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Cover image: Aristotle Studying Animals (1791).
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The Influence of Hegel’s *Weltgeist*
on Nietzsche’s Death of God

Ji Hoon Kim

Hegel is a prominent German idealist who is widely recognized for his influential works on the philosophy of history and philosophy of religion. Nietzsche, another prominent German philosopher, is widely recognized for such influential works as *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This paper seeks to explain how the Hegel’s concept of Spirit prepares the way for Nietzsche’s pronouncement of the death of God. In his works, Hegel claims that Spirit is immanent in our history, and through history it externalizes itself in order to recognize itself. The concept of *Weltgeist*, the world spirit, acquiring the truth about its self-consciousness through our history, contributes to the development of Nietzsche’s claim that God is dead.

Hegel claims that consciousness is acquired through experiences (Kaufmann 46). An individual cannot become aware of himself in solitude, but only through experiences with others. An individual may believe that he can acquire consciousness on his own and become certain about himself; but even if one may perceive a limited truth about oneself, this self-obtained consciousness is merely subjective. This subjective self-consciousness is challenged when the individual encounters other human beings. When self-consciousness is encountered by another self-consciousness, it becomes an object in the eyes of the other. How one conceives of oneself as an isolated individual is not necessarily true in the eyes of others. As a result, the truth about this subjective self-consciousness is no longer absolute; in fact, it becomes an abstract truth. Self-consciousness must overcome its own otherness to itself, and in order to do this it needs to be recognized by others (Hegel 111). This otherness can be overcome through encounters and experiences with other conscious beings. Conversely, the other conscious being also has to overcome its otherness in others. Acquiring self-consciousness is therefore a dialectical process. The truth about one’s self-consciousness can only be acquired when there is a mutual recognition. Through this mutual recognition, two self-conscious individuals can find and recognize the truth about themselves through one another. “They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another” (Hegel 112). In this mutual recognition, two independent self-conscious beings become dependent on each other to be fully aware of themselves.

Although individuals can attain the truth about their consciousness through mutual recognitions of one another, this truth is not yet complete. Whereas humans are finite beings living in a finite world, there is a being that is outside the realm of our finite world. Just as an individual needs to overcome his or her otherness in other people, humans within this finite world, as a community, need to overcome their otherness.
in the eternal being. Conversely, the eternal being has to attain the truth about itself by overcoming its otherness in humans. This is where the concept of the Weltgeist comes into play in Hegel’s works. The Weltgeist is the world spirit, and the world spirit acquires self-consciousness only through us (Kaufmann 47). As individuals require experiences with others to recognize themselves, the Weltgeist also requires experiences with humans to recognize itself. Unless the Weltgeist externalizes itself, the truth about itself remains subjective. It needs to externalize itself to be objectified so that it can acquire the truth about itself, and our history is the Weltgeist’s means to externalize itself: that is, to be objectified so that it can overcome its otherness. By overcoming its otherness, Spirit obtains true knowledge about its own essence as free, and the acquisition of this knowledge is the highest goal of Spirit (Hegel 75).

As Spirit externalizes itself through our history in order to obtain true knowledge about itself, humans also need to overcome our absolute otherness in Spirit so that we can be fully aware of ourselves. Overcoming our absolute otherness in Spirit, as we are conscious of it, requires a unity among us. Humans need to overcome this otherness of Spirit as a community (Harris 61). The reason is that the Weltgeist must undergo experience over a lengthy time to become aware of itself, and the Weltgeist takes upon itself tremendous labors of world history; therefore, it is impossible for an individual to overcome the absolute otherness of Spirit within one’s lifetime (Kaufmann 46). Since an individual, within his or her lifespan, cannot overcome the otherness of Spirit to acquire knowledge of our consciousness, humans need to work as a community to overcome the otherness of Spirit. When humans, as a community, overcome this otherness of the Spirit, we can fully attain the truth about our consciousness (Harris 81). When we overcome this otherness in Spirit, we can establish a mutual recognition with Spirit and obtain the truth about our self-consciousness.

Even though Hegel doesn’t directly mention it, for Hegel Geist is God (Harris 61). Can humans, as a community, overcome the absolute otherness in God? Or do we require something more than a communal effort to overcome our otherness in God? There needs to be some sort of mechanism that will allow us human beings to overcome our otherness in God so that we can establish a mutual recognition with God. Hegel demonstrates his position that humans already have acquired this mechanism. In Christian doctrine, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was incarnated among us in human form. This divine person dwelt among us to allow humans to achieve eternal life. By his death on the cross and his resurrection, Jesus Christ has defeated death and has allowed us to be reconciled with God in his eternal kingdom.

Hegel argues that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ allowed us to be re-united with God, and allowed us to establish a mutual recognition with God. The Church teaches that after Jesus’s resurrection from the dead, God sent down the
Spirit to live among us, inspire us, and guide us. The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ led us to grasp that the universality of Spirit as Spirit dwells among us in the Church. This allowed us to overcome the absolute otherness of God and be reconciled with God. “What is ultimately significant is not the crucifixion and resurrection of this particular man, but the insight it affords into the universal nature of Spirit; the negation of the negative, the reconciliation of the finite, with the infinite, dying in order to live” (Gregor 6). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have become historical moments that Spirit required to obtain truth about its being. It was a historical event that God had to experience: to externalize himself in order to recognize himself. “There Hegel describes the negative as an essential moment within the life of Spirit, something that is revealed pre-eminently in the crucifixion” (Gregor 5). Even though Hegel thinks that the crucifixion was an actual historical event, he doesn’t quite believe that the resurrection was an actual historical event. The incarnate God, Jesus Christ, did die on the cross; he is resurrected, however, in the spirit of the church-community (Gregor 6).

In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel argues that the finite human community projects an image of its own infinite ground in thought, and God is this projected image. This projected image of God is not simply an image of idealistic thoughts that humans have projected to wish for or fear, however; rather, the image of God comes from our knowledge of things we can achieve in our world (Harris 81). For Hegel, God is—has his being—as the subject of human community, providing guidance and harmony therein. “The realization of Spirit is not the recognition that I am myself God, but that we are all God, that Spirit pervades and defines all of us” (Solomon and Higgins 187). As a result, God is no longer an absolutely mysterious spiritual being that gives us rules to follow. God is the communal morals that humans have developed to follow for the sake of harmony in a human community.

This idea of God as a collective guide for the human community contributes to the development of Nietzsche’s idea of the death of God. This claim may sound bit ironic since Nietzsche is known for emphasizing the importance of individuality over community. Before we can fully understand this concept, we first need to identify a historical connection between Hegel and Nietzsche. Feuerbach, a German materialist philosopher, provides an essential link between Hegel’s concept of the *Weltgeist* and Nietzsche’s death of God. Feuerbach develops his idea that theology is reducible to anthropology by arguing that humans have projected a perfect image, one we desire but cannot achieve, into God, who essentially represents the highest human qualities (Pirie 125). God symbolizes the communal values that we yearn for and desire. Humans have projected these communal values into this imaginary being “God” so that we can look up to him as an example to follow. Our consciousness of God mediates our own human self-consciousness. In
In The Gay Science, Nietzsche writes that God is dead and we are all his murderers. When Nietzsche claims that God is dead, he doesn’t mean it literally. He is not saying that an actual divine being died. Rather, he is arguing that human communal values, rooted in Christian faith and practice, have collapsed. Hegel presented his idea of the universality of Spirit, arguing that God is our subject and guide to preserve harmony in our community. As Hegel wrote, God is this projected image, and religion is a system that humans created in order to achieve harmony. “Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. By breaking one concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole; nothing necessary remains in one’s hands” (Small 193).

Nietzsche’s claim concerning the death of God occurs when this system of Christianity, the communal values, breaks down. We see this in the first part of Thus Spoke Zarathustra. After spending years in the mountains, Zarathustra talks to a hermit and is surprised to discover that he has not yet heard that God is dead. With this understanding, he comes down from the mountain and goes to preach to people that God is dead, and that people have to create new values. He tells the crowd in a marketplace that they should focus on this worldliness, and tells them about the “last man,” whose way of life is defined by the desire for safety, security, and easy comforts. In other words, the last man exhibits a deep lack of will or spirit. Zarathustra presents the last man as a contemptible being, but the crowd cries: “Turn us into this last man!” The crowd desires to live a life of inverted happiness, easy comforts, and lack of will or spirit. Therefore, the crowd asks him how they can achieve this type of life. In order to fully grasp this idea, there is a need for us to analyze the story of Zarathustra.

As mentioned before, God is the image of the communal values that people themselves have projected. People believe in God and try to abide by his laws so that they can have peace and harmony in this world. Since this image of God is the image that people look up to and subject themselves to, however, the fall of this image will bring disorder into our world. As a result, the community continues to believe in God to keep order in their human world. Zarathustra withdraws from the community and lives a life of solitude in mountains. By thus withdrawing, he is able to disengage himself from these communal values and understand that there are other values that we should pursue besides communal values. The death of God symbolizes the challenges that individuals make against the conventional standards and rules created by mass society. When Zarathustra announces to people in the marketplace that God is dead, he is not talking to believers but to those who do not believe in God (Small 192). In this story, Nietzsche is talking to those who don’t actually believe in God but follow the rules of “God” that human society has created. Nietzsche is claiming that these non-believers should break out from the communal values that Christian society has created and
create their own values to fulfill their lives in this finite world.

The character Zarathustra and the image of the lion that Nietzsche uses in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* symbolize those people who have courage to destroy the authority of every “Thou shalt” and assume the lonely task of setting up their own values in this finite world. Nietzsche is arguing that we should break from the dogmatic communal values and to set up our own values in our lives. Nietzsche believes that Christian morality is a system in which the weak, lacking the power to take revenge directly, seek revenge against the strong through a conceptual manipulation that compels the strong to condemn their own virtues and to be compassionate toward the weak (Small 197). Nietzsche argues that by breaking away from the communal values that Christian society has created, the strong can set themselves free from the shackle of Christian mortality and thrive as individuals. Continuing from Hegel’s idea that God is a value created by the human will, Nietzsche is claiming that community created the image of God for the sake of keeping harmony in society, and when these communal values cease to order people’s lives in a meaningful way, God is dead. Nietzsche is claiming that we should break away from being tamed by community, and instead thrive as individuals in this world.

The purpose of this essay was to explain how Hegel’s concept of the *Weltgeist* contributes to Nietzsche’s idea of death of God. Just as each individual requires to obtain the truth of his consciousness through a mutual recognition, human beings and divinity have to obtain the truth of themselves through a mutual recognition. Divinity overcomes its otherness in this finite world through our history, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was a part of this process that allowed divinity to become reconciled with human beings in the finite world. The incarnate God did die on the cross, but God is resurrected in the spirit of the church-community. By understanding God as immanent Spirit, Hegel prepares the way for Feuerbach’s argument that God is merely a projection of human spirit. God is the perfect image of the communal values humans desire and to which they aspire. God is the highest value that keeps harmony in the community. Nietzsche, pushing this idea further, claims that the death of God occurs when these communal values cease to be believed. As a strong advocate of individualism, Nietzsche is compelling us to break away from the values that Christian society has created, and instead to create our own individual values that will allow us to thrive in this finite world.

Works Cited


Marianne Dashwood’s 
Sickness Unto Death 

Emilie Grosvenor

In Jane Austen’s 19th century novel, Sense and Sensibility, the Dashwood girls and their mother are deprived of the majority of their inheritance after the death of Mr. Dashwood. Forced out of their family estate by their half-brother and his greedy wife, the Dashwoods begin a new life at Barton Cottage. Miss Marianne, the middle-child, is a stereotypical romantic (Austen 6-7). At sixteen years old she enjoys reading poetry and is convinced that her first love will also be her last. Her outwardly emotional reactions to the loves and losses which take place in the year of her family’s move to Barton stand in stark contrast to those of her older sister, Elinor. While Elinor experiences much of the same turmoil as Marianne, her consideration for the well-being of others prevents her from languishing in her personal sorrows. The character of Miss Marianne Dashwood, as described by Jane Austen, exemplifies Kierkegaard’s descriptions concerning the manifestations of despair.

In The Sickness Unto Death, Kierkegaard conceives of the self as a relation. If the self is a relation, despair is thus a misrelation of the self to itself. According to Kierkegaard, the self is a synthesis, or relation, between the eternal and temporal, the infinite and the finite, the possible and the necessary. In this sense the self is a synthesis, or relation. But this relation must relate to itself. According to Kierkegaard, the self is not inherently given. An individual must assume responsibility for the development of itself in order to become itself (Kierkegaard 5).

At the same time, the self does not establish itself, but must be established by another. Furthermore, the level of selfhood in the other determines the proportion to which the individual’s spirit is called into being by the other. Therefore, the ultimate self-relation occurs in relation to God, who is pure Spirit. According to Kierkegaard, the individual exists before God. However, he points out that most people remain unconscious of this. They seek comfort from temporal beings, situations, and material goods. Kierkegaard refers to such an individual as “the man of immediacy.” Unconscious of their existence before God, they do not relate their finite body with their infinite spirit. Thus, theirs is an unconscious despair. This misrelation of the self to itself prevents the synthesis of both aspects of the human being which are required for the development of self (Kierkegaard 51). It is also possible to be aware of being in despair, but to misattribute the cause of this despair to something external, rather than seeing it as a misrelation originating in oneself (Kierkegaard 54).

In Volume I of Austen’s novel, Marianne exhibits both forms of unconscious despair. Prior to the death of her father, Marianne, as well as her sisters and their mother, were in a state which Nietzsche would call “wretched contentment.”
Possessing significant wealth, a fine house, and a loving family environment, the Dashwoods wanted for nothing. Marianne could be called a woman of immediacy in that her sense of self was dependent upon her choice of books, her piano forte, the immediate connections she made with other people, and the house in which she lived (Austen 17, 27). Thus, when Mr. Dashwood dies and Marianne loses the majority of her temporal comforts in addition to the father she loves, she becomes aware of being in despair.

Marianne believes herself to be in despair over her father’s death and over the loss of her inheritance. However, Kierkegaard argues that despair over something is indicative that despair was present prior to the loss of a desired finite being, situation, or object (Kierkegaard 107). The self, not fully developed, is only emotionally confronted by this state of despair when the loss of something exposes this misrelation of the self to itself. Kierkegaard claims that one who despairs over something is still in a state of unconscious despair since they mistake their despair to be the result of a loss of some temporal thing or relation, when in actuality it is a misrelation of the self to itself (Kierkegaard 52).

Despite her professed, overwhelming despair, Marianne recovers from the extremity of her discontent soon after their arrival at Barton Cottage. Kierkegaard acknowledges that once enough time has passed and the external situation which exposed the despair has ebbed, the individual does not progress out of despair. Instead, the individual reverts back to being a man or woman of immediacy, figuring that since the external source he attributed to his pain has been alleviated, so too has his despair. Once again he defines himself by the finite objects, people and circumstances of his life. No real progress has been made (Kierkegaard 55). So too does Marianne revert back to a woman of immediacy. After spraining her ankle while on a walk with her younger sister, Margaret, Marianne is carried home by a helpful stranger. The young man introduces himself as Mr. Willoughby. Marianne considers it to be a case of love at first sight. She immediately identifies herself by her relationship with Willoughby (Austen 42-43).

According to Kierkegaard, despair can also be a misrelation in the syntheses of the eternal/temporal, possibility/necessity, or spiritual/physical (Kierkegaard 51). Marianne’s unconscious despair of the eternal, evident in her identification with what is temporal, is also a despair concerning the relationship of possibility and necessity, as well as that of spirituality and physicality. Her love for romance spurs her imagination. That which she imagines, she considers to be manifest in the physical world, though she has no evidence for it. Thus, she also despairs of necessity within the physical world (Kierkegaard 35-36). However, as a result of her reverting back to a despair in weakness, rather than over weakness, Marianne is unaware of her state of despair during her romance with Willoughby. Her misrelation between spirit, manifest in her imagination, and the reality of the physical world is evident in the
manner in which she assigns meaning to each of Willoughby’s actions without being told directly by him what his intentions truly are (Austen 186).

Marianne spends most of her time on outings with Willoughby. When friends gather at Barton Park for parties or picnics, she scarcely speaks a word before his arrival. She is most happy when he is by her side, and is dismissive of opportunities for conversation with everyone apart from Willoughby and her direct family (Austen Chapter XI). On the morning Willoughby is expected to propose marriage, her mother and sisters arrive at home to find Marianne in tears. Willoughby is not his usual social and polite self. He tells them he must leave immediately for London and gives no answer as to when he will return to Barton (Austen Ch. XV). Marianne receives no form of communication in the following weeks. However, she continues to invest all her happiness and hope in him. Once again, she is aware of being in despair over her weakness. Marianne, her friends, and her family attribute her melancholy to the external factor of Willoughby’s abandonment of her.

When the opportunity arises for Elinor and Marianne to accompany their neighbor’s mother-in-law to London, Marianne is eager to take advantage of the offer. Her mood changes once again. She is cheerful and excited at the chance to meet with Willoughby in London (Austen Vol. II, Chs. II-III). Upon their arrival, Marianne sends him a letter, notifying him of their being in town. Despite sending him several such notes, Marianne receives no reply. She is anxious at the sound of every carriage in hope that he might call. She finally meets him by happenstance at a local party. When she greets him with enthusiasm and affection, he is dismissive of her. It is later revealed to her that he is to be married, as soon as possible, to a more affluent woman (Austen Vol.II, Chs.IV-VIII).

At this point in the novel, Marianne’s despair deepens. She becomes conscious of the fact that she has identified herself with Willoughby. Furthermore, she is struck with the realization that the intentions she had attributed to Willoughby in her imagination were not grounded in reality. She made Willoughby into an idol. Rather than becoming a self through God, she assigned her entire self to the man she loved (Kierkegaard 69). Kierkegaard argues a person who is despairing over weakness is in a more intensive state of despair than the individual despairing in weakness, who is not even aware of the existence of despair. Since Kierkegaard defines despair as sin, this state of despair over weakness is also an intensification of sin. However, he points out that the switch from immediacy to recognition of despair brings the individual closer to potential salvation. This is because, while still unconscious of their despair being a misrelation originating from within the self and not an external source, despair over weakness requires the individual’s acknowledgement of themselves as spirit, as well as an increase in consciousness to recognize the presence of despair (Kierkegaard 62-63).
While Jane Austen was raised in a Christian household, there is very little in her writing describing Marianne’s relationship with God (Austen-Leigh 47-51). It is only near the end of the novel that she mentions the impact of God in her regrets concerning Willoughby. However, from this short passage, one may surmise that Marianne was conscious of despairing before God after her rupture with Willoughby (Austen p.346). After having identified herself completely with another, Marianne’s despair is based on her inability to escape herself. Her former sense of identity left along with him, leaving her with a desire to be dead to the world (Kierkegaard p.18). Her spirit becomes more enclosed. She seeks the refuge of her bedroom, avoids social gatherings, and hardly eats at meal times (Austen Vol.II, Chs. VIII-X).

Marianne’s despair over weakness is her first step into defiance, which is a form of conscious despair. Kierkegaard warns that if the further intensification of defiant despair is not curbed by faith, the individual may become inclined to commit suicide (Kierkegaard 66). Marianne’s defiant despair occurs when her idol changes from Willoughby to her despair over the loss of Willoughby. The despair itself has become the object with which she identifies herself. Upon their return journey to Barton Cottage, Marianne, Elinor and the rest of the party spend time at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Palmer, located not far from Combe Magna, Willoughby’s residence. In order to nurture her despair, Marianne goes on long walks throughout the grounds of the Palmer’s house. When she reaches the hill at the edge of their estate, she imagines seeing Combe Magna before her. She continues to occupy her time during their stay at the Palmer’s with these restless walks, despite having symptoms of a cold. Marianne then becomes extremely ill, weak, and close to death (Austen Vol. III, Ch. VII).

While Marianne did not attempt to commit suicide in a direct way, her desire to be dead to the world and to make despair her idol led her to neglect caring for herself. She later reflects upon her sickness saying, “Had I died- it would have been self-destruction” (Austen 345). In her delirium, Marianne reflects upon her behavior. She fears death and confronting God, for she becomes conscious of the selfish and sinfulness of her despair. So enclosed was she in her own sorrow that she provided no comfort to her elder sister since Elinor revealed that the man she loved was engaged to be married to another as well. Nor did she take into account her mother’s potential sorrow when she longed for nothing but death. Furthermore, her fear of encountering God made her conscious of the ill-manner in which she treated Colonel Brandon, who remained in love with her despite this treatment, and who unlike Willoughby remained a loyal friend to her family (Austen 345-347).

Colonel Brandon hastens to bring Mrs. Dashwood to her daughter’s side. By the time of their arrival, Marianne is in stable condition (Austen 311-314). From that moment onward, Marianne has a more cheerful disposition and as
a result of the intervention of faith in her state of defiant despair, she becomes aware of her existence before God (Austen 344-347). Kierkegaard claims that a person who is conscious of their existence before God is still imperfect. Despair is part of our fallen state. However, in being conscious of existing before God, the self is able to recognize this misrelation and thus experience the true syntheses between aspects of the self that we once imbalanced.

In conclusion, the fictional character of Marianne Dashwood, as portrayed by Jane Austen in the novel Sense and Sensibility, moves from unconscious to conscious despair before being redeemed through faith. Thus, Kierkegaard’s concept of the relationship between faith and despair is illustrated in Marianne’s personal journey in developing a self throughout the novel.

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Liberalism in International Relations Theory

Conor McGarry

It is often assumed that individuals and groups base their decisions on rational self-interest, which would further help to build a more cooperative society. This forms the basis of liberalism as applied to international relations theory, which has been one dominant trend in policy decisions. The debate about liberalism, however, is very divided both within the theory and also in the eyes of critics who see its limitations. Liberalism is not unified in all its philosophical beliefs, but it contains certain key understandings. Despite these key beliefs, liberalism still has to struggle with its own paradox of economic peace and interdependence—which may still promote a hegemonic attitude when dealing with nations that do not align with liberal beliefs—even as liberal theorists are not in complete agreement.

The international relations theories associated with thinkers like John Locke, Hugo Grotius, and Immanuel Kant have been labeled as liberal-institutionalism. Kant proposed that “republican constitutions,” commercial exchange embodied in “cosmopolitan law,” and a system of international law among republics governed domestically by the rule of law would provide the basis for sustained peace. Kant believed that natural processes of self-interest could compel rational individuals to act as agents to bring a just peace, while also being realistic in acknowledging that nations must act prudently until a federation of interdependent republics is established (Russet, 95).

The key assumptions that are relevant in liberalism are belief in the rational qualities of individuals, faith in the feasibility of progress in social life, and the conviction that humans, despite their self-interest, are able to cooperate and construct a more peaceful and harmonious society. Liberal internationalism has put these beliefs into the international sphere by emphasizing the fact that war and conflict can be overcome or mitigated through concerted changes in both the domestic and international structures of governance (ibid.).

The Kantian perspective has been characterized as antithetical to realism. That is a problem, however, as Kant accepted Hobbes description of conflict among many of the nations, but went far beyond it. The federation he envisioned is more accurately a confederation and not a world-state. Its members remain sovereign and linked only by partially federal institutions, as in Europe today, or by collective security alliances. The difference between the two traditions is that Kant sees democratic government, economic interdependence, and international law and organizations as a means to overcome the security dilemma of the international system. The desire of individuals to be free and prosperous enables democracy and trade to expand, which leads naturally to the
growth of international law and organization in order to facilitate these processes. Kant held that peace among republican states does not depend upon a moral transformation of humanity, as even devils understand how to promote their own interests in cooperation (Russet, 95).

Kant has influenced liberal ideas about international relations and helped to create the basic assumptions of liberalism. These influences include that democracies will refrain from using force against other democracies, that economically important trade creates incentives to maintain peaceful relations, and that international organizations can constrain decision-makers by positively promoting peace (Russet, 101). Two explanations that are cited as to why democracies do not fight each other are norms and institutions. With regard to norms, democracies operate internally on the principle that conflicts are to be resolved peacefully by negotiation and compromise without resorting to the threat or use of organized violence. Democratic peoples and their leaders recognize other democracies as operating under the same principles internally and so extend to other democracies the principle of peaceful conflict resolution. Negotiation and compromise between democratic states are expected and the threat of violence is both unnecessary and illegitimate. On the subject of institutions, democratic leaders who fight a war are held responsible through democratic institutions for the costs and benefits of the war. The costs often outweigh the benefits and many of the costs are borne by the general public. Democratic leaders who start wars risk being voted out of office, especially if they lose or if the war is long or costly. In anticipating this political judgment, democratic leaders will be reluctant to fight wars, especially wars that they are likely to lose. When facing another democracy, both sets of leaders will be restrained (ibid.).

Sustained commercial interaction becomes a medium of communication whereby information about needs and preferences is exchanged across a broad range of matters ranging beyond the specific commercial exchange (Russet, 102). This may result in greater mutual understanding, empathy, and mutual identity across boundaries. A complementary view stresses the self-interests of rational actors with trade depending on expectations of peace with the trading partner. Violent conflict endangers access to markets, imports, and capital. It may not make trade between disputing states impossible, but it certainly raises the risks and costs. The larger the contribution of trade between two countries to their national economies, the stronger the political base that has an interest in preserving peaceful relations between them. We measure the importance of trade for each state in a dyad as the sum of its imports from and exports to the other state, divided by its GDP. A given volume of trade will exert greater economic and political impact on a small country than on a big one, while similar effects can be expected from international investments (ibid.).
On the subject of intergovernmental organizations, IGOs include both almost-universal organizations, like the United Nations or the International Monetary Fund, and those focused on particular types of countries or regions. They may be multipurpose or “functional” agencies directed to specific goals like military security, promoting international commerce and investment, health, environmental concerns, or human rights. The means by which they may promote peace also vary greatly on a range that may include separating or coercing norm breakers, mediation among conflicting parties, reducing uncertainty by providing information, expanding members material interest to be more inclusive and include longer-term planning, shaping norms and generating narratives of mutual identification, with IGOs varying in effectiveness. The network of international organizations is spread very unevenly across the globe. Some dyads in Europe share membership in over a hundred IGOs while other dyads share few or even none. Our measure is the number of IGOs to which both states in the dyad belong, with this index equating all types and strengths of IGOs in a simple count. This crude measure is likely to underestimate the conflict-reducing effect of IGOs as compared with a more refined measure, which takes into account the kind of countries that constitute IGO membership (Russet, 102).

Liberals may tend to be distrustful of the military but they might concede that military forces can be necessary to protect liberal states and can even be used to advance liberal aims (Greener, 295). Liberals can be seen as a contested group with the primary unification being the focus on individual human liberty (Greener, 296). Democratic means of governance have been used to promote liberalism but this raises a series of questions regarding the relationship between individual rights and state sovereignty, both domestically and internationally. More cosmopolitan liberals seek to define international relations as a world society of individuals who share a common humanity (Greener, 297). However, some communitarian liberals have come to promote states as the best way to protect political freedoms while others have attempted to mediate between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism by suggesting that democracy must be pursued at the state level as a necessary step for world democracy. There is also a strong condemnation of non-liberal societies, undermining claims to tolerance, which is noted in liberal notions of progress as a lot of liberal notions are seen as universally acceptable (Greener, 297–98).

Liberals tend to dislike war, which they feel threatens freedoms, civil society, markets, and basic individual rights. The use of military action can also be seen as a precursor to militarism within the state and therefore a threat to liberty. There are debates about the use of force within liberalism, which depends on the circumstances. Almost all liberals are prepared to fight wars of self-defense in order to preserve liberal states. Some have suggested that force
must be used as a last resort after negotiation has failed and that the direct use of force must be used only against aggression (Greener, 300). The issue becomes more complicated around preemptive and preventive self-defense, which can be used to prevent the further rise of an already dangerous state. If the state threatens the dominance of the liberal international order, others may feel that preemption is unjust. Within the last few years, there has been debate about preemption. The defense of the liberal state might include preemptive self-defense measures in cases of serious imminent threats. The liberal notion of caution in seeing force as a last resort makes it difficult to justify preventive actions as purely self-defense, but can be secured as justified if used in conjunction with securing human rights or liberating others (Greener, 301–2).

There has been much recent debate about the notion that liberal states were remarkably peaceful—but only with other liberal states (Macmillan, 179). In recent years, however, this position has been challenged by claims that liberal state peace-proneness is actually more extensive than previously thought, which raises questions about whether liberal states are more peaceful than non-liberal states. Liberalism tends to exert a restraining influence upon the use of force by states, but is not generally or universally peace-prone as it may legitimate and even commission the use of force by states (Macmillan, 180). The importance of open political competition and in particular the government’s support of the opposition party can determine whether a democracy will make threats in international crisis. There is also the perception of public consent to explain why democracies do and do not start wars with the definition of the national interest determining whether a public will consent to war (Macmillan, 181). There is also the role of norms, which are seen as moral or regulative standards that legitimate or delegate certain behavior. Some scholars have focused on the liberal norm of respect and toleration for fellow liberals as regarding peace, but even this is limited. There is also the issue of the historical record of imperialism and wars of subjugation by liberal states which is seen as invalidating the norm-based explanation of the violence of liberal states with many weaker states being targeted by liberal states (Macmillan, 182–83).

We must also look at the peoples of liberal states. The basic three features of a liberal people are: first, that they have a reasonably just constitutional government; second, citizens are united by common sympathies; and third, a moral nature. The society also strikes a balance between liberty and equality by giving priority to basic rights, liberties, and opportunities but also assuring that citizens have the means to make decisions about their freedoms (Macmillan, 183–84). Attention must be given to the behavior of liberal peoples as a criterion for being in good standing in order to account for their actions. Justice is integral to liberal peoples, which constrains the use of force against non-liberal peoples, as well as relations with other liberal peoples (Macmillan, 185).
Looking at different liberal-democratic great powers like the United States, there are four potential means of regime change. They include imposed democratization coming from offensive realism, partial/gradual democratization coming from the defensive liberalism, non-intervention/abstention coming from defensive realism, and finally democracy removal coming from offensive realism (Miller, 563). Imposed democratization is when the great power uses coercion to impose drastic regime change toward democratization of the country at stake, manifested by holding free elections in a short time with major investments in the political, military, and economic spheres (Miller, 563). Gradual/partial democratization is when the great power in cooperation with other like-minded states and international institutions helps to build up state institutions and create a political environment which are necessary prerequisites for democracy but do not possess sufficient conditions for the emergence of a full-blown democracy. Non-intervention is when the great power stands on the sidelines with an abstention from intervention in domestic affairs of non-democratic states even if authentic democratic revolution is suppressed by force in these states. The rationale behind the different actions is dependent on the philosophy. Offensive realists argue that the best way to ensure state security is by maximizing a state’s power until it becomes the superior power or hegemon, with the assumption that a hegemonic system is the most conducive to national security. Defensive realists argue that states maximize their security and maintain their position in the international system by balancing their rival’s capabilities or deterring them (Miller, 564). There is the question of how to determine both national security and world peace, which can be asked in two questions. The first is whether to focus on the balance of capabilities between the state and its rivals or on those rival’s fundamental intentions and domestic character. The second is whether to focus on military power or non-military means and whether to do so unilaterally or multilaterally (Miller, 568).

There has been a constant debate within international relations theory on whether trade promotes peace. Many issues are raised which include wealth creation and distribution, relations with foreigners, or the political effects of capitalism. The liberal peace is often explained by the pacifying influence of international commercial relations, with the central question of the trade-leads-to-peace debate being whether increased economic interdependence abolishes or at least constrains war (Haar, 132–33). The arguments made in favor of increased economic interdependence include that economic exchange and military conquest are substitute means to acquire the resources needed for political security and economic growth. Growing trade and foreign investment means there is less reason to seek those means through foreign conquest, while barriers to international trade stimulate conflict. Economic relations between states foster communications and ties of interdependence.
between private actors and governments. A third element is that increased economic relations between countries will lead economic actors in each state to have an interest in keeping peace because war would damage their business interests (ibid.).

Liberals have different views on the debate on the trade-leads-to-peace idea. The five most important liberal thinkers all had different views on the trade-leads-to-peace hypothesis: these individuals are Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Hume, and Smith. Montesquieu believed that concerns for growth and economic expansion could constrain the behaviors of rulers domestically and it would most likely have the same effects internationally (Haar, 139). Montesquieu did not detect a relation between human nature and war, but regarded war as a normal and regular feature of relations between states, which justified far-reaching rights of war to them. Kant embraced the trade-leads-to-peace hypothesis with open arms. Kant expected trade to foster interdependence between people and nations. Kant argued that ‘nature’ would bring nations together through their concern for mutual self-interest. States would promote peace not out of benevolence or morality, but with a view to their own interest. If there is a threat of war, states will try to prevent its outbreak through mediation, “just as if they had entered into a permanent league for this purpose; for by the very nature of things, large military alliances can only rarely be formed, and will even more rarely be successful” (ibid.).

John Locke was not much of a free trader, however, as his strongest economic sentiments were in favor of the balance of trade and other mercantilist viewpoints (Haar, 140). He defended a bullionist position against the prominent free traders of his time. Locke also argued in favor of the just-war tradition and favored English colonial expansionism in America for economic gain. David Hume believed that political arrangements were the outcomes of human action as the individual is the key actor. Hume also believed that passions or emotions had more influence on the human will than reason. Therefore Hume regarded them as the most important explanatory factors of human behavior, with reason alone not producing any action. Hume thought that commerce, the greatness of a state, and the happiness of its inhabitants were positively related, with trade and commerce possibly being sources of opulence, grandeur, and military achievement as long as they were accompanied by free government and general liberty, as in the British and Dutch cases (Haar, 140–41).

There have been three waves of democratization in the past couple of decades, with the first one occurring in the 1970s with democratization in Latin America, East Asia, and the Pacific. The second wave came around the fall of the Berlin Wall in the former Soviet bloc nations and also in South Asia. The number of democracies also rose in sub-Saharan Africa, although the region lags behind Eastern Europe and Central Asia. There is also a trend in the
countries of North America and Western Europe toward opening a complete financial market with the same trend in Central Europe, East Asia, and Latin America (Simmons, 784–85). International policy diffusion occurs when government policy decision in a given country is systematically conditioned by prior policy choices made in other countries, with these theories encompassing a wide array of assumptions about who the primary actors are and what motivates their behavior, the nature and extent of the information on which they base decisions, and their ultimate goals (Simmons, 787). Political economists have analyzed restrictions on cross-border capital flows as tools of economic repression or reasoned that such controls could be explained by partisanship, domestic cleavages, and governments’ desires (Simmons, 788).

Recent work on monetary and exchange-rate institutions also focuses on the null hypothesis. This is demonstrated by a recent special symposium focusing on domestic political pressures, domestic veto players, federalism, coalition governments, and domestic policy transparency as determinants of national monetary institutions and policies. Economists debate whether there is a rational/material base to international financial crises or whether they result from contagious herd behavior (Simmons, 789). One explanation for the spread of economic and political liberalism involves coercion. Powerful countries can explicitly or implicitly influence the probability that weaker nations adopt the policy they prefer by manipulating the opportunities and constraints encountered by target countries, either directly or through the international and nongovernmental organizations they influence. Whether direct or mediated, this mechanism may involve the threat or use of physical force, the manipulation of economic costs and benefits, and/or even the monopolization of information or expertise all with the aim of influencing policy change in other countries (Simmons, 790). Competition is a more decentralized mechanism for policy diffusion than coercion. Theorists of competition-based diffusion stress the differential attractiveness of certain policies to investors and buyers in international markets. The competition argument is typically applied to economic policies, although there is some evidence that investors and even buyers in the global marketplace have preferences for certain political systems (Simmons, 792). Another diffusion method is learning, which refers to a change in beliefs or change in one’s confidence in existing beliefs, which can result from exposure to new evidence, theories, or behavioral repertoires (Simmons, 795).

Kant’s basic philosophy of international relations is reliant on his three main points, which are the constitutional, international, and cosmopolitan aspects of his treatise. Not one of these sources is sufficient, but together they are able to connect the characteristics of liberal polities and economies with sustained liberal peace and no single one can explain the liberal peace or liberal war (Doyle, 463). There is no
reason for all direct or indirectly majoritarian governments to be peaceful toward other majoritarian governments. An example would be a democracy of xenophobes or hyper-nationalists, who would externalize their preferences. Democratic institutions are perfectly compatible with Realist foreign policy when preferences are integrally and exclusively nationalist, and with Socialist solidarity and international class warfare when strictly egalitarian. Jean Jacques Rousseau’s classic account of democratic theory anticipates that democracies will be locked, as any Realist would agree, in a generalized state of war with all other states, whether democratic or not. Second, there should be no expectation that a population widely sharing liberal values associated with a human rights norm will shape policy unless they have democratic representation with the transparency and accountability that can shape public decision making. Third, there is no guarantee that commercial and other forms of interdependence alone will provide material foundations for cooperation among societies—rather than provide sources of imperial rivalry and fuel balance-of-power competition—unless trade and investment are part of a relationship of trust and respect (ibid.).

Once combined, the three sources do help to explain why liberal states maintain peace with each other and for explicable reasons are prone to both war and imperialism with non-liberal states (Doyle, 464). First, republican representative-democratic governments tend to create an accountable relationship between the state and the voter, particularly median voters. This encourages a reversal of disastrous policies as electorates punish the party in power with electoral defeat, while legislatures and public opinion further restrain executives from policies that clearly violate the obvious and fundamental interests of the public, as the public perceives those interests. The division of powers and rotation of elites, which is characteristic of republican regimes, can permit mixed signals, allowing foreign powers to suspect that executive policies might be overturned by legislatures, courts, or the next election. Representation should ensure, however, that liberal wars are only fought for popular, liberal purposes, which does not produce peace. The historical liberal legacy is laden with popular but costly/unsuccessful wars fought to promote freedom, protect private property, or support liberal allies against non-liberal enemies.

Second, liberal principles add the prospect of international respect, in which liberal norms involve an appreciation of the legitimate rights of all individuals (Doyle, 464). Domestically, publicity helps ensure that officials of republics act in accordance with the principles they profess to be just and according to the interests of the electors they claim to represent. These principles begin the differentiation of policy toward liberal and non-liberal states, which require trust and accommodation toward fellow liberals and produce distrust of non-liberals. The experience of cooperation helps
engender further cooperative behavior when the consequences of state policy are unclear but potentially mutually beneficial. Democratic liberals do not need to assume either that public opinion rules foreign policy or that the entire government elite is liberal. They can assume that the elite typically manages public affairs but that potentially non-liberal members of the elite have reason to doubt the anti-liberal policies would be electorally sustained and endorsed by the majority of the democratic public.

Third, material incentives sustain interliberal normative commitments, with the spirit of commerce spreading widely and creating incentives for states to promote peace and try to avert war. Liberal economic theory holds that these cosmopolitan ties derive from a cooperative international division of labor and free trade according to comparative advantage, when the parties can expect to be governed by a rule of law that respects property and that enforces legitimate exchanges. Each economy is said to be better off than it would have been under autarky as each acquires an incentive to avoid policies that would lead the other to break these economic ties (Doyle, 464–65).

Liberalism in international relations theory has been around since the eighteenth century and continues to influence the realm of international politics. Efforts at both democratization and liberalization of the economy have happened since the 1970s and continue to happen around the world. However, liberalism has had to face criticism at both its theoretical level and policy decisions. Liberalism has had to struggle with its belief in peace and distrust in force, but liberal countries have used force when dealing with smaller nations or non-liberal states. Liberalism has also had to deal with its economic practices; liberals feel that trade can lead to less conflict, yet economics have often played a role in why liberal states go to war. These questions have been raised time and time again and still play a role in determining whether liberalism has a place in policy decisions or if it is perfectly compatible with realist objectives of domination within the international world of politics.

Works Cited


The Search for *Aletheia* in Tao Lin’s *Taipei*

Andy Lara

In his 1954 essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Martin Heidegger says that the essence of technology is not technological, and that our understanding of technology as a mere instrument is incorrect. For Heidegger, technology is an idea, and its essence is *Gestell*, or “enframing,” which is the way humans place demands on nature to reveal itself. Heidegger submits that the essence of technology imposes itself onto our current mode of existence, and he names our 21st-century disposition the enframing. This *Gestell* is a position that perceives man as lord of the Earth and nature as an inanimate object upon which technological demands are set forth in order to generate surplus goods. These goods are then stored as a standing reserve, ready at a moment’s notice. It is a fundamental imperative to participate in the “setting upon that challenges forth,” and our enframing epoch necessitates logistical engineering, for how else are we to monitor, regulate, quantify, transport, and maximize goods, profit, and progress? The danger, according to Heidegger, is that man and woman too become objects in the standing reserve, and their failure to recognize this has grave consequences. Thus, exploring the impact of the *Gestell* on human relationships to goods and each other becomes a crucial step in understanding modern identity. According to Heidegger, once incorporated, it is difficult to escape this epoch where man is the sole engineer of meaning, and I find an illustration of this epoch and framework in Tao Lin’s 2013 novel, *Taipei*. Paul, the novel’s protagonist, categorizes and calculates all movement and moments: he is hyper-aware, hyper-technological, and nothing escapes his processing mind, even the weather is described as ‘information.’ As a result, in *Taipei*, there is no mystery to life: Paul’s thinking demands all aspects of human experience be quantified. Paul decontextualizes and abstracts all he encounters, and no authentic relationship, connection, or growth is possible. *Taipei* serves an allegory of the labyrinthine voyage towards *aletheia*, or truth as a revealing, and how the enframing, the technological orientation/disposition we inherit, robs all of their subjectivity.

The characters in *Taipei* are both familiar and strange, but they do not presuppose a suspension of disbelief. They check Twitter, gmail; they take the subway, read Gawker, they hold M.F.A.’s and do yoga; they also ingest copious amounts of drugs. While drug use may not play an important component in everyone’s life, *Taipei*’s characters are representatives of contemporary 20-somethings in a major metropolitan area, all with plausible interests, backgrounds, desires, and lifestyles. One aspect of Paul that is most immediate, yet seems peculiar, is his manner of thinking: Paul essentially functions as an emotionless robot, a technician of the human experience. In a moment
describing Paul and his girlfriend Erin, the narrator states, “More aware of Erin’s perspective, looking at his face (and not knowing what expression she saw or what he wanted to express), than of his own, Paul didn’t know what to do, so went ‘afk,’ he felt, and remained there—away from the keyboard of the screen of his face” (106). Another moment occurs after Paul wakes up from a Percocet-promoted nap:

Paul woke on his back, with uncomfortably warm feet, in a bright room, not immediately aware who or where he was, or how he had arrived. Most mornings, with decreasing frequency, probably only because the process was becoming unconscious, he wouldn’t exactly know anything until three to twenty seconds of passive remembering, as if by unzipping a file—newroom.zip—into a PDF, showing his recent history and narrative context, which he’d delete after viewing, thinking that before he slept again he would have memorized this period of his life, but would keep newroom.zip, apparently not trusting himself. (35)

In both of these types of moments, which occur on every page of the novel, Paul is a confused, disgruntled robot, decontextualized, dehistoricized, alienated from meaning and, thus, he attempts to calculate his experience, to reveal the truth of his relationship to the world, in terms of technology. For Paul, every instance is either precise, only in his mind or foreign and unknowable, in relation to the external world. In his mind, Paul ‘delicately walks’ (17), ‘casually believes’ (18), ‘moves conspiratorially’ (24), ‘uncharacteristically approaches’ (26), ‘states accusatorily’ (27), ‘unskillfully teleports’ (26), etc. This precise quantification of all movement is clear and distinct in his mind, yet when he interacts with people, no truth is revealed, for his ‘intellect is incompatible with things’ (John David Ebert). In Taipei, Paul is the supreme ‘determiner of meaning’ and, in his mind, nothing escapes categorization, yet he lacks the ability to communicate effectively with any other character in the novel, suggesting that despite the exactness of his thinking, this modern man’s mode of understanding reality is fundamentally incompatible with the tangible world. In Taipei, thinking, the mediator between the thinker and the thought about, is scientifically oriented and, as a result, illustrates a paradoxical relationship, an incongruency between thinking and the natural world.

Paul’s logistic disposition, his embeddedness in a technological world, his abstracted mode of interpreting the world, inhibits his ability to authentically connect with others, for the enframing necessarily corrupts the subject-object relationship. All of Paul’s interactions with people are empty, meaningless, and frustrating for him, as they fail to provide meaning: there is no progress, no Hegelian dialectic, the meeting between two forces that results in progress/development/new knowledge. This failure to bridge the gap between subject and object can be a result of the enframing, and these relationships as representative of the fundamental mode of interaction between people. At dinner with Laura, an acquaintance from a party, Paul is unable to connect to her:

Paul watched Laura move very slowly, in a kind of exploring, it seemed, as if through darkness, to arrive at a four-person table, where
once seated, with a slightly desperate expression, not looking at Paul, she focused on signaling a waiter. Paul also focused on signaling a waiter. Laura ordered a margarita, then sometimes turned her head 90 degrees, to her right, to stare outside—at the sidewalk, or the quiet street—with a self-consciously worried expression, seeming disoriented and shy in a distinct, uncommon manner indicating to Paul an underlying sensation of ‘total yet failing’ (as opposed to most people’s ‘partial and successful’) effort, in terms of the social interaction but, it would often affectingly seem, also generally, in terms of existing. Paul had gradually recognized this demeanor, the past few years, as characteristic, to some degree, of every person, maybe since middle school, with whom he’d been able to form a friendship or enter a relationship. (31)

This scene, like many others in the book, illustrates Paul’s impotence at connecting with other people. Paul spends the entire encounter mapping Laura’s demeanor into categories of experience, viewing them in relation to other social instances without considering the specific moment passing him by. Here we see the impact of a technological disposition on human relationships: Laura is deauthenticated as her own person, as Paul orders her within a compartment in his memory. Paul spends more time methodically analyzing Laura than conversing or attempting to connect with her or allowing either of them to reveal themselves. Further, Paul is unable to think/operate in any other way, and this is the danger of the enframing, our current technological paradigm, according to Heidegger:

> Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is. As a destining, it banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, Enframing...the setting-upon that challenges forth thrusts man into a relation to that which

is, that is at once antithetical and rigorously ordered. Where Enframing holds sway, regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing... It conceals revealing itself and with it that wherein unconcealment, i.e. truth, comes to pass. (27)

Here Heidegger discusses the total control that the modern framework asserts against Paul. Because of the calculating manner of thinking that Heidegger believes we find ourselves embedded with, truth, and by extension authentic relationships, are difficult. For Paul, nature and people, including Laura, do not emerge or flash forward, like the way *aletheia*, or truth as a revealing/unconcealment, did for the Greeks, a result of the Greek poetic disposition; Paul’s enframing consciousness, on the other hand, challenges the real into unconcealment as a standing reserve and reduces Laura to an abstract concept. After employing nothing other than neutral ‘small talk’ at dinner with Laura, Paul decides to ‘not trust himself with social interaction,’ a symptom of his inability to connect. Paul, and by extension the technological man, is at the “very brink of a precipitous fall” (27), when “modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces” (21), and nature remains “orderable as a system of information” (23). In a similar instance, Paul is overwrought with remorse about not attending parties:

> Now if he felt urges to socialize, to meet a romantic prospect, he would simply relocate them, without further consideration, beyond the interim period, when he would be extremely social, he envisioned. Until then he would calmly focus on being productive in a low-level manner, finding to-do lists and unfinished projects in his Gmail account and
further organizing, working on, or deleting them, for example. (22)

Here, people show up as standing-reserves for ordering in Paul’s mind. Future, anonymous, romantic prospects, like Laura, will find themselves ordered in the constellation of Paul’s neatly arranging mind. The enframed and enframing Paul is hostile to all mystery and spontaneity. Thus we see how Paul’s disposition creates an insurmountable obstacle in his quest for authentic relationships with people: the technological attitude eliminates the possibility of other subjects determining any truth/significance for themselves or for Paul, and further Paul does not realize his own position as object in the standing-reserve; it is Paul, the machine-like man, who determines the limits of the world around him. In Taipei, technology is not merely an instrument; rather, as an idea, it is a myopic, instrumentalizing attitude.

Simultaneous with his robot-like mentality, Paul mechanically/automatically consumes a grotesque quantity and variety of drugs on his book tours and at home in NYC; For Paul, these drug trips, along with the actual cross-country tours, permeate the novel: they are the motors of the novel, thus, these voyages are important to consider here. Some of the places Paul visits and drugs he ingests include: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Montreal, Cleveland, Boston, Minnesota, Baltimore, North Carolina; LSD, Cocaine, Heroin, Adderall, Ambien, Xanax, MDMA, Psilocybin Mushrooms. In a bizarre moment of meta-irony, Paul meets a character named Aletheia, yet she, too, takes drugs with Paul, which soon becomes his only precedent for human interaction. Drugs, it seems, provide a vehicle for Paul to connect to others and perhaps escape the enframing, as the drugs he takes promote counter-productivity. If Paul does generate content on drugs, it is usually incoherent and pointless—live-tweeting an X-men movie, recording himself speaking in funny voices in Whole Foods, live blogging himself on drugs for his twitter followers to discern what drugs he is on—just like the conversations he holds with others. In spite of the vast number of miles trekked and illicit substances ingested, Paul essentially remains the same thinking thing. These voyages do not lead to any new insight, despite Paul believing that they ‘enhance’ him. Further, while these trips to the grocery store and the movie theater are playful and spontaneous moments, they quickly turn/are exposed as sour as sour upon “analysis.” After Paul and Erin watch Eat, Pray, Love, which they both elected to watch and had both enjoyed, the narrator states:

After the movie they stood hugging by the ‘lavatories.’ Erin said she felt better than when she’d been paranoid, but seemed reluctant to reciprocate Paul’s enthusiasm when, with a child-like sensation of wanting to be encouraged to believe a fantasy, or that an aberration was the norm, he said…as if stressing the unexpected discovery of something worth living for, in an existence in which most things were endured, not enjoyed, that it seemed good they used ‘all those drugs and energy drinks’ and hadn’t slept and still felt ‘okay.’ Paul was surprised and confused when it occurred to him that if they felt almost anything other than happy, or at least content, Eat, Pray, Love (with its montages and fortune cookie-like monks and unacknowledged but knowing, it had seemed, usage of clichés)
would’ve been incredibly depressing. He felt self-consciously annoyingly optimistic when Erin reacted to this information, which had felt to him like an epiphany, with little interest and no enthusiasm, seeming less glad or curious than troubled, as if the message was to retroactively not enjoy the movie. (163)

Here Paul recognizes his inability to truthfully translate his emotions to Erin. Like the dinner scene with Laura, here Paul feels alienated even in the presence of another, as a result of the current ontological epoch, which reduces all matter into resources. Additionally, Paul understands that a seemingly happy, authentic bonding moment quickly turns rotten after his calculating understanding is activated, yet, as he was analyzing the film, the reader recognizes that the enframing was not entirely transcended. Paul also realizes the importance of drugs, euphoria catalysts, to transcending the enframing, though he does not recognize his increased dependence. While the drugs seemingly encourage Paul’s free play, he soon becomes bonded or addicted to the freeing/liberating agent.

Moreover, Paul’s belief in the power of drugs, his strong, unwavering faith in substances, becomes more dogmatic as the novel progresses. The pharmacological implication here is worth exploring. In Ancient Greece, pharmakon meant both poison and remedy. For Paul, similarly, drugs function as an ideological poison that both sustains him in the enframing, for they are the motor or base of the novel, and provides him a temporary, fleeting, escape, if only as a lapse in productivity. This connection between the need to consume increasing amounts/combinations of drugs and the need/inability to generate meaningful content/products/relationships is interesting. As a technician/absolute author of meaning, Paul is trapped in the frame of mind that understands all of nature as a standing-reserve. Consequently, Paul’s controlling mentality, his grotesque ratiocination, engenders his inability to recognize the potentiality of others, their subjectivity, or their multiple-aspectedness: his understanding promotes a disrespect of the natural world as an arena for the emergence of phenomena independent of his sophisticated, record-keeping, reality-controlling mind—Heidegger’s lament about the current epoch.

The novel ends in an ambiguous scene, where after a drug overdose, Paul accepts life and chooses to live, but what that means, and if his thinking will shift or turn, Heidegger’s hope for the technological man, is unclear. Nevertheless, Tao Lin provides a bleak allegory for Heidegger’s enframing, a lucid illustration of the danger that today’s hyper-technological, modern man faces. Positioning Heidegger’s enterprise, his ontological project, against the background of today, i.e. Tao Lin’s Taipei, illuminates our societal framework’s concealed horror: our method of being, of understanding reality, and our attitude towards reality, interferes with the telos, or end, of all our actions: truth. Moreover, while Paul is potentially ‘harmless’ in his pursuits, interests, desires, naively practicing self-destruction, the novel gestures towards a more destructive technician who is not too far behind.