some grounds for supposing that one can judge the comportment one takes towards that which love exposes one to. He speaks of “illusory or deceitful loves”¹⁸³ and later suggests a hypothesis: that love and hate do not form opposites, but rather that hate would be a privation of love. He writes:

... there would not be a reversal from hate to love, but in hate I would be traversed by the love of another whom I deny in his alterity. Ultimately, I would be traversed by this negation. This would be the limit of love, but still its black glimmer. Perverse acts of violence, or the cold rage to annihilate, are not hate)¹⁸⁴.

Hate occupies a place here, as the negation of love, and I believe this can be taken as pejorative. One is called forth to being-with every time one encounters another and the way one responds to that can be more or less true to being-with. The law of love, which is related to an ethics in Nancy (which would have to be a *praxis*) is not entirely without content. One could formulate it: 'practice or embody being-

180“Shattered Love” 99.

181“Shattered Love” 100.

182*Ibid.*

183*Ibid.*

184“Shattered Love” 102.

with', adding perhaps 'be open to alterity, do not negate'. The idea is to comport one's self in accordance with being-with. One is already related to others, one's very identity is what it is only through relation. Recognizing the significance of being-with can cause a change in the way one lives. One would try to be open to difference, resist rigid identities and roles, resist exclusion and violence. Love, like writing and thinking, call one forth to recognize being-with. The comportment which one adopts on recognizing this is to be the *praxis*, this practical mode of being.

'Culture' and 'Cultural Identity'

One might raise the objection that Nancy's injunction on us to resist imposing identity on community is problematic. Arguably it excludes cultural identity which is important for some both personally and in terms of larger political concerns. Different social, cultural and political groups identify themselves, and demand that their identity be recognized so they can be accorded recognition and justice. To deny that there is something to these groups' identities would, in a sense, be totalitarian since one is refusing to acknowledge their uniqueness and multiplicity. This, however, is not what Nancy's argument amounts to. He is not denying that there are 'cultures' and 'cultural identities'. He is simply refiguring what those concepts mean, given the implications of the ontological structures he is exposing.

The meaning of culture (one's own and others) takes on a modified meaning in Nancy's thought. In "Eulogy for Mêleé"¹⁸⁵ Nancy writes: "The unity and uniqueness of *a* culture are unique precisely on account of a *mélange*, or a *mêleé*. It is a 'mêleé' that defines the style or tone of a 'culture,' as well as the various different voices and aptitudes [*portées*] for interpreting this tone. There is no such thing as a French culture, but it itself has various voices, and nowhere is it presented in person"¹⁸⁶. It is not that

¹⁸⁵Jean-Luc Nancy, "Eulogy for Mêleé," in *Being Singular Plural*, ed. Erner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery, trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Byrne, (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp 145 – 158; hereafter "Eulogy for Mêleé".

¹⁸⁶"Eulogy for Mêleé" 152 – 153. The translators note (notes 2 and 3, 205) that *mêleé* and *mélange* are to be taken as signifying mixing and interchange where difference maintains. It is not strictly about the combative sense of *mêleé*, though that is part of it. Polyphony might be another adequate synonym or analogy.

there is no French culture at all, but that there is no ever-present, unchanging French culture. There is something there; an ever changing *mêlée* to be taken up and engaged with in a multiplicity of ways by each of its 'members'. Similarly, exchanges between cultures are polyphonic:

Cultures, or what are known as cultures, do not mix. They encounter each other, mingle, modify each other, reconfigure each other. They cultivate one another; they irrigate or drain each other; they work over and plough through each other, or graft one onto the other¹⁸⁷.

The agricultural metaphor in this passage is quite effective at clarifying what Nancy is discussing. Cultures, like crops, grow. They are affected by and affect others around them (lettuce, for example, typically enjoying cool temperatures, can grow well in summer heat if planted in the shade of the leaves of pumpkins and other plants that grow with trailing vines). There can be variety in the way each member develops (smaller and larger plants, unusual coloured flowers, genetic variations). Different cultures interact causing unexpected results (new species or sub-species can occur from cross-pollination). Indeed, cultures do not function by themselves. Monoculture is alien to the way nature operates; food producers go to extreme lengths to try to create monoculture farms to maximize production (one could say the totalitarianism of the farming industry).

For Nancy, 'identity' and 'culture' are inflected. He writes:

What we have in common is also what always distinguishes and differentiates us. What I have in common with another Frenchman is the fact of *not* being the same Frenchman as him, and the fact that our 'Frenchness' is never, nowhere, in no essence, in no figure, brought to completion. This is not the absence of figure, but a plan always being sketched out, a fiction always being invented, a *mêlée* of traits. And it is not that identity is always 'on the way,' projected onto the horizon like a friendly star, like a value or a regulative idea. It never comes to be; it never identifies itself, even as an infinite projection, *because it is already there*, because it is the *mêlée*¹⁸⁸.

Culture is this *mêlée*, this polyphonous interaction of various 'members' of a culture and with other cultures. Cultural identity is not some project to be realized or some nostalgic return to something lost. Nor is it incoherent or cacophonous as the word *mêlée* might suggest. If I identify myself as a Muslim, a Jew, a North American, or a European I am talking about something that is reasonably coherent.

¹⁸⁷"Eulogy for *Mêlée*" 151.

¹⁸⁸"Eulogy for *Mêlée*" 155.

Though each 'member' of that group will have a different story to tell and a different impact on me that multiplicity does not dissolve the meaning of these groups into nothingness. It simply acknowledges that whatever meaning these groups can have is only as open, plural and interrelated.

II. Nancy's Relationship to Heidegger's Thought.

This section will examine Nancy's relationship to Heidegger's thought within the texts being considered.

Nancy's rootedness in Heidegger is obvious from the frequent references and language that he uses. As Nancy admits, Heidegger is the one who has set the thought of community on its way. There is a certain indebtedness to fundamental ontology throughout Nancy's work on community. Nevertheless, Nancy holds reservations about certain aspects of Heidegger's thought. He is reworking fundamental ontology, hoping to enact a more accurate thinking of being-with. He also wants to emphasize that this project is not merely a "... 'readjustment' of the Heideggerian discourse"¹⁸⁹ but rather "... is about nothing less than the possibility of speaking 'of *Dasein*' in general, or of saying 'the existing' or 'existence'"¹⁹⁰. His concern is with thinking Being as such, getting at a more accurate 'fundamental ontology', not an academic exercise of correcting another writers' mistakes.

Nancy's central concern is Heidegger's mistreatment or lack of adequate treatment of being-with. It is not that Heidegger does not consider being-with or that what he does say isn't fruitful or enticing, but that it is insufficient. In the "Shattered Love" essay, Nancy points out that Heidegger's "... description of *Fürsorge* greatly resembles a certain classical description of the most demanding, most noble, and most spiritual love"¹⁹¹. Yet even with such favorable points Nancy notes that he is pushing Heidegger's text, giving *Fürsorge* a 'privileged position' it does not have, and further writes that: "The analytic of being-with remains a moment, which is not returned to thematically, in a general analytic

¹⁸⁹"BSP" 27.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁹¹"Shattered Love" 104.

where the *Dasein* appears first of all and most frequently as in some way isolated, even though Heidegger himself emphasizes that there is solitude 'only *in* and *for* a being-with'"¹⁹². Nancy is willing to push this point further a few lines later. He notes that Heidegger wanted to think *Dasein* outside of subjectivity, but yet, continued to portray *Dasein* "... in the apparent form of a distinct individuality..."¹⁹³. Even the moment of *Fürsorge* which resembles a great form of love has the logic of an identity moving toward the other. It isn't merely that Heidegger's text presents *Dasein* as isolated or alone in its general descriptions. Rather, it is that Heidegger, while trying to surpass the logic of the subject, continues to use it. In 'Being Singular Plural' Nancy argues that given Heidegger's statement that being-with is essential to *Dasein*:

... it needs to be made absolutely clear that *Dasein*, far from being either 'man' or 'subject,' is not even an isolated and unique 'one,' but is instead always the one, each one, with one another [*l'un-avec-l'autre*]. If this determination is essential, then it needs to attain to the co-originary dimension and expose it without reservation. But as it has often been said, despite this affirmative assertion of co-originary, he gives up on the step to the consideration of *Dasein* itself¹⁹⁴.

For Heidegger, being-with is one element of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world, one which is marginalized. For Nancy, being-with is the fundamental structure of Being itself. Because of this marginalization, and Heidegger's focus on the self, Heidegger falls into the implications of a language of subjectivity which he is trying to avoid. Nancy believes his approach solves this problem. This is not a difference of opinion over where the priority should be placed. Nancy argues that his approach is more accurate, more true to Being. A bit further on in 'Being Singular Plural' Nancy writes:

Heidegger writes, '*Dasein*'s ... understanding of Being already implies the understanding of others.' But this surely does not say enough. *The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others*, which means, in every sense, understanding others through 'me' and understanding 'me' through others, the understanding of one another [*des uns des autres*]. One

192"Shattered Love" 103 – 104.

193"Shattered Love" 104. Nancy makes a similar argument in 'Being Singular Plural'. There he is arguing that the 'with' is not an addition to Being but constitutes Being. He then argues that the metaphysics of subjectivity has understood it as the opposite – that sociality or intersubjectivity is some addition tacked onto a subject. He calls for a reversing of this priority, then writes: "Even Heidegger preserves this order of succession in a remarkable way, in that he does not introduce the co-originary of *Mitsein* until after having established the originary character of *Dasein*" (*BSP* 30 – 31).

194"BSP" 26.

could say even more simply that Being is communication¹⁹⁵.

A parallel argument appears later in the text. Here Nancy is again considering the subordinated position of *Mitsein* compared to *Dasein* in Heidegger's analysis. He then suggests that "It is necessary to forcibly reopen a passage somewhere beyond that obstruction which decided the terms of being-with's fulfillment, and its withdrawal, by replacing it with the 'people' and their 'destiny'"¹⁹⁶. Destiny is the way a resolute people engages itself, pursuing some joint venture. What Nancy is talking about by using the terms 'people' and 'destiny' is what might be called an exclusive or nationalist understanding of cultural identity. A culture is presented as something defined (perhaps by some pseudo-historical narrative) and which is to be followed to the exclusion of others and those who do not fit. Nancy is arguing that, for Heidegger, destiny – as being thrown into some pre-defined culture – is the fulfillment of being-with. This is clearly a problem for Nancy since it is the same as imposing a rigid identity on a community. 'Cultural identities' can be spoken of, but they need to be understood as open, changing entities (both in terms of their 'members' and in their interactions with other 'cultures'). Just as Heidegger continues to portray the self, inadvertently or not, in the logic of a subject, he makes the same mistake in portraying the community as a rigid identity or project.

I discussed Heidegger's insufficient exploration of the ways different cultures might interact. I believe Nancy's account is able to explain this in a more satisfactory fashion, if only because Nancy does offer some explicit discussion of this issue in 'Eulogy for Mêlée'. For Nancy, cultures interact, touch, inform each other. They do not mix in the sense of melting into each other but there are clear connections between different cultures. Their interaction makes each other possible.

The strongest point of Nancy's argument at this point is the charge that Heidegger's thought becomes trapped in the language of subjectivity which he is trying to avoid. Even though Heidegger insists that *Mitsein* is co-originary, even though there are convincing grounds for believing that his

¹⁹⁵"BSP" 27 – 28, my emphasis.

¹⁹⁶"BSP" 93.

treatment of liberating solicitude – however brief – is capable of presenting at least the groundwork for a praxis-based ethics, even an understanding of friendship, it is not sufficient. As several of the commentators discussed above pointed out, Heidegger must be forced and modified to get these kinds of readings. Nancy offers the explanation that this is because of Heidegger's failure to grasp the primary significance of being-with. He could not but fall back into the language of subjectivity because being-with was not considered as the most fundamental structure. The crucial question is whether Nancy's injunction to refigure fundamental ontology solves this problem. It appears that it does. By approaching the problem the way he does, Nancy is able to avoid the language of subjectivity – however awkward formulations like being-singular-plural may be – and is able to provide an account of being and community which overcomes the problems associated with Heidegger's account. However, it does bring about another set of problems which will become clear when we consider criticisms of Nancy in the secondary literature in the following section.

It is also important to carefully consider Nancy's assertion that for Heidegger, being-with's fulfillment lies in destiny and the people. Nancy believes that Heidegger's argument that being-with is fulfilled through destiny is inadequate. For Nancy this represents a limitation to being-with which is contrary to the ontology he is trying to present and is politically dangerous. This objection is not entirely fair to the argument Heidegger presents, though. When discussing fate and destiny, Heidegger emphasizes that Dasein does not necessarily take up its context as it is handed down. There is room for interpretation, dialogue, indeed a multiplicity of ways of taking up one's historical context.

Another recently translated text "The Being-With of Being-There"¹⁹⁷ provides a focused version of Nancy's criticism of Heidegger. Nancy argues that the concept *Mitsein* leaves three possible ways of thinking the 'common:' being-alongside, sharing of singularity, and something communal. Of this he writes:

¹⁹⁷"The Being-With of Being-There", Trans. Marie-Eve Norin. *Continental Philosophy Review*. 41/1 (2008), 1-15; hereafter "The Being-With of Being-There".

And this shortfall betrays without a doubt a fundamental disposition of our whole tradition: between two subjects, the first being 'the person' and the second 'the community,' there is no place left for the 'with,' nor in a more general way for that which would neither be a 'subject' (in the case of a self-constitution) nor a simple thing (in the sense of the things put simply beside one another, a sense of the *with* which Heidegger precisely wants to dismiss)¹⁹⁸.

He argues that Heidegger's account focuses on the first (in discussions of the they) and the last (in the discussions of historicity and destiny). In either case, as Nancy also argues in *Being Singular Plural*, "... the *with* has been hidden, lost or suppressed between the *Anyone* and the *people*"¹⁹⁹. Nancy argues that the middle option – the 'with' as the sharing out of already related beings – is the correct one. He writes: "multiplicity is not an attribute extrinsic to *Dasein*, since the concept of the *there* implies the impossibility of a unique and exclusive *there*. A *there* can only be exclusive – which it also inevitably is insofar as it is 'mine' – if it equally includes a multiplicity of other *theres*"²⁰⁰. The 'with' is already implied in the 'there'. Pointing out a 'location' requires relating it to other 'locations', which discloses that 'locations' are already interrelated. That is, *Dasein* is *Mitsein*. In trying to identify an 'individual' you encounter the relatedness of such an entity. Heidegger failed to see this because he pushed the 'with' into either the anonymous 'they' (beings standing beside each other) or some communal destiny (beings combining in some cultural mold), both of which are identities or subjects. Nancy writes: "As much as Heidegger felt with peculiar acuity the necessity of the primordially of the *with* ... he himself has erased the possibility he opened: namely, the possibility of thinking the *with* exactly as he had indicated, as neither in exteriority, nor in interiority"²⁰¹.

The way Nancy formulated the problem in "The Being-With of Being-There" is particularly clear and concise. Nancy's argument is that of the three – being alongside, sharing singularity and communal – only the middle one truly gets at how fundamental being-with is. Nancy is correct in arguing that Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, only presents being-with in terms of either the they (being

198 "The Being-With of Being-There" 5, Nancy's emphasis.

199 *Ibid*, Nancy's emphasis.

200 "The Being-With of Being-There" 10, Nancy's emphasis.

201 "The Being-With of Being-There" 11, Nancy's emphasis.

alongside) or in terms of destiny (communal). In both cases we are talking about some identity. Neither of these present the full significance of being-with. The with is constitutive of Dasein. Presenting it as either the they or destiny obscures this.

I will now examine three themes that Nancy believes exemplify the marginalized nature of being-with in Heidegger's analysis. These are death and community, the everyday, and curiosity. In 'The Inoperative Community' Nancy argues: "... Dasein's 'being-toward-death' was never radically implicated in its being-with"²⁰². Heidegger's analysis of being-toward-death focuses on death as the grounds of one's individuation. It is one's ownmost, non-relational possibility. Though being-with remains, in principle, equiprimordial, there does not seem to be any explicit connection drawn. For Nancy, as should be clear from the above section on finitude, death and birth are intrinsically linked to community. Death and birth, encountered through others, expose finitude. Death and birth expose me as a finite being – which as such is relational – and furthermore are outside the realm of my experience. I can never relive my birth, nor can I be there for my death. Nancy argues that community presents me with these otherwise inaccessible phenomena. Because of the link between death and community, Nancy believes that death and birth are phenomena that are disclosive of being-with, and thus essentially linked with community.

Nancy also argues that Heidegger's descriptions of the they and Dasein's everydayness are inadequate. For Nancy, what is encountered each time one encounters another is an other origin. Given this, the everyday for Nancy is "...constantly renewed rupture, intimate discord, polymorphy and polyphony"²⁰³ and further: "The 'ordinary' is always exceptional, however little we understand its character as origin"²⁰⁴. Each Dasein is an origin, that is, a locus point of the plurality of being and a bearer of meaning for Being. Of Heidegger, Nancy writes:

²⁰²"IC" 14.

²⁰³"BSP" 9.

²⁰⁴"BSP" 10.

Heidegger confuses the everyday with the undifferentiated, the anonymous, and the statistical. These are no less important, but they can only constitute themselves in relation to the differentiated singularity that the *everyday* already is by itself: each day, each time, day to day. One cannot affirm that the meaning of Being must express itself starting from everydayness and then begin by neglecting the general differentiation of the everyday²⁰⁵.

Nancy is arguing that the everyday is differential. Even 'undifferentiated' public opinion and uniformity is a playing out of singular-plural beings. Even in encountering 'just another person like any other' I am facing another being whose very being is differentiation and interplay.

Nancy gives a similar argument in relation to the theme of curiosity. He argues that "We find this alterity primarily and essentially intriguing. It intrigues us because it exposes the always-other origin ... This is why we are primarily and essentially *curious* about the world and about ourselves"²⁰⁶. Curiosity for Nancy is being drawn to alterity, the origin. It is ontological as well, for we are curious in our very beings (as finite, exposed beings always encountering other beings – origins). Heidegger's analysis of curiosity does not adequately see the connection with being-with, which seems to blind him to some of curiosity's ontological significance. Nancy writes: "For him [Heidegger], curiosity is the frantic activity of passing from being to being in an insatiable sort of way, without ever being able to stop and think. Without a doubt, this does testify to being-with-one-another, but it testifies to it without being able to gain access to the existent opening that characterizes *Dasein* in the 'instant'"²⁰⁷. For Heidegger, curiosity is a distracting phenomenon which prevents us from approaching being in an authentic manner. For Nancy, though, because of his differently focused ontology, curiosity is another force which discloses being-with. Something is curious because it is, like me, part of the plurality of being. I am drawn or enticed by some curious entity because it reveals being, my being, its being, the between.

Each of these three thematic examinations shows how the same concept radically changes when the underlying ontology is changed. By making being-with the primary ontological structure, Nancy is

205"BSP" 9.

206"BSP" 19.

207"BSP" 19 – 20.

able to think these themes in such a way that they make sense and cohere with the analysis of being-with. The interconnectedness of being plays out in these themes for Nancy in a way that it cannot for Heidegger. The question would then be whether these readings of curiosity, death and the everyday are more accurate than those given by Heidegger. Little could be done here in terms of verification as these are phenomenal interpretations. It is not a matter of something objective, but a matter of whether the readings accord with experience. In curiosity I am struck by something special or seemingly unusual. In the everyday, even though I may not notice it most of the time, I do encounter a plethora of beings in an ever-changing mixture which I may never see again and may never be the same again.

Nancy's case is that Heidegger failed to think being-with radically enough. Further, Nancy thinks that by refiguring fundamental ontology, he will be able to resolve the problems associated with Heidegger's analysis. The evidence Nancy presents – analyzing Heidegger's repeated 'falls' back into subjective thinking – is convincing for the first point. Certain aspects of Heidegger's arguments concerning being-with present enticing, fruitful bases, but overall, he failed to truly disclose the significance of being-with because he did not consider being-with as radically as Nancy does. The second point – that refiguring fundamental ontology is the solution – remains to be proven. I will explicitly engage this point at the close of the following section after having reviewed several critiques of Nancy's thought.

III. Critical Reception of Nancy's Thought

A major line of critical argument concerning Nancy's thought and ethics runs through three texts, starting with Nancy Fraser²⁰⁸, then to Robert Bernasconi²⁰⁹ and finally James Gilbert-Walsh²¹⁰. I

208Nancy Fraser, "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political?" in *Working Through Derrida*, Ed. Gary B. Madison, (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993) pp. 51 – 76; hereafter "French Derrideans".

209Robert Bernasconi, "On Deconstructing Nostalgia for Community within the West: The Debate Between Nancy and Blanchot," *Research in Phenomenology*, Volume 23, Number 1 (1993): pp 3 – 21; hereafter "Deconstructing Nostalgia".

210James Gilbert-Walsh, "Broken Imperatives: The Ethical Dimension of Nancy's Thought," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 26/2 (2000): pp. 29-50; hereafter "Broken Imperatives".

will present Nancy Fraser's argument first, followed by Bernasconi's slightly different articulation of it, finally, the two are responded to by Gilbert-Walsh.

Fraser's criticism is as follows: that Nancy's philosophy fails to engage politics precisely where it must. Fraser writes:

But just when such straightforwardly empirical and political argumentation is called for, just when *la politique* is about to be broached in earnest, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe remove themselves from the scene of conflict and draw back into quasi-Heideggerian speculation. They reflect on the 'essence of the political,' the 'delivery of the question of the political,' 'finitude,' the 'social bond,' an 'originary sociality,' 'the mother,' and a 'wholly transformed alterity.' The problem is not that such speculation is in itself useless or irrelevant. It is rather that it functions for Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe as a means of avoiding the step into politics which the logic of their own hopes and thought would otherwise drive them²¹¹.

Bernasconi offers a similar argument and a second criticism – that Nancy's account rejects alterity and thus has troubles with ethics. I will return to the second point below. Bernasconi writes:

In 1983 [first publication of 'The Inoperative Community'] Nancy had found the political meaning of community in the imperative 'we must not stop writing' (A, 48) ... In 1986 it was extended to say that one must also not stop 'letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself' (CD,100; IC,41) ... The imperative seemed to survive the phrase 'literary communism' itself. Nancy's 'Of Being-in-Common' presents another version of it: "Philosophy' and 'community' have this in common: a categorical imperative ... not to let go of the sense *in common*' (CD 233 – 34, 11 – 12). The commitment, therefore, seems to be increasingly to the articulation of an ontology²¹².

Bernasconi is saying that yes, Nancy does talk about this imperative in several places but it seems to always get directed towards some ontological enterprise, not to anything concrete. Bernasconi's second criticism is based on a comparison with Levinas. Bernasconi argues that the ethical for someone like Levinas requires that the Other "... puts the self in question"²¹³. As was noted above, Nancy wants to work away from a concept of the capitalized Other (something he believes would be immanent) to one of others. Bernasconi describes Nancy's account as: "... *partage*: a sharing that was also a division"²¹⁴. Bernasconi argues that for Nancy there is not any radical alterity because the self and other are essentially the same. He writes: "From a Levinasian perspective, Nancy's own ontological elucidation

211"French Derrideans" 71.

212"Deconstructing Nostalgia" 11.

213"Deconstructing Nostalgia" 12.

214"Deconstructing Nostalgia" 5.

of the 'inoperative community,' by rendering the face to face secondary, obliterates alterity. Nancy's account thus remains tied to the philosophy of immanence that Nancy himself sets out to avoid"²¹⁵. On this reading, Nancy's account falls into immanence because of the rejection of alterity (that is, the self and other are posed as the same, as 'one').

James Gilbert-Walsh, by offering a careful reading of what the imperative means for Nancy, gives a response to both of these criticisms. He writes:

I maintain that a rigorous reading of Nancy cannot but admit a certain retreat or reserve in his texts concerning the imperative as concretely voiced. Nevertheless – and this is what I will try to underscore here – the retreat in question is not simply a withdrawal from *praxis* into an abstract analysis of the 'conditions' underlying the imperative address; nor is the reserve a refusal to acknowledge the concrete alterity of the singular imperative address. This retreat and reserve mark, rather, an absolute (and, I will argue, absolutely practical) respect for the imperative, an affirmative response to its singular and determinative command²¹⁶.

He does this by arguing that the imperative and our being-in-common are closely tied, so much so that the imperative is the very 'event' of being – plurality, the mutual interacting of singularities, each 'one' crossing each 'other'²¹⁷. The 'event' is the imperative because it calls us forth to recognize and acknowledge our being-with. He writes:

An imperative, then, which somehow commands us – and commands us to *be us* – before any of us address any of the others. What is there in Nancy's thought that might 'call' prior to the 'us' which its call convokes? Only *être-avec* (it is worth noting that, in French, '*avec*!' can itself function as an imperative). This command can only be the event of being-in-common itself²¹⁸.

What the imperative commands is precisely 'to be' as Gilbert-Walsh said. Earlier I formulated a possible reading of ethics in Heidegger as 'practice being-with'; in Nancy the imperative is similar. The imperative 'practice being-with' is a directive to live according to the implications of being-with. Gilbert-Walsh suggests a twofold command: first, one is obligated to speak to others – that is, acknowledge the being-in-common that shares us out – and second, to "... at least listen to and respect

²¹⁵"Deconstructing Nostalgia" 12.

²¹⁶"Broken Imperatives" 31.

²¹⁷"Broken Imperatives" 43.

²¹⁸*Ibid*, Gilbert-Walsh's emphasis. Gilbert-Walsh tells us in note 24 that it was Nancy himself who pointed out the imperative nature of '*avec*!' to him.

the address of the addresser(s)”²¹⁹. Obeying this imperative would be “... at the very least, to *hold signification open*”²²⁰, that is, to engage the radically concrete event of being in an open manner – to speak and to listen, *to be as* (that is, according to) *being-with*. Gilbert-Walsh concludes:

Might we not be obliged then – concretely, but differently each time – to resist withholding any determinative utterance (be it imperative or indicative) from the play of the address-event? Might we not be obliged precisely to participate 'actively' in the movement of the address, to speak and/or listen, thereby allowing determinate utterances (categorical imperatives included) to stand forth in their own precarious, existenziell singularity, exposing their own constitutive 'default'?²²¹.

In the above sections, I mentioned several points where Nancy talks about imperatives or interruptive events: the origin, literature, being-in-common, love. Each of these is one of the modes of this imperative playing out. In each case the event of being-with, the raw interaction that is singular-plurality, calls upon each participant to recognize this ontic/ ontological fact and to comport him or herself accordingly. One should be open precisely because one *is* open. Closing oneself off, or seeking to close off the other is only possible on the basis of this prior openness, and is thus a privation. In the same way that hate is a 'black glimmer' of love, doing violence to the other (by imposing an essence either on one or on community, by negating, ignoring) is a privation of one's being-with; it is failing to hear/ answer, or being unwilling to hear/ answer the command of the imperative. Gilbert-Walsh argues that this presentation of Nancy's thought answers both criticisms above. First, Gilbert-Walsh argues that the concrete is engaged. The concrete is not engaged in the sense of some grand political activity, but nevertheless, is as concrete as such a thinking could authentically be (since specifying some grand political program would violate the call to hold signification open). Second, alterity is not cast aside here but is refigured, or, as Gilbert-Walsh puts it, 'inflected'. He writes: “There can be neither 'we'/'I' nor 'you' (nor *Autrui*) prior to this command, for such indices first emerge only as 'addressed' by the command. It is the archi-imperative address itself which is radically other (and other than itself)”²²².

219"Broken Imperatives" 44.

220"Broken Imperatives" 45, Gilbert-Walsh's emphasis.

221"Broken Imperatives" 46.

222"Broken Imperatives" 44.

Alterity is not the capitalized Other, it is the other in me, in you, as the between that shares us. This inflected alterity has the same basic ethical force that the radical Other of Levinas has: it calls forth to answer the imperative's command.

Another similar criticism offered by Andrew Norris²²³ allows another defense of Nancy to come forth. Norris argues that Nancy's thought constitutes "a political philosophy that is, however theoretically brilliant, strangely removed from the political"²²⁴. He argues that Nancy's call for us to be our being-with would amount to political decisions being groundless. There would be no criteria to decide which politics is more desirable than another, and particular politics cannot become rigidly defined identities since that would violate being-with. Choosing one or another would appear to be contrary to authentically engaging the political. Norris writes: "Our decisions, it seems, will be guided by a critical suspicion of those things that have hitherto served as their most common guides"²²⁵. Later on, he will qualify this attitude as essentially ironic (I will return to this). He argues that at most a 'negative' politics can be formed here²²⁶. He observes:

If our being is, as Nancy argues, non-self-identical, then it is a perverse misunderstanding of who we are to seek absolute unanimity or absolute communal identity. Difference is something that must be respected. If freedom is the central good of politics, respect is its most important virtue ...

The first thing to be said of this proposed principle is that it is essentially negative in character.

...

It rules out those political engagements that deny respect for difference. The second thing to note about our proposed principle is that it will determine not just our relations with those whom we determine to be different from us, those who fall outside our borders, as it were. It will also determine our relation to our *own* political identities. It will rule out commitments that fail to 'consciously' acknowledge the areality of those identities. In other words, it will only allow for essentially *ironic* forms of political identity.

The principle of respect calls us to recognize our being-with and act accordingly – that is recognize the folly of politics that seek rigid unanimity. What this leads to is that we must recognize our own political context as another groundless one amongst others. If we are to engage our context it cannot be

²²³Andrew Norris, "Jean-Luc Nancy and the Myth of the Common," *Constellations*, 7/2 (2000): pp. 272-295; hereafter "Myth of the Common".

²²⁴"Myth of the Common" 285.

²²⁵*Ibid.*

²²⁶"Myth of the Common" 286.

in such a way that we raise it to immanence. Ironically taking up one's political identity would be like acknowledging that I am of this context and will work with it, but ultimately understand it as groundless and further must refuse to consider it an identity in any immanent sense. Norris argues that this actually undercuts the principle of respect since "What must be respected is not other identities, but other *ironies*, other ironic undercuttings of political identity"²²⁷. What is respected in an ironic approach to one's own context and others' is the ironic approach as such, not an identity. It is not about respecting the culture of group a, b, c, but rather or respecting their recognition of the groundlessness and relational character of their cultures.

I will take Norris' criticism as twofold: first, the charge that Nancy's 'politics' is at best negative, and second, that it must take the form of irony which precludes any serious political engagement. Against the first criticism, one could simply reply that a negative approach is the only one possible, considering the implications of the ontology Nancy is exploring. It is not that Nancy has failed to provide a better answer but rather that no other answer could be given if one is to be true to the ontology. That would be conceding too much, though. I would argue, with Gilbert-Walsh, that Nancy's project is not strictly speaking negative. Of course it has its moments – certainly all political projects, as part of identifying themselves, identify what they are not. Nevertheless, it does present, in the form of the imperative Gilbert-Walsh clarified, a command to activity which is as positively defined as is possible. Injunctions like: 'hold signification open' and 'engage others with an open comportment' may seem no different from the negative 'don't close off', but these injunctions are different in an important manner. The latter gives no direction; the former does, though what direction it gives is necessarily vague and indeterminate. It cannot give directions in the sense of a rulebook or guidebook, but it can direct one to alter one's mode of being, one's comportment towards others, in such a way that one engages with them as one is (that is, as already with, already shared out). One's relationship to culture

²²⁷"Myth of the Common" 287.

(one's own and others') is modified, as was discussed in the above section on culture. The 'ironic' attitude adopted towards culture does not mean that one respects the ironic attitude itself and not the culture/ other cultures. It is a comportment that has a double purpose: disarming and disclosive. It disarms in the sense that, by recognizing the relational, non-immanent nature of culture, one is on guard against totalitarianism. It discloses in that it allows one to recognize the essential indebtedness and interchange that makes and makes possible 'my' culture and 'your' culture. If culture is the *mêlée* then the comportment to be directed towards it is not one of seeing it as groundless and arbitrary. Rather, one recognizes that there is something real here, and of value, a polyphonic interchange and intermingling which can be taken up without violating being-with, so long as one is vigilant against attempts to make that 'identity' immanent. So long as one earnestly recognizes and acknowledges the inflected form of culture and identity, one can take them up in an 'authentic' manner.

Another thinker, Andreas Wagner²²⁸, explicitly examines Norris's arguments. Wagner contends that Nancy's thought is not merely a negative politics. He argues that we can interpret a 'theory of communicative *praxis*' in Nancy's work but that ultimately the practical application needs more fleshing out than Nancy has given²²⁹. Wagner explains this *praxis* thus:

... a *praxis* that on the one hand 'does justice' to the naked *with* of the being-with and that on the other hand, while remaining fully present and effective, withdraws rather principally from any domination. ... The *praxis* of such a sovereignty would be 'apolitical' in as much as it would not weigh in a power – or autonomy – oriented context. But it would be 'political' in as much as it would cross every such context, in as much as, while it could not be brought to bear directly against domination, it still would have destabilizing effects on domination. This *praxis* may then well be the 'most political' that Nancy is able to think in the framework of his approach, but *how exactly* does he think it?²³⁰.

Again, similarly to Gilbert-Walsh, Wagner is arguing that some minimal sort of positive description of 'political' engagement is articulated by Nancy. Doing justice to the *with* implies the same open comportment described above. Strictly speaking, Nancy's project is not entirely negative, though what

228Wagner, Andreas, "Jean-Luc Nancy: a Negative Politics?" *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 32/1 (2006): pp 89-109; hereafter "A Negative Politics?"

229"A Negative Politics?" 90.

230"A Negative Politics?" 97.

its positive content might be remains relatively indeterminate. Wagner believes that this indeterminacy could perhaps be filled in by some sort of 'Nancyian' critique of practical political institutions²³¹. He argues that there is a beginning of this type of project given in Nancy's discussion of justice. Justice, he explains, opens the space between relations of power and being-with, it is hoped, forcing the sphere of power relations to acknowledge being-with²³². Nevertheless, the power relations, justice, and their relation needs more detailed analysis.

What the scholarly debate on the possibility of an ethics in Nancy amounts to is that we cannot dismiss his thought as 'retreating into the ideal' or 'merely negative.' The many shatters of being-with call us forth to a practical mode of being, a comportment, a *praxis*. One should act in such a way that one is true to being-with. There is no guidebook, for each event, by its very structure, presents us with something different. On the one hand the indeterminacy seems justified, considering the ontology Nancy has given and the need to avoid immanence. On the other hand, it seems like, with a proper examination of concrete political structures, one could at least say something determinate. Perhaps this is where writing becomes crucial. I will return to this shortly.

It remains to be judged whether Nancy's call to refigure fundamental ontology is justified. After all, has this approach resolved the problems he raises against Heidegger's fundamental ontology? We are faced with a parallel problem concerning ethics and practical considerations. That question will be considered in a moment. What I am concerned with now is whether Nancy's approach has overcome the problems he argues are associated with Heidegger's failure to make being-with primary. If we recall, the two primary points discussed in "The Being-With of Being-There" were that Heidegger presented being-with in terms of either the "they" or destiny: as either an immanence of the individual or an immanence of a cultural or people. If Nancy's approach is capable of avoiding this problem, then it has at least partially proven itself. For Nancy, the 'individual' is singular-plural; it is what it is

²³¹"A Negative Politics?" 101.

²³²"A Negative Politics?" 102.

because it is interrelated with the rest of being. This is not immanence; this is not a subject in the usual sense. I am who I am because I am ontologically open – that is, everything about me was formed and continues to form through interactions with other beings. Culture operates in the same way. The presentation of culture that Nancy has given us allows us to talk, albeit in a refigured sense, about cultural identity without talking about something rigid and ossified (immanent). Culture is plural and open. This is not to say there is nothing to it, just that it is what it is only because of the interaction that makes it possible. In both cases Nancy is sticking with the middle option he discussed in "The Being-With of Being-There", that is, the sharing of singularity. 'Culture' and the 'individual' are discussed as different ways being-with occurs.

Another point of evaluation is whether Nancy's presentation of ethics is in any way better than Heidegger's. If we consider the secondary literature, there is certainly less contention as far as Nancy is concerned. In the secondary literature I considered above, at least from Bernasconi on, it is accepted that there is an ethics in Nancy's thought. The dispute is about the exact nature of this ethics and how effective it is. By contrast, in the secondary literature on Heidegger, each thinker who believes there is an ethics in Heidegger's thought feels it is necessary to provide an argument for that position. That there is an ethics in Heidegger's thought remains a contentious issue. The difference between the reception of ethics in Nancy's thought and Heidegger's thought may simply be due to the larger amount of writing that is explicitly related to ethics in Nancy's corpus compared to Heidegger's. Further, though Nancy's ethics seems to suffer from the parallel problem of indeterminacy, that indeterminacy is adequately justified in Nancy's system. Nancy is willing to explicitly approach the issue of ethics even though, as critics point out, he does not engage in overtly concrete discussions. He gestures towards the style of thinking which he thinks best accomplishes the ethics he is advocating (the call in 'Literary Communism' to keep writing for example). He presents fascinating glimpses of his imperative throughout his texts. These force us to read more deeply, to interrogate the text and ourselves. I believe

that, through the praxis of writing, Nancy is attempting to begin the dialogues and stir questions and interest in his readers so that each of them can work towards this ethos he is advocating. He cannot give a rulebook, so he must do what he can to gesture at ways that each reader might come to understand what he is talking about. I believe, at the least, Nancy's system is more capable of exploring these issues than Heidegger's.

In the final chapter to follow I will, if I may be so bold, attempt writing in this sense. I will first, briefly explore what I believe would be the practical implications of Nancy's understanding of ethics in a general sense. Then I will approach the issue of these practical implications in a more particular sense via an angle which I see developing out of Nancy's discussion of Love. Rather than looking for answers in terms of what I will call 'large scale politics' (governments, laws,) why not consider how Nancy's proposed *praxis* might play out in 'small scale politics' ('individual' relationships, friendships)?

3. What is to be done?

Nancy is not blind to the fact that the kind of work he is doing implies some kind of politics²³³. Nor do I believe that his resistance to describing a 'politics' is simply evasiveness on his part. He is taking the injunction which he believes arises from understanding being-with very seriously. 'Holding signification open', as I have argued, does not prevent us from having politics or cultures – indeed it forces a new understanding of them -, but it does preclude giving prescriptive political statements, save only the most carefully phrased (such as 'hold signification open'). To be true to his analysis, Nancy cannot say anything more 'specific' than this. We can ask, however, what has he said? Being's most primary structure is being-with. As such, 'individual' beings are what they are only through the interrelation that spaces them out (hence the concept singular-plural). Community is the 'playing out' of

²³³In the introduction of 'The Inoperative Community' he writes: "The place where these texts originate is not one political place among others. It is not a question of a political position that I hold, or might like to hold, in accordance with a political option or ideal, or even a political ideology and program. However, it is not independent from an unchanging and definite political determination, which I would say, to be simple and direct, while not wishing to be simplistic, comes *from the left*" ("Preface", xxxvi, Nancy's emphasis).

this ontology. But there is more here: because Being is being-with, because we, our institutions, our truths, are relational, we are able to realize that it is contrary to Being to take these things as rigid. From this we can draw a basic ethical framework: 'be open to being-with'. What *can* this mean? Most obviously it demands a sense of openness: to listen; to speak with; to recognize the subtle interweaving of others in me and me in others ('my culture' in 'theirs' and 'theirs' in 'mine'). It demands resistance: to immanence, to violence, to exclusion. It demands respect: my ideology, my political program, my culture, are all of the same status as those of others. Cultures are neither superior nor inferior to each other; they are with each other. It demands equality and resistance to discrimination. To some degree, it is possible to talk about 'large scale' ways of enacting these. Surely it is not going too far to overturn racist laws, enact laws guaranteeing equal wages. Equally important, though, is the fact that what underlies these tasks is an ethos which cannot be legislated. This does not mean that we ignore legislation; it has its purpose. But, it has to coincide with developing a consciousness of the ethics of being open on the part of each individual. I would like to concern myself primarily with this aspect, leaving more detailed discussions of general or large scale political activities for others.

I will explore the possibility of 'grounding' Nancy's project in something more akin to the concrete 'politics' critics call for. I will do this by a different approach than might be expected: by considering the status of 'individual' to 'individual' relationships – particularly friendship – in Nancy's thought as it has been presented here. Individual relationships, indeed all interactions, are modes of politics for Nancy. Recall his politics/ the political distinction, where the former refers to the various ways being-with occurs and the latter refers to the ontological structure which underlies and makes possible politics. By making the term "politics" very broad, Nancy is able to include elements of people's lives which might not be considered part of politics (in the sense of lawmaking or governance) but clearly are part of politics since they both influence how we choose between political alternatives, and are where our political lives occur. Even a politician's life occurs at a level of interaction with

others. Since it would be problematic to attempt to impose the ethics Nancy's project implies onto people, the remaining option is to investigate how it might be accepted and spread through individual interactions.

Two points of clarification first. What I will present as a difference between 'large scale' and 'small scale' politics is not a dichotomy present in Nancy writings themselves. As we have seen, Nancy tends to collapse such dichotomies – politics/ the political, ontic/ ontological – into a relation. I suspect something similar would be applicable here. All I seek to emphasize by these terms is the difference between phenomena like legislation, governance, organization of groups (such as protests or other forms of activism), and what takes place on what we might call a more 'intimate' level. That is not to hold these two types of events completely apart though as there are certainly elements of each in the other. Obviously 'individual' relationships take place in large scale events (one could meet and have a deep conversation with another at a rally), and there is likely some impact of large scale actions on the possibilities open for individuals (the overturning of a racist law separating one ethnic group from another in schools could open the door to an intermixing of the two groups which would allow people to meet who might not have met otherwise). The second point is that while I focus on friendship, we must keep in mind Nancy's injunction in "Shattered Love" not to hierarchize among types of love. No single type of love is given any privileged position for Nancy. I am not trying to present friendship as an exemplar. I focus on friendship here because first, it simply focuses the discussion and second, friendship is typically considered one of the more 'political' forms of love.

The problem, it seems, with trying to provide a concrete description of how Nancy's project might play out in terms of politics on the large scale is that it would violate its own imperative. One is supposed to 'hold signification open.' Saying that one should pursue one model of politics over another seems contrary to that injunction. As I suggested above, the task of writing may allow some leeway in this respect. I may propose a possible way of approaching concrete issues through this discussion of

friendship but I certainly cannot present that as canon. It is possible to propose some points. For example: 'resist politics which seek to impose a single essence on community' or 'engage with others in an open, dialogical fashion.' However, if what we seek are answers to more particular, thorny issues, these general points don't seem to provide much assistance. It could be argued that this is precisely the point – that the *praxis* called for is a style, an active, decision-making comportment that must be developed by each person and cannot, as such, be quantified or legislated (I will return to a version of this idea below). But for Wagner: "... how can any style be the sovereignty that is a detriment to domination, that undermines or even opposes domination?"²³⁴. How can such a comportment provide real resistance to fascism or totalitarianism? Surely those who have such comportment would be opposed to fascism, but that provides no defense within the structure of the society itself, nor does it seem capable of stopping those who simply don't agree or refuse to 'be open'²³⁵. Wagner is optimistic that, given a thorough critique of systems of power done in Nancyian terms, one might be able to say something determinate without violating the imperative to practice being-with. Such critiques remain to be undertaken but lie outside the parameters of this project.

I am arguing that in order for some political change based on an ontology of being-with to be effective – and possibly for any political change – it is important that the members who make up that polis recognize and accept the change and its underlying arguments. For example, affirmative action legislation, whose intention is to 'level the playing field' and play a part in combating inequality and

234 "A Negative Politics?" 100.

235 Curiously, one could ask whether refusing totalitarian politics is not contrary to the imperative. I do not believe this is a very difficult issue to get out of though. Since totalitarian politics are those which seek to close off or refuse the very multiplicity of being-with, the resistance to it is necessarily implied in the injunction 'hold signification open.' Nor does it seem fair to request of Nancy's project that it provide permanent, structural defense against totalitarianism. It is not simply a matter of adjusting our laws to make it impossible, that is absurd. Even if such laws could exist, it would only take one person willing to ignore them, or a powerful group and indifferent populace for them to be overturned or violated. Alongside, and at least equally important to the legal or legislative concerns, it is a matter of people – 'individuals' engaging with and sharing dialogue with each other – recognizing the wrongness of such politics and actively resisting any tendency towards them. If the individuals subject to a set of laws do not understand them and see why they should live by them then those laws are useless even if obeyed. Each individual must 'be open' of his or her own accord.

racism, may not be understood as such by some of the people the law affects. In some cases it may even create more resentment and racial tension than existed before. If one of the primary goals of such legislation is to combat racism and inequality, then, in those instances, it has failed. The failure, I would argue, is, at least in part, because the controversial decision was made at some unknown governmental level with little or no input from the majority of the population. When such decisions are made without consultation with people, those who really need to be convinced are not likely to be convinced. It is possible that some of these people could be convinced if engaged on an individual to individual level²³⁶.

I would argue that the kind of change being called for by Nancy is not something that can be attained from a strictly 'top-down' approach (that is, making laws, changing policies, holding rallies). Some of the work is certainly to be done at such a level – overturning clearly racist laws seems to be a clear example – but a whole other element is to be pursued from the 'bottom-up.' One can change a law, but if the people who are subject to that law don't agree, then that change is impotent. One can overturn racist policies but members of the populace may remain racist, and may even become more entrenched. A change in attitude, comportment on the part of 'individuals' is necessary for such changes to be effective. Both elements – 'large scale' and 'small scale' – are necessary, but with respect to the critic's calls for concrete politics, I believe it is a question of the former and not the latter. We cannot adequately consider the practical applicability of Nancy's project in real-world politics without also considering the nature of the *praxis* for 'individuals'²³⁷.

The *praxis* called for is an attitude, a lifestyle, a comportment. This is something each person must develop and maintain by living it. In this context one could perhaps talk about policy or law changes, perhaps educational practices that allow for or encourage such a comportment or other such

²³⁶Of course they would have to be open to the possibility of dialogue. There are always some who refuse to change and refuse to even be open to the possibility. The existence of such people and mindsets does not reflect negatively on what I am proposing here since it is their failure to 'be open to being-with', not a failure on the part of what I am arguing.

²³⁷There is a measure of redundancy here. Of course *praxis* is something individual.

things. One can also talk about the way such lifestyle changes develop through our everyday interactions with others – reading²³⁸, speaking, listening. I have been arguing for Nancy's notion of writing for some time now, but perhaps it is not as potent as Nancy would like us to believe. Does reading or writing a text within this tradition of thought have an impact on the reader(s) or writer(s)? Initially, a defender of Nancy could easily respond that each person must 'be open to being-with' if this relationship is to be effective. Some people do not open themselves and thus the process cannot work. That does partially answer the objection, but another element remains troubling. How can reading or writing a text have such a significant effect on me, my worldview, my comportment with others. First of all, nothing can make me 'be open'; only I can take up that mode of being. That being said, some experiences can 'shake me up' so to speak, and make me more aware of the stakes. My everyday unawareness of the connection I share with the rest of being is interrupted, and I am made aware of that connection, and its ethical significance. The relationship of leaping ahead described by Heidegger is precisely that kind of interruptive experience. Given Nancy's favorable interpretation of leaping ahead, I believe it is legitimate to talk about it here. A person can leap ahead, why not a text? Nancy is arguing that writing is capable of interruptive gestures²³⁹. What is interrupted in literature is myth, a narrative of some immanence. The interruption of myth brings those involved to recognize the arbitrariness of ossified worldviews, and further, to recognize the relational nature of Being. This is an individual to individual event also. I see no reason why the ethos of writing cannot be carried over into everyday 'face to face' interactions.

An interaction on an 'individual' level, as argued in "Shattered Love", can be an interruptive and

238A text could perhaps be seen as a 'top down' type of activity – an argument or command is written and disseminated to a large number of people. It can also be seen as a type of friendship. True enough, author and reader may never meet but a type of sharing takes place, and perhaps even a peculiar type of mutuality. The author gives, and in a way receives (being read, agreed with, disagreed with, able to touch lives he or she never physically meets), and the reader receives and in a way gives. Derrida discusses this sort of thing as what he calls 'friendship with the dead' in *Politics of Friendship* (Derrida, Jacques, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins, (London, Verso, 2005)).

Nancy's ethos of writing is implied here also.

239"Its [literature] essence is composed only in the act that interrupts, with a single stroke – by an incision and/ or an inscription – the shaping of the scene of myth" ("Literary Communism", 71 – 72).

disclosive event; it can call one forth to the imperative. One is cut across, and likewise the other is cut across, both called to recognize being-with. Presumably, upon recognizing this, one is capable of reaching out to others, to try to help them recognize it also. One could write a book, try to convince those of one's close circle, perhaps speak to a stranger. And of course, as the imperative requires, one listens as well as speaking. Friendship in particular is a relationship where this kind of mutual interchange takes place and enters the realm of pedagogy²⁴⁰. I would propose that we consider friendship in terms of a mutuality that necessarily contains a mutual pedagogy²⁴¹, at least partially based on Nancy's reading of Heidegger's concept of leaping ahead. The inclusion of pedagogy and the concept of leaping ahead should bring to mind the above mentioned argument of Robert Dostal that Heidegger's account of leaping ahead, by presenting a teacher/ student model does not provide an adequate account of friendship. Even though I have already argued against this with respect to Heidegger, I will return to it again here. The account I am giving here does not suffer from this shortcoming. For one, what I mean by pedagogy and what Dostal means by teacher/ student are not equivalent, and second, this does not exclude all the other elements of friendship (affection, sharing, difference). Nor do I believe I am simply describing one type of friendship among others. Rather, it is the case that the pedagogical element I am speaking of is an element contained in all friendships to some degree. It is not necessarily conscious. We learn from each other whether we intend to or not, whether 'all' we share is moments of intimacy and sorrow or whether we regularly engage in philosophical discussions. The extreme solicitude of leaping ahead, at least for Heidegger, requires awareness and authenticity on the part of the one who leaps and this seems correct, considering what is

²⁴⁰It proves difficult to find an English word that speaks of teaching and learning without strong professional implications. Pedagogy implies a teacher, the profession of teaching. Learning and education seem steeped in connotations of the classroom. What I am trying to express here is the general sense of learning and teaching, which does not necessarily take place in any structured environment but rather takes place all of the time. In this sense friendship is pedagogical since it is a relationship where I am always bumping up against/ with another consciousness, being presented with their perspective, being forced to see myself outside myself – 'through the friend's eyes' so to speak – all of which inevitably 'teach' me in a variety of ways.

²⁴¹Recall Aristotle's discussion of friendship between unequals where the inequality is equalized (discussed above).

being attempted. One is trying to call the other forth to recognize his or her ownmost self, to recognize the 'truth of his or her being' as it were. For Nancy, the cutting across of love can have the same effect. Presumably this is not something done lightly. That is not to suggest it would be a somber affair, though; one could imagine any number of ways leaping ahead could play out. This would be a very strong form of the pedagogical element, and it can, I believe, be mapped onto the event of love.

As said above, a moment or event of love calls us forth to the imperative. There is nothing in Nancy's description to indicate that this is a strictly passive experience. One could, in an activity akin to leaping head, engage with others in such a way that the imperative called forth by the event of love is shown to them. It is a teaching concerned with letting the other become aware of the imperative. In a way this is what is going on when Nancy writes his texts and sends them forth. The call for writing, speaking, listening can, among other things, be taken as a call for the kind of sharing that takes place in friendship. But how does this help answer the critics?

This description provides an account of how the comportment called for can spread to enough people to make a difference without that spreading being an imposition. Friends are not forced to think alike; they engage each other openly. Of course this means that not everyone will be convinced, but that is true of any project. The ethical framework presented by Nancy makes at least one thing clear: we cannot impose upon others without violating being-with. The only option available is to engage each other, talk, write, discuss. Concrete political activity already occurs in this way. People see a problem with something, they meet, discuss it, try to figure out what went wrong, how to resolve it, then try to convince others to accept their solution. The problem in political activity occurs when, instead of asking 'how do we engage with others and convince them that this is a worthwhile path?', politics asks 'how do we use our money/ power/ influence to manipulate enough people to accomplish our goals?'. The latter certainly gets results, but not ones which most would consider to be in accord with a just political system. Part of what is essential to Nancy's project is making sure we do not lose

sight of the fact that politics is based on being-with, which means it is sharing; it is dialogical. The imperative can address us in a variety of ways (through love, through writing, through some other event). In each case it calls us forth, to recognize being-with, to be open to being-with, to hold signification open. This, like Heidegger's notion of authenticity, is something that is the responsibility of each Dasein. Nobody can make me have this ethos. They can, however, help me find my way to it.

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