THE AESTHETIC TURN IN THE FACE OF NIHILISM

A Thesis

by

BENJAMIN TAYLOR CRAIG

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2008

Major Subject: Philosophy

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Theodore George
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis outlines one's overcoming of nihilism by consulting two figures, Martin Heidegger and John Dewey. Each thinker holds a pivotal role for art, such that, a turn to the aesthetic allows the individual to overcome this nihilistic age. I intend to show that Heidegger and Dewey mutually inform each other's project. Heidegger is able to shed light on Dewey's project; however, Dewey ultimately takes Heidegger's thought a step further. Heidegger understands the current age to be overcome with nihilism as a consequence of modern technological enframing as well the end of classical religious sensibilities. Heidegger, like Dewey, relies on aesthetics to correct this dilemma. Because of Heidegger's diagnosis of the problem, we can see a new context for Dewey's thought. Dewey does not speak in the language of nihilism, however, through Heidegger, we can see that they share a similar concern. Where Dewey takes Heidegger's thought a step forward is in regard to Dewey's emphasis on personal experience. This emphasis shifts the responsibility of overcoming nihilism away from Heidegger's poet and onto the individual. Dewey understands aesthetics to be a process of experience and art to be the culmination of this experience. This shift in responsibility is placed upon the individual because the individual is the arbiter of their

doings and sole recipient of their undergoings. Consequently, the individual bears the consequences, and therefore the responsibility, of their experiences. Meaning, each individual holds the tools necessary to overcome nihilism inherent in one's own experience. The name for the process of properly weathering one's doings and undergoings is called the aesthetic life. The turn to personal responsibility, in the aesthetic life, allows the people to be the genesis of change rather than necessitating a leader, or poet. A community of people engaged in the aesthetic life is understood as democracy. Dewey's formulation of democracy, then, is not only a work of art but it also prevents the return of nihilism through the creation of a society always creating more possibility for its citizens.

DEDICATION

The present work is dedicated to my parents, Leroy A. Craig and Sharon L. Craig. None of the following pages would have been remotely possible without their continued support and encouragement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Both Martin Heidegger and John Dewey view art's foremost aesthetic function as a way to realign the individual's proper relation to the environment. Both understand art as a *paideia* resulting in personal and societal *arête*. Correlatively, the purpose of this thesis is to bring Heidegger and Dewey into conversation with each other in order to answer the question "Where do we turn aesthetically to lead us out of nihilism?" In answering this question, I hope to show that John Dewey and Martin Heidegger's aesthetic theories mutual inform one another. Without Heidegger's contribution we are unable to see what is at stake for Dewey. Even though Heidegger provides a proper framework for understanding John Dewey, Dewey thickens the discussion in Heidegger. Building on and surpassing Heidegger's aesthetic theory, Dewey provides an experiential bedrock for the individual to save himself from nihilism. This experiential bedrock will turn the responsibility for overcoming nihilism way from Heidegger's poet and onto the individual. Dewey accomplishes this through his emphasis on experience.

The first chapter focuses on Heidegger's contribution to art and the way in which art can deliver one out of nihilism. Nihilism is brought about by two things: technology obscuring being and the death of God which ends religious sensibilities. These two events have created a potential for nihilism such that it is "waiting at our door."[1]

This thesis follows the style and format prescribed by *The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th edition*.

[1] Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead," in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 62.

Consequently, the condition of society is such that it is in a nihilistic abyss, *abgrund*. Heidegger, however, provides a way out of this abgrund. Through the guidance of the poet, the individual returns to healthier outlook on the world. The poet is able to better able to represent the tension between the earth and the world and thereby is better equipped to lead society out of nihilism. This experience of the work of art affords the individual a perspective of unconcealed-ness. Since the role of art has been ghettoized in the history of philosophy, Heidegger teaches us that the question of art is not useful to simply elucidate other ideas but important unto itself and can answer questions of first order importance. In Heidegger the question of art is of central importance.

The second chapter demonstrates the way in which Heidegger sheds light on Dewey's aesthetic theory and how Dewey thickens the discussion in Heidegger. This is demonstrated in two movements. Firstly, I will show how understanding Heidegger can help bring new light to ideas in Dewey through a discussion of Heidegger and Dewey's conception of the role of art. Secondly, I will demonstrate how Dewey thickens the discussion in Heidegger through his emphasis on experience. Dewey's emphasis on experience turns the responsibility for the aesthetic turn introduced in the first chapter away from Heidegger's poet and onto the individual. Whereas an interaction with art in Heidegger begins with being and ends with the experience of the work or art, in John Dewey the interaction with art begins with experience.

The third chapter demonstrates how Dewey's aesthetics, including the consequences of placing the responsibility for this aesthetic turn on the individual, transforms our community. The name given to a community of organisms aesthetically

engaged Dewey calls the Great Community or democracy. Through presenting Dewey's understanding of democracy, the Great Community, and their resistance to nihilistic totalitarian dictatorships, I hope to show one of the many upshots of Dewey's aesthetic life, namely, that an aesthetic engaged community radically opens possibility. Dewey's aesthetics attempts to remove compartmentalization, dualisms, and habituation and increase communication and facilitate passionate living. Democracy, therefore, takes on the same attributes. Consequently, we notice that for Dewey this aesthetic work is also a work of art. The purpose of the conclusion, then, will be to show how this turn toward individual responsibility creates not only an overflow of possibility through this transformed community but this transformed community also guards against nihilism's return.

However, before we are able to see this completed solution we must understand the problem we face. As we turn to Heidegger, in the following chapter, he provides an excellent diagnosis of our current condition.

CHAPTER II

NIHILISM AND THE AESTHETIC TURN

In the midst of the battle for Troy, Hector notices Achilles charging toward him. Afraid for his life, Hector flees. He turns to face Achilles only after Athena tricks him into thinking that Deiphobus, his brother, is at his side. Hector's confidence rises. It is only with Deiphobus that Hector thinks victory is possible. Hector realizes Athena's ruse after he turns to meet Achilles and Deiphobus vanishes. After, Homer describes Hector as a man expecting the inevitable. Hector laments:

> My time has come!
> At last the Gods have called me down to death….
> And now death, grim death is looming up beside me,
> no longer far away. No way to escape it now….[2]

The events led Hector to a place where he sees the end clearly. It is because of these events that Hector seems to know what is coming next, almost as if his future were "standing at the door."

Martin Heidegger describes humanity's current situation in much the same way. In his essay on Nietzsche, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'," Heidegger argues that nihilism is "standing at the door."[3] Heidegger understands nihilism to be "the world historical movement of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age."[4] Nihilism is standing at the door for one reason with two direct implications. Heidegger argues that Nietzsche's phrase, "God is dead," proclaims

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[2] Homer, *Iliad*, translated by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin Classic, 1990), 551.
[3] Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead," in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 62.
[4] Ibid., 63.

the end of humanity's religious sensibilities and that technology has constricted one's experience to fit a certain structure. The rise of the technological age not only destroys one's religious sensibilities by constricting experience but also creates an environment in which every thing is viewed as what Heidegger will call "standing reserve." Though, where Homer provides no way out for Hector, Heidegger is more optimistic. To carry the analogy further, in Homer's *Iliad* Deiphobus standing beside Hector was only an illusion created by Athena, whereas in Heidegger's understanding of our predicament Deiphobus is actually beside us. For Heidegger, as we shall see, this Deiphobus is the poet.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the contribution Heidegger makes to the question "Where do we turn aesthetically to lead us out of nihilism?" In order to achieve this it will demand an explication of Heidegger's thought in relation to this question. Among other things, Heidegger's response to the problem of nihilism teaches us two things. One, Heidegger teaches us about the serious problem facing humankind, how it came about and how we can be lifted out of this bleak condition. Two, Heidegger teaches us about a new significance and role for art. Heidegger lifts art from the ghetto. Heidegger lifts art from its ghettoized role within the history of philosophy. For Heidegger this means that the history of philosophy has treated questions in the philosophy of art as second-class questions. The history of philosophy has quarantined the questions and concerns within the philosophy of art to secondary questions that do not reveal answers or the nature of things themselves. This means, for Heidegger, that questions within the philosophy of art have been held hostage by conclusions of

questions deemed more important, usually within metaphysics, instead of questions of the philosophy of art being a source of discovering and inquiry itself. Heidegger transforms art's role to one of prominence and importance. This transformed role of art will show the poet's holds part in society's escape from nihilism.[5]

To this end, this chapter will have three sections. The first section will focus on the subjugated role of art within the history of philosophy. The second section will focus on the problems that arise because of society's neglect of art, namely the rise of Heideggerian enframing and the end of religious sensibilities. Finally, the third and final section will focus on how a return to art, the aesthetic turn, can steal us from the current nihilistic age which is challenging and depriving society. These three sections combined aim to further Heidegger's claim that the aesthetic turn can abate, confront, counteract, and eventually rescue us from the nihilistic abyss of the world's night in which we find ourselves.

What is significant about Heidegger's contribution is where he turns in hope of abating the problem of nihilism. This appeal to poetry and art represents a significant shift within the history of philosophy. This shift is a shift away from the ghettoized role of art that has dominated much of the history of philosophy.

Heidegger teaches us the importance of art. This is significant because the history of philosophy has maligned the role of art and aesthetics. One of the best

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[5] It is important to note that though Heidegger understands the poet to be the most qualified to approach the question of nihilism. This does not mean that other artists are unable to confront the problem of nihilism. All artists contain the perspective and attributes necessary to confront the problem of nihilism. Heidegger's continual use of 'poet' in this respect is due to his claim that poetry is the pre-eminent mode of art. In order to stay true to Heideggerian language, unless otherwise noted, the term "the poet" will refer to all artists.

examples of this diminished role of aesthetics is a surprisingly honest dictionary of philosophy entry referenced by Theodor Adorno:

> There is scarcely another philosophical discipline that rests on such flimsy presuppositions as does aesthetics. Like a weather vane it is 'blown about by every philosophical, cultural, and scientific gust; at one moment it is metaphysical and in the next empirical; now normative, then descriptive; now defined by artists, then by connoisseurs; one day art is supposedly the center of aesthetics and natural beauty merely preliminary, the next day art beauty is merely second-hand natural beauty.'…There is a double reason for this pluralism of aesthetic theories, which are often left unfinished: It resides on the one hand in the fundamental difficulty, indeed impossibility, of gaining general access to art by means of a system of philosophical categories, and on the other, in the fact that aesthetic statements have traditionally presupposed theories of knowledge. The problematic of theories of knowledge returns directly in aesthetics, because how aesthetics interprets its objects depends on the concept of the objects held by the theory of knowledge.[6]

As Adorno rightly points out, this may very well be true but these are not attributes unique to aesthetics. Aesthetics is no more controversial than any other discipline within philosophy. There are no more differing opinions in aesthetics that cause it to "blow about" than in any other philosophical disciplines.[7] The dictionary writer's insight is neither sufficiently novel nor generous to aesthetics; however, the entry does reveal a certain paradigm within philosophy. One does not need to look at aesthetics because it is derivative, depending "on the concept of the objects held by the theory of knowledge." In other words, the philosophy of art is not interesting because it depends on theories of knowledge. The author reveals a prevalent mindset within the history of philosophy that disregards questions of aesthetics as secondary concerns next to other questions within philosophy.

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[6] Qtd in Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1997), 332.
[7] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 333.

With few exceptions, art in philosophy has ordinarily been thought of one of two ways. As Adorno points out,

> Philosophical aesthetics found itself confronted with the fatal alternative between dumb and trivial universality on the one hand and, on the other, arbitrary judgments usually derived from conventional opinions.[8]

Traditionally, aesthetics has either been understood as something fixed and therefore grafted onto the questions of metaphysics; or, aesthetics has been understood as something unfounded, unjustified, unsubstantiated, decided solely on tastes, and, therefore, declared arbitrary by outsiders. Nevertheless, many times, understanding aesthetics as solely concerned with tastes and the mere sensory was thought to be a consequence, repercussion, or implication of metaphysical questions.

Examples of both sorts are hardly scarce. In illustrations of the first way, Plato removes art from the ideal society because of its potential danger. As Heidegger understands Plato, the danger arises after Plato discovers that art, namely poetry, distracts men from truth, justice, temperance, and other metaphysical entities. After Plato is able to identify and understand the metaphysical structure of reality, then, the implication of this discovery is that art is a problem. For Heidegger, Plato's exclusion of poetry may be interpreted as an example of the first way that art is subjugated. Some of the central motifs within medieval philosophy can also be understood as examples of the subjugated role of art. For both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, questions of art and aesthetics are mere byproducts of questions of God and metaphysics. Questions of art and aesthetics were discussed as implications to conclusions already reached in

[8] Ibid.

metaphysics and theology. Pope Gregory IX once referred to theology as "the Queen of the sciences"[9] and, consequently, all edicts and rulings come down from the queen to her subjects. Even though Augustine and Aquinas approach metaphysics from two different traditions[10], questions of art contain the same method laid out by the church; art ought to work in the service of the church. Despite some of the beautiful articulations that came from the some of the medieval theologians, specifically from Bonaventure and the other Franciscan philosophers in particular[11], questions of art and aesthetics were understood as secondary to questions of religion. Within these examples, questions of art are considered as byproducts of other questions. The questions of art are simply the consequences of questions already determined.

Both Alexander Baumgarten and the entry from the dictionary of philosophy above can be understood as examples of the second way. As the father of modern aesthetics, Baumgarten understands questions of aesthetics as judgments applied to the realm of the sensory[12]. Art, then, only deals with things of the senses and does not have anything to say about "the big questions" within metaphysics. If this is true, then, as the philosophy dictionary pointed out, art ought not to be discussed because no agreement or interpersonal insight could possibly be reached with regard to classical conceptions of truth or metaphysics. As seen by the dictionary of philosophy's author, if art is only for

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[9] Rubenstein, Richard. Aristotle's Children. (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2003), 173.
[10] For a discussion of these separate traditions consult, Etienne Gilson, *The History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).
[11] Gregory Schrand, 1982, The Franciscan and Dominican Aesthetics in Middle English Religious Lyric Poetry., PhD diss., Rice University, in Rice University Digital Repository, http://rudr.rice.edu.ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/bitstream/handle/1911/15721/8216359.PDF, 8
[12] Martin Seel, "The Career of Aesthetics in German Thinking," in *German Philosophy Since Kant*, ed. by Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), 400.

the sensory and for affection, then any resulting answer from an aesthetic question could be blown "about by every philosophical, cultural, and scientific gust."

Heidegger, however, places emphasis on art because art is necessary to confront the problems created from modernity. Only from an aesthetic turn can society hope to confront the problems of modernity.

Humanity faces a serious problem. Because of certain factors, however, humanity is unable to see the problem it faces. Western metaphysics as we know it is at an end. The end of structured, static, objective, and absolute metaphysics (such as Platonism) is at an end. As Heidegger understands it, Nietzsche's declaration "God is dead" is the flat line hum of classical western metaphysics. Heidegger praises Nietzsche's interpretation of the history of Western metaphysics "as the rise of nihilism," yet, despite this praise, Heidegger, nevertheless accuses Nietzsche of being infected with this same nihilism himself.[13] The end of classical Western metaphysics comes about for a couple reasons. One, the rise of the scientific and technological age demystifies and demythologizes our world, removing our need to abstract to religious sensibilities and miracles to explain natural phenomena. Two, because science and technology have taken the place of religion, religious explanations become obsolete in such a way as to not hold sway over individuals within a community. Three, this problem has been intensified by the entity that has taken religion's place, technology. As Heidegger sees it, technology does not allow one to progress toward a solution to humanity's problem.

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[13] Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 54.

It is important to note that in the course of western history the meaning of technology has undergone a significant change. On one hand, as Heidegger points out, technology is closely tied to the Greek word *techné*, from where technology gets its name. Since art was considered a kind of *techné* in ancient Greece one can not understand technology in a wholly negative light. Fair enough. Heidegger said, "What is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic."[14] However, since technology has taken on a much more complex dimension than that of its usage in ancient Greece, one has to consider Heidegger's thoughts on technology holistically and from a modern perspective. What is significant for this discussion is not whether technology is essentially corrupt or unredeemable but rather what technology means in the modern world and what its effects are upon those who use it. The problem is with modern technology's *Gestell*, or "enframing."

Heidegger reverses the common narrative regarding the rise of technology. For Heidegger, it is this attitude of technological enframing that precedes and gives rise to modern science and technology, rather than the rise of technology that gives rise to technological enframing.[15] In this view, technology creates a structuring. This is not awfully significant since everything is a structuring. However, the kind of structuring associated with modern technology is the structure of enframing. Paul Gomer says, "This difficult notion [enframing] combines the idea of a technological way of revealing

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[14] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, translated by David Farrel Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collin Publishers, 1993), 333.
[15] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Further Reflections on Heidegger, Technology, and the Everyday," *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 5, 339-349 (2003), 340.

in which entities are revealed as *claiming us, taking possession of us*."[16] This structuring from technology is one of the major contributors to the problem of nihilism because humankind not only because it is leveling, but, just as important, because we cannot be easily removed from this particular structure. The enframing created by modern technology is one that is not easily cast off.

Enframing is a problem because it "conceals a former way of revealing", "conceals revealing itself", "blocks the shining forth", "blocks…the holding sway of truth", and it also conceals unconcealment itself.[17] Enframing prohibits and conceals the coming forth of Being. Without the insight into the pure unconcealment of Being, humanity has no access into the truth of Being itself. This is because truth is an event, requiring and depending on the passing and moving of time. Enframing, however, blocks the coming forth of events in such a way that it stills life. Heidegger says, "Will we see the lightning-flash of Being in the essence of technology? The flash that comes out of stillness, as stillness itself? Stillness stills. What does it still? It stills Being into the coming to presence of world."[18] The stillness of enframing stills because enframing can not bring forth the event of truth and because objects are contorted from objects that are and appear as themselves into objects as standing reserve. The stillness of enframing discloses no truth.

Enframing holds the individual within one way of viewing the world. As we will see, this is a problem because it does not allow the individual to see what Heidegger will

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[16] Paul Gomer, *Heidegger's Being and Time: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177.
[17] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 333.
[18] Martin Heidegger, "The Turning" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 49.

refer to as the "earth," the realm of disclosure. It is precisely this enframing that is the most dangerous to society's unfolding, since enframing prohibits unfolding. The individual caught up in this enframing is not able to respond properly to much advice given from other. Advice such as, one ought to "walk a mile in another's shoes", "get another perspective", or "see things differently". Enframing creates problems for empathy as well, evident in such statement as, "you don't understand me", "this isn't my problem", "you don't get me", or "you just can't see why I am angry". In other words, the one caught up in an enframed structure is not able to see the world from any other structure, not able to understand any other worldview, or not able to empathize properly with others. This is why Heidegger says, "where enframing reigns, there is *danger* in the highest degree."[19] Since modern technology is in enframing there is danger in the highest degree.

Enframing gives rise to this standing reserve. Technology gives rise to enframing; enframing both aggressively structures one's outlook or worldview as well as gives rise to standing reserve. Is modern technology a danger or a problem, something that needs to be overthrown and abandoned or simply carefully watched? What evidence is there that this enframing within modern technology is actually a problem? After all, enframing is also a kind of revealing and a kind of bringing-forth.[20] As Paul Gomer says, "Technological revealing is not a *bringing* but a *demanding*; and this demanding does not have the character of bringing *forth* but forcing *out*. It demands of

[19] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 333.
[20] Ibid., 295.

nature that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored."[21] Modern technology is a problem for two reasons. One, enframing creates a structure that oppresses the individual and does not allow any kind of removal or getaway from the structure. And, two, the enframing created by modern technology reveals objects not as objects but as "standing reserve." The first problem in modern technology holds the individual within enframing and does not release its captors. Enframing cannot release its grasp because it is a stilling, a demanding, and a forcing. Enframing does not leave any room for any other worldview. The second problem in modern technology is the standing reserve that arises from one's dependence on technology. Standing reserve is a problem because it does not allow the individual to view the object-in-itself but rather as an object-for-observer. When one views things as standing reserve, "the forest is lumber, the Rhine is hydroelectric power, the land is mineral resources, the worker is labor, and the worth of the product is entirely defined by exchange value."[22] An individual plagued by standing reserve views things only as they could be helpful to the individual. Evidence is evident in disastrous statements like "why should I care? It doesn't effect me" or "what's in it for me." Standing reserve turns that which ought to be affective into a consideration of the effective.

With the rise of technology comes the end of religious sensibilities. Because western humanity has abandoned its religious sensibilities, technology has taken its place. The word of Nietzsche declares the end of these sensibilities. By the end of

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[21] Gomer, *Heidegger's Being and Time*, 175.
[22] Teschner, George. "The Humanities and Telecommunication." 20th WCP: The Humanities and Telecommunication. 25 Aug 2000. http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Tech/TechTesc.htm.

religious sensibility I mean the end of a suprasensory world's power over the lives of human beings. The end of this power means that humanity is left to its own devices, that help can come from nowhere but from within society. Since the power of the suprasensory world is attributed to God, to say that the suprasensory has no power over the lives of human beings is to say that God no longer has power over the lives of human beings. And, to say that God no longer has power over the lives of human beings is to say that God is dead.[23] This is not a simple denial of Christianity nor is it a simple metaphysical conclusion.[24] Nihilism is not a problem where Christianity is simply disowned because the simple negation of a religious structure is still a kind of religious structure. Humanity is nihilistic because there is no exterior or suprasensory place to turn for answers.

Our current situation, then, is bleak. As stated above, nihilism, for Heidegger, is the whole of the modern mindset and society's retreat from a religious understanding of the world contributes and exacerbates this modern mindset. We are trapped within technology's enframing. This enframing conceals the unconcealed earth that is necessary for the shining forth of being. The modern individual is not afforded abstraction for justification of their actions. Abstractions such as religion and strictly structured metaphysics are things that sway no more hearts.[25] The absence of these sources of meaning creates a void. Unfortunately, technology has filled the void.

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[23] This is not a metaphysical or religious claim but a societal claim. My scope is societal not religious. This is to say that within society God has lost influence, authority, and society's obeisance.
[24] Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 61.
[25] This claim that structured metaphysics and religion "sways no more hearts" is a condensed derivation of the Heideggerian point that "if the suprasensory world of the Ideas has suffered the loss of its obligatory and above all its vitalizing and upbuilding power, then nothing more remains to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself." (Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 61)

Technology has complicated the situation because the individual is not afforded access to the one thing that could deliver society from its nihilism, art. Technological enframing restricts the earth and thus restricts truth in such a way as to prevent the individual from experiencing a coming forth of the event of truth. The artist is the one that is able to rescue the individual from the enframing caused by the rise of the technological age and the effluence of religion's absence.

As Heidegger sees the solution to society's condition, there is no way simply to correct the problem as a car, robot, or as an appliance is fixed. Unfortunately, though, this problem cannot be thusly fixed. By "correct the problem," I mean that there is no way to go back to the condition before the problem was created. In reference to the death of God, Nietzsche stated, "Who will wipe this blood of us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?"[26] Heidegger agrees; no atonement can be made for such a colossal event. If one makes an attempt to correct the problem, then one must deceive oneself into believing the scientific revolution never happened and society is in a condition that it is not. One would have to close themselves from a great number of things. To attempt to correct the problem one would have to live an inauthentic life apart from or deceived of society. Though Heidegger's words are grim, the serious problem we face is not without hope. Our hope is the poet. The poet is able to see the serious problem humanity faces and the artist's art is the only thing that can potentially turn the course of history out of this nihilistic abyss.

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[26] Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1968), 95-96.

It is necessary to make an aesthetic turn in order to solve the problems that the nihilistic age poses. In "What are Poets for?" Heidegger describes the poet's role in the abyss, or *Abgund*. As indicated above, the one able to offer victory from nihilism is the poet, our Deiphobus. However, before I address exactly how the poet counteracts the affects of the nihilistic age, I would like to motivate the need for an aesthetic turn in order to confront the problem of nihilism by talking about the unique position and perspective of the poet.

Heidegger spoke of this dark time in history as "the world's night." At this point in history, humanity is facing the world's night because humanity is facing an end to the day of the gods. When the gods, Hercules, Dionysius, and Christ, left the world it marked a time when the world began its decent into night time. The world's night creates the abyss society finds itself in and the one that the poet will pull us through. This world's night is a destitute time. Heidegger states, "Long is the destitute time of the world's night."[27] Nevertheless, Holderlin states,

> But where there is danger, there grows
> also what saves [28]

As Holderlin recognizes, the coming of the world's night also brings about that which saves humanity from the world's night. Art and the artist can lead society out of the world's night but not without this destitute time first being experienced and endured. As Heidegger says, "in the age of the world's night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured. But for this it is necessary that there be those who reach into

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[27] Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial Classics, 1971), 91.
[28] Ibid., 115.

the abyss."[29] Even though the world's night must be experience and endured, the poet is able to reach into this abyss and pursue the gods who have left and plunged us into the world's night, "the fugitive gods."

What does it mean to be a poet in a destitute time? Heidegger answers, "To be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods. This is why the poet in the time of the world's night utters the holy."[30] This means the poet utters both that which is set apart for sanctified use and that which will save society. This is why, in Holderlin's language, "the world's night is the holy night."[31] The poet is that individual that is able to reach into the abyss and pull society through the world's night. The poet allows society to endure the world's night. The poet in a destitute time, then, gives chase to the fugitive gods, the ones that have left and in their leaving they leave behind an abyss. The poet does not hope to fill this abyss; but, rather, the poet hopes to pull us through this abyss, conquer the world's night, and end this nihilistic age.

The poet confronts the symptoms of the nihilistic age and also counters the nihilistic age itself. In order for the aesthetic turn to counter and confront the problem of nihilism sufficiently it must speak to the three direct implications from the rise of the technological age. These three implications are also the three symptoms of our nihilistic age. The poet confronts the effects of the nihilistic age by confronting these three implications or symptoms. The poet is capable of confronting the symptoms of the nihilistic age because the poet can break the hold of technological enframing, transform

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[29] Ibid., 91.
[30] Ibid., 92
[31] Ibid.

things from standing reserve, and the poet can renew religious sensibilities. The poet can also counter the nihilistic age itself because of the very nature and character of art.

If we are to accept the Heidegger's diagnosis of the problem, then there are a couple of ways to approaching the problem that are not accessible to us. These kinds of particular paths are from an *aporia*. For example, this problem cannot be corrected simply by resurrecting religious sensibilities. Rather, the poet replaces religion's suprasensory sway over the hearts of human beings within the work of art. This replacement is similar because both the suprasensory and art are external to the individual and hold sway over the hearts of human beings. Heidegger, in "The Word of Nietzsche," points out that the declaration, "God is dead," forbids the individual abstraction to the suprasensory world.[32] Though the poet's poetry is not suprasensory, it still renews that which is significant of the suprasensory, the ability to sway the hearts of human beings. The ability to sway the hearts of human beings renews religious sensibilities.

Art and the artist are able to counteract the effects of the death of God in two ways. One, as stated above, the poet during the world's night utters the holy, where holy is understood as that which saves society and also that which sanctified. The poet is the one speaking of the fugitive gods in such a ways as to lead to a holy night. It is still a destitute time because it is still a night; however, because artists give chase to the fugitive gods their words are set apart as holy. Two, art renews the beneficial aspects of the suprasensory without referring to something abstract. The beneficial aspect of the

[32] Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche," 61.

suprasensory was the sway that it held over the hearts of human beings. The work of art has this sway over the hearts of human beings. Poetry and art affect us as people; they sway society. Art is something external to us so, when we come into contact with it, it affords us the opportunity to interact within something that affects and sways us. The very reason that Plato exiles poetry from the ideal city is for the same reason that Heidegger reveres poetry. Poetry promises to sway the hearts of human beings. Though we are in the world's night, the poet renews the aspects of the religion that sway the hearts of human beings.

The poet is that individual who is better equipped to escape the "enframing," *Gestell*, created by the rise of the technological age. If art is anything, then art is a new perspective. This new perspective is exactly that which breaks the strict and stagnate structuring caused by enframing. Art is, essentially, the perspective of the artist. When one looks at a landscape painting one can not see lumber. The presentation of the artist presents objects as they are. When one looks at a painting the art speaks to the individual rather than the individual imposing their enframed view to the painting. Poetry shakes one from technological enframing by bringing forth an event of truth. As will be shown, Heidegger describes this event of truth in his "Origin of the Work of Art" as the interplay or tension of the earth and the world.[33] This tension breaks enframing because of the event of truth. Enframing is a stillness and art is a shifting, a shaking, and a moving of being.

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[33] Johnson, Patricia, *On Heidegger* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000), 51.

The last way that art counteracts the effects of the nihilism brought about by the world's night is the transformation of things away from standing reserve. Enframing, we have said, gives rise to a perspective of objects simply as standing reserve. Art is able to counteract this standing reserve by shifting our view of objects from stagnate objects to objects that are and appear as objects in themselves; this way in which objects present themselves Heidegger calls a "thing thinging."[34] When one looks at a painting of someone in the forest, the individual is forced to ask "what is going on here?" This inquiry into the painting prohibits one to then revert back to viewing the trees simply as lumber. The individual views the person in the forest as the artist wants the individual to view the forest. When one looks at the *Peasant's Shoes* by Van Gogh, one is unable to look at the shoes and only remark "I wonder if those shoes would look good on me." Because of the way in which the shoes are presented, one is unable to see the shoes only as potentially useful to them. One must see something much more fundamental, namely the interplay of earth and world. Heidegger says, "Truth happens in Van Gogh's painting. This does not mean that something is correctly portrayed, but rather that in the revelation of the equipmental being of the shoes, that which is whole—world and earth in their counterplay—attains to unconcealedness"[35] This unconcealedness of the being of the shoes as is that which is more fundamental.

Someone who views the world as standing reserve has a vain view of the world; the world's objects are only for his or her use. When someone stands before a great

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[34] Dreyfus and Spinosa, "Further Reflections on Heidegger, Technology, and the Everyday," 344.
[35] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 54.

work of art, it reverses the order of priority such that it dwarfs the individual in the face of the work's magnificence. When this order of priority is reversed a vain view of the world is impossible; and, consequently, seeing the world only in terms of standing reserve is impossible. When someone stands before Michelangelo's *David*, one is unable to simply say "I wonder if he could do something for me."

The artist, then, confronts the symptoms of this destitute time in each of the three ways. The artist renews religious sensibilities by providing something exterior to ourselves that sways the hearts of humankind. The artist removes technological enframing by providing us with alternative points of view, opening ourselves up to new possibilities, and bringing forth an event of truth. And, finally, the artist removes enframing's standing reserve by providing something whose magnificence stands over us, which breaks our vain view of objects.

The foregoing considerations have concerned experiencing and enduring the world's night, but the artist is also able to turn or lead society out of the world's night. In what way does the artist help the world come out of this destitute time? The poet is able to lead society out of the world's night for a very specific reason. Heidegger says, "The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality."[36] The poet, then, teaches us of our own mortality.

The work of art informs the individual. This informing is a kind of teaching. This teaching is important. As indicated above, Heidegger says that the world's night

[36] Heidegger, "What are Poets for?" 94.

will not end until mortals are able to grasp their mortality. The work of art teaches the individual of his or her mortality. As Patricia Johnson puts it, "The most immediate reality of the work of art is not that it is a thing, but that it is an event of truth."[37] This event of truth has a very specific structure. This event of truth of the work of art is a tension. It is by way of this tension that one confronts one's own mortality. This tension is a play between what Heidegger calls, in "The Origin of the Work of Art," the earth and the world. The world is understood as the realm of total unconcealedness and the total disclosed. The earth is the realm that is presented to us, but it is also more that that. The earth is, for Heidegger, the realm of the materials. The earth is concealed in so far as rocks do not teach.[38] In explication of Heidegger's conception of earth Patricia Johnson points to Heidegger's example of the Greek Temple. She says, "The temple is certainly made of stone. But it is not about the stone. It is about religious experience and the human relationship to the divine."[39] Where the stones of the temple represent the earth, the world represents the meaning behind it. The event of truth comes about through this tension between the earth and world. The work of art perfectly represents this conflict, tension, or strife between the concealed and the cleared, between earth and world. Heidegger says, "Earth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth only so far as truth happens as the primal conflict between clearing and concealing."[40] The work of art is a shifting tension between these two. No work of art is simply one or another but a playing between the two. It is through this strife or

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[37] Johnson, Patricia, *On Heidegger* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000), 49.
[38] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 172.
[39] Johnson, on Heidegger, 51.
[40] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 54.

tension that truth happens. This is why the work of art is an event of truth. Heidegger says, "Truth establishes itself as strife within a being that is to be brought forth only in such a way that the strife opens up in this being; that is, this being is itself brought into the rift."[41] This event of truth teaches us of our mortality.

If we return to Michelangelo's *David*, this tension might better be illustrated. When one stands in front of Michelangelo's *David* one can not help but notice the desire for David to leap to life. People surrounding Michelangelo's masterpiece normally and casually remark "he is so lifelike" or "he looks so real." The tension between earth and world is this realization. This realization is the tension between realizing the lifelike aspects, the apparent realness of the sculpture, and conceding that this realness is still encased in stone. The encased movement of the David looks as though at any moment he will free himself from his podium; however, one still knows that the King of Israel remains encased in stone. This is the play between stone and life, between world and earth, and between the concealed and the unconcealed. Patricia Johnson says of sculptures that "these figures reach towards a world of openness, but at the same time are not free from the stone. They show us the tension of our historical experience."[42]

This teaching of the historical experience shows us our finitude. When one confronts the finiteness and the finality in the tension of their historical experience, one is confronted with his or her own mortality. This is because one cannot see the tension of one's historical experience without noticing his or her radical temporality. When one confronts this finiteness, one understands that there was a time when he or she did not

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[41] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 188.
[42] Johnson, *On Heidegger*, 53.

exist and there will be a time when he or she will exist no more. This is their confrontation with their mortality. This confrontation with our own mortality leads us out of this destitute time of the world's night.

Since the work of art creates a tension between the earth and the world, it gives rise to this experienced strife. This strife shows us the tension of our historical experience. Since this historical experience cannot be experience apart from being confronted with one's radical temporality, the work or art teaches one of his or her finality and finitude. Because of this artist is, through art, able to lead society out of the destitute time of the world's night.

Where does humanity go once the world's night has been experienced, endured, and eventually escaped? Since society cannot simply regress to the days of the gods and cannot go back into the grasp of modern technology's enframing, where must society go from here in order to prevent relapse and to secure a proper and nutritious life outside of this nihilistic age? The answer I would like to pose is that for a proper and healthy escape from nihilism the burden of responsibility must shift from the poet to the individual. The way in which I hope to motivate this shift is through John Dewey's notion of experience and the aesthetic life.

CHAPTER III

SHEDDING LIGHT ON EXPERIENCE

In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Guy Montag is opened to the world around him with the help of a little girl. With simple questions and observations, Clarisse McCellan opens Guy Montag's mind to the surrounding possibilities. At first Montag is able to shake off Clarisse's comments as comments from a mere foolish girl. However, little by little, her comments begin to haunt Montag's experience. In light of Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" it might be said that Montag's mind is shaken from the grasp of his cultural epoch and opened to the possibilities of his surroundings.

Clarisse challenges Montag in two important ways. One, Clarisse challenges him to re-experience the environment around him. She says,

> I sometimes think driver don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly…If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! he'd say, that's grass! A pink blur! That's a rose garden! White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows.[43]

And two, Clarisse pulls Montag out of what, with Heidegger, might be called his enframing by asking personal questions that force him to reevaluate his relation to the environment. She says,

> "Good night!" She started up her walk. Then she seemed to remember something and came back to look at him with wonder and curiosity. "Are you happy?" she said.[44]

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[43] Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (New York: Random House, 1979), 9.
[44] Ibid., 10.

Both of these ways pull Montag out of his enframing and to a place that is uncomfortable and foreign.

One morning Montag wakes to find Clarisse not present for their morning walk. Montag begins to frantically search for the same thought provoking dialogue that Clarisse was able to provide. This search ultimately leads him to turn inward with the help of an English professor he remembered meeting. It is this inward turn that forces Montag to escape his oppressive society. Though Clarisse provided the basis for Montag to escape his enframing, ultimately, Montag was not free from the control of his society until he felt the responsibility to escape his own enframing.

In Bradbury's novel, the involvement of Clarisse and the old Professor functions similar to the way Dewey and Heidegger mutually inform each other. Clarisse's comments affect Montag in such a way as to force him to see the world in a new way. Montag met the old professor before he met Clarisse and was not affected. It was only after his morning walks with Clarisse that he was able to see the relevance and importance of the professor to his situation. Montag's encounter with the professor were directly informed by the meetings with Clarisse. It was not the success of Clarisse or the professor; rather, it took both of them for Montag to overcome his nihilistic society. Montag was not able to understand the full impact or importance of the professor until he first understood Clarisse. The old professor and Clarisse mutually informed each other's purposes. In the same way, Dewey and Heidegger mutually inform each other.

In this third chapter, I intend to show that while Heidegger sheds light on Dewey's project, Dewey's emphasis on experience compliments and thickens

Heidegger's approach. Specifically, Dewey's focus on experience shows that each person is capable of and responsible for overcoming nihilism.

Accordingly, this chapter will have three movements. The first movement will focus on showing how Heidegger can shed light on Dewey through a discussion regarding the importance of art and the meaning extracted from life. Though John Dewey does not invoke the language of nihilism, he, nonetheless, conceives the role of art in much the same way. I hope to demonstrate this by showing how their similar concern for the role of art can be informed by the Heidegger's understanding of the problems facing society. The second movement, and the bulk of this chapter, will focus on John Dewey's emphasis on experience. This second section will chronicle Dewey's understanding of experience as the bedrock of every aspect of life, including art. The second section will lead into the third. Through Dewey's emphasis on experience, Dewey shows us that each person is responsible and capable to overcome nihilism. Therefore, the third movement will focus on how this experiential bedrock leads to personal responsibility. This third movement will fall out of the two earlier ones. If we read Dewey within this Heideggerian framework it becomes evident that Dewey moves beyond Heidegger in an important respect: one's individual responsibility for his or her escape from nihilism. Consequently, the individual is able to overcome nihilism through art.

In the epilogue to "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger suggests that perhaps experience brings about the death of art.[45] This cryptic phrase does not mean that experience itself brings about the death of art; this would suggest that Heidegger has committed a grievous error. After all, for Heidegger also, the experience of art is strikingly important. Heidegger, I believe, means something much more profound. If merely subjective experience is the criterion by which art is distinguish as art, absent of any kind of ontology, then art dies. Art dies because it can then no longer be approached as an event of truth. This does not invalidate Dewey's concerns. For John Dewey, aesthetic experience, or having *an* experience, is an event of truth.

And, thus, for John Dewey experience is the basis of distinguishing art and aesthetics. If one looks at Dewey in light of Heidegger, however, then Dewey's emphasis does not bring about the death of art. Dewey's reliance on experience applied within this Heideggerian framework shifts the realm of responsibility from the poet to the hands of the individual. This shift of responsibility, from the poet to the individual, is a necessary move for a proper escape from nihilism.

Under a concern for the importance of art, Dewey and Heidegger compliment each other's claims regarding the role of art. Art, for both thinkers, is seen as solving central problems arising from society; and, at the same time of this rescue, art is able to return the individual to a healthy dispensation, mode of existence, or an overall recrudescence of life's vim. Specifically, art addresses questions having to do with

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[45] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, translated by David Farrel Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collin Publishers, 1993), 204.

one's relation to the world as well as an individual's proper relation to their environment.

As was noted in the last chapter, art, for Heidegger, takes central importance because art removes the structure of enframing by returning objects to objects in themselves, a thinging thing, instead of the standing reserve created by technological enframing. Consequently, art then brings about the salvation of the world. Meaning, it is through art that society is able to be saved from modernity's fallen society, where this fallen society is understood as a society that has surrendered to the threat of nihilism. Art brings about the salvation of the world because it saves society from our fall into nihilism. Also, as a result, art creates a healthy individual as well as a healthy society. Art teaches an individual of their mortality. The consequence of this teaching is an individual shaken from an essentially egotistical view of life. The individual, once removed from the nihilistic age, is able to see objects just not in terms of their usefulness to him or herself. The individual, then, is able to take into account the surrounding environment and the needs of the society. Art opens up the individual from their egotistical outlook and transforms their world into one that takes into account more than just him or herself but also the environment and the society around them.

In the same way, art for John Dewey creates a healthy individual. Art for John Dewey is first understood as creating a healthy individual. Art breaks the monotony of habit by bringing about an experience from one's environment that the individual must respond to. Habit, according to Dewey, constricts the vitality of our experience resulting in inchoate experience. And, consequently, forces the individual to confront the

environment around them by severing experience subjected to habit. Art puts the individual in sync with their environment. Like Heidegger, John Dewey's philosophy also holds art in high regard. Dewey's project could be understood as the attempt for society, writ large, to realize their potential to change the world. This can only be achieved through artistic means. Consequently, art is defined broadly. As we will see, the reason for this broad definition is to provide for art the ability to pervade and inundate every aspect of our life and to make the individual and their experience the center of this aesthetic revolution.

John Dewey does not write in the language of nihilism that one finds in Heidegger. However, through an understanding of Heidegger, one finds that Dewey has similar concerns. Consequently, art and aesthetics are capable of correcting problems set forth by modernity. And, moreover, although Dewey does not speak this way, art is also capable of overcoming a sense of meaninglessness. Art engenders meaning.

Dewey writes, "there are two sorts of possible worlds is which esthetic experience would not occur."[46] He goes on to describe these two worlds: one world of complete flux and one world completely devoid of flux. As Heidegger shows us, a world devoid of flux holds the same implications of a nihilistic age. In Heidegger's language, a world devoid of flux is enframed, or stilled. Enframing stills our experience and restricts events of truth. This stillness does not bring forth objects as themselves but allows objects to appear only as standing reserve. For Dewey and Heidegger, this is a world where aesthetic experience would not occur.

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[46] John Dewey, *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. by John McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 538.

The point of art in both Dewey and Heidegger is to restore the world to flux. By restoring flux to the world one can extract meaning from it. For both philosophers one can extract meaning through and by the tension of our experience. For Heidegger meaning is created by returning objects to thinging things which occurs through the tension and strife of the earth and world. For Dewey, meaning is created through the shifting of the environment and the individual responding to this environment.[47] This shifting cycle is Dewey calls "the rhythm of loss of integration and recovery of union" with the environment.[48] Dewey writes in *Art as Experience*, "The rhythm of loss of integration with environment and recovery of union not only persists in man but becomes conscious with him; its conditions are material out of which he forms purposes."[49] Since flux is that which engenders direct experience and direct experience is the genesis of all meaning, flux is the genesis of all meaning. For both philosophers this flux is the basis by which meaning can be extracted from the world. Therefore, for Dewey and Heidegger art is concerned with overcoming a sense of meaninglessness through understanding the world as a world of flux. A world in flux is the only one in which can engender meaning.

For both Heidegger and Dewey, by restoring this flux to the world one is able to extract meaning from the world. For both philosophers, art is ultimately concerned with overcoming a sense of meaninglessness in the modern world. For Heidegger, as we saw in the last chapter, aesthetics creates a tension between the earth and the world such that

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[47] Ibid., 535.
[48] Ibid., 536
[49] Ibid.

the interplay between the two returns objects to objects in themselves, objects in flux. For Dewey, as we will see, aesthetics experience is the process of the environment presenting something and the individual responding to his or her environment in such as ways as to create a rhythm or a drama. In both attempts to restore flux to the world each philosopher makes art a necessity. Through Heidegger we can see that modernity creates a problem in our environment in which the organism must respond.

As we have seen, Dewey does not mention nihilism or the effects nihilism could have on society. However, through understanding Heidegger one can see that Dewey's thoughts can and ought to be understood in such a framework. In this way, John Dewey and Martin Heidegger mutually inform each other. Since art in both Heidegger and Dewey have similar purposes, John Dewey's thoughts on art directly apply to the problem of nihilism.

The movement that follows seeks to show the way in which the philosophy of John Dewey draws implications within Heidegger's thought. As was addressed in the last chapter, Heidegger understands art to have the ability to free the individual from this nihilistic age. Society requires help to be removed from this nihilistic age. This art comes down from a designated individual, the poet. Though, through Dewey's emphasis on experience, one can see the importance of personal responsibility. Dewey transforms each of us into Heidegger's poet. In order to achieve this it will be necessary to broaden certain Heideggerian definitions, specifically the definition of art. This is not a rejection or critique of Heidegger but rather an opening-up of his thought. The way in which his thought will be opened up is through the philosophy of John Dewey. The element

within Dewey that allows this opening is his emphasis on experience. It will be through this emphasis on experience that one will see the turn to personal responsibility that informs the answer to the question "Where do we turn aesthetically to escape from nihilism?" While Martin Heidegger ends his discussion of art on one's experience of it, John Dewey begins his discussion with one's experience of art.

The heart of art for Dewey is experience. It happens regardless of one's intentions and it is the basic result of life. However, it is the basic structure of experience that is noteworthy. This general structure is characterized by two very important aspects. Firstly, experience is characterized by what Dewey refers to as the rhythm of loss of integration and recovering of union. Dewey writes,

> Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it—either through effort or by some happy chance. And, in a growing life, the recovery is never mere return to a prior state, for it is enriched by the state of disparity and resistance through which it has successfully passed. If the gap between the organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies. If its activity is not enhanced by temporary alienation, it merely subsists. Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives.[50]

Dewey relates this passage to what Santayana called "hushed reverberations."[51] Life, says Dewey, is characterized by a process of losing step and regaining step with society. This cycle of "alienation and reconstitution" is both the tension that brings about meaning and the way by which the organism is enabled to grow.[52] The organism is alienated and then reconstituted.

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[50] Ibid., 535
[51] Qtd. in Dewey, The Philosophy of John Dewey: two volumes in one, ed. McDermott, 539.
[52] John McDermott, "Introduction" in *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, xxix.

Secondly, the general character of experience is essentially "double-barreled." Meaning, experience has two aspects to it, doing and undergoing. Undergoing here is understood as enduring, sufferings, and abiding. Dewey proclaims, "Experience is primarily a process of undergoing: a process of standing something; of suffering and passion, of affection, in the literal sense of these words. The organism has to endure, to undergo, the consequence of its own actions."[53] In the same way, he understandings that one can not simply undergo. Dewey reasons,

> Undergoing, however, is never mere passivity. The most patient patient is more than a receptor. He is also an agent—a reactor, one trying to experiments, one concerned with undergoing in a way which may influence what is still to happen. Sheer endurance, side-stepping evasions are, after all, ways of treating the environment with a view to what such treatment will accomplish. Even if we shut ourselves up in the most claim-like fashion, we are doing something; our passivity is an active attitude not an extinction of response. Just as there is no assertive action, no aggressive attack upon things as they are, which is all action, so there is no undergoing which is not on our part also a going on and a going through.[54]

It is upon this basis that Dewey then declares that "Experience…is a matter of simultaneous doings and sufferings.[55] Consequently, complete passivity is impossible. Organisms always act. This process of alienation and reconstitution, of hushed reverberations, within general experience is characterized by our doings and undergoings. Every organism has both kinds of associations their environment. However, the intensity and the level of the organism's participation characterize these experiences as either aesthetically imbued or aesthetically vapid.

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[53] Dewey, *The Essential Dewey, vol. 1*, ed. Hickman and Alexander, 49.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

There are two poles of experience.[56] One has an aesthetic element to it; the other type of experience is aesthetically drab. Although experience is a basic result of life, Dewey writes, "Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate."[57] The distinction between these two types of experience is the distinction Dewey makes between inchoate experience and having *an* experience. As we will come to see, having *an* experience not only has an aesthetic dimension but it is through this notion of having *an* experience that will open up the definition of art such that it will allows for a turn to personal responsibility. What follows focuses on having *an* experience because the characteristics of having *an* experience mirror the qualities of art. However, it is first necessary to outline the characteristics of inchoate experience.

Inchoate experience is a result of the individual not being a passionately active participant with the world around. Things happen to the organism; however, the organism does not interact within these experiences, merely alongside them. These experiences are neither concluded nor brought to consummation. This kind of individual has experiences but since he or she is not a committed and engaged member of these experiences, the organism only experiences that which is fractured, withheld, or shortened. Experiences of this sort never come to their natural climax or ending. Dewey writes, "Things happen, but they are neither definitely included nor decisively included nor decisively excluded; we drift…There are beginning and endings, but no genuine

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[56] While two distinct types of experience are identified by John Dewey in his chapter "Having an Experience," found in *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 35-57, it is important to note that these two types are two poles are a very large spectrum. Experience can fall anywhere between the two poles.

[57] Dewey, *The Philosophy of John Dewey: two volumes in one*, ed. McDermott, 555.

initiations and concludings."[58] The organism disengages their experience before any meaning, nutrition, or meaning can be extracted. Consequently, these experiences are near homogenous. The only difference being the location of these fractured experiences cut short. This is what Dewey means when he identifies these experiences as inchoate, they barely exist. These experiences offer no nutrition to the individual because the experience is cut short before meaning can be extracted.

By contrast, having *an* experience is distinguished by primarily four things things. It is primarily distinguished by the individual actively participating with his or her surrounding environment and, as a result, by a kind of conclusion, or consummation, to the event. Firstly, when the organism has *an* experience, he or she is participating with and through the environment around them. Dewey deduces, "Direct experience comes from nature and man interacting with each other."[59] Having *an* experience "is like breathing."[60] It "is a rhythm of intakings and outgivings."[61] Secondly, having *an* experience is characterized by the process of drawing meaning, connections, and relations between events and happenings. These meanings and relations are what bring *an* experience to consummation. The build up, or consummation, of experiences yields a conclusion. "A 'conclusion' is no separate and independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement."[62] This conclusion is the nectar of the series of experiences. This consummation of experience is only possible when an individual participates within the environment and becomes a member of the doings and

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[58] Ibid., 559.
[59] Ibid., 537.
[60] Ibid., 573.
[61] Ibid., 573.
[62] Ibid., 557.

undergoings. When one has *an* experience, one brings the series of experiences to consummation. A series of experiences brought to consummation is able to have nutrients, meaning, and purpose extracted from it. Contrariwise, a fractured experience yields nothing but the inchoate. Like a tree that has been up rooted before its fruit can ripen, experience halted before it can develop can offer the individual no fruit.

Thirdly, it is not bare response to environment that designated *an* experience. It is also distinguished by the rhythm of experience. This rhythm is metered by the nutrition one can potentially extract from experience. Dewey instructs, "If we move too rapidly, we get away from the base of supplies—of accrued meaning—and the experience is flustered, thin, and confused. If we dawdle too long after having extracted a net value, experiences perishes of inanition."[63] This rhythm is similar to the pound of a pulse. Correspondingly, the connection between a pound or a pulse is the time between the beats. Each beat is meaningless in and of itself but within the rhythm the beats find meaning. Consequently, the beats within the rhythm are closely related to each other. Dewey writes, "The flights and perchings [of experience] are intimately connected with one another; they are not so many unrelated lightings succeeded by a number of equally unrelated happenings"[64] The connections of the pulse or rhythm of experience brings forth brings forth new potentially meaningful experiences that are "pregnant with connections."[65]

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[63] Ibid., 573.
[64] Ibid., 573.
[65] John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey, Volume One: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, ed. By Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 48

Fourthly, "have" here is not understood as a "have" of ownership but as one "has" a friendship.[66] When one has an experience one has a relation to the experience. Regarding aesthetic experience, one does not merely act in the world, but with and within the world. This relationship, however, is a delicate one. This does not mean the individual simply takes control of the situation and thereby has *an* experience. Rather, the individual enters the situation presented, almost by request of the environment. Dewey declares, "integral experience moves toward a close, an ending, since it ceases only when the energies active in it have done their proper work."[67] The name Dewey designates for the organism that participates in these characteristics he deems "the live creature." The name designates two important characteristics. On the one hand the term "live" represents the act of the individual being an active member of the environment. On the other hand, the term "creature" designates the individual's membership within the environment. Consequently, the live creature is an active part of his or her environment. One who is practiced at having *an* experience is a live creature.

Not every experience is brought to consummation. Unfortunately, experiences brought to consummation are not as frequent as one would hope. The aesthetic life does not hide from us but there are still enemies to the aesthetic. These enemies are actions which offer a quick retreat, a resignation, or an abdication from one's current situation. Dewey evinces,

> The enemies of the esthetic are neither the practical nor the intellectual. They are the humdrum; slackness or loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure. Rigid abstinence, coerced submission, tightness on one

[66] John McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, 554.
[67] Ibid., 560.

> side and dissipation, incoherence and aimless indulgence on the other, are deviation in opposite directions from the unity of an experience.[68]

Likewise, Dewey continues,

> The non-esthetic lies within two limits. At one pole is the loose succession that does not begin at any particular place and that ends—in the sense of ceasing—at no particular place. At the other pole is arrest, constriction, proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another. There exists so much of one and the other of these two kids of experience that unconsciously they come to be taken as norms of all experience."[69]

Three essential enemies come out of these selections. First, though experience has a general structure the intensity of these "hushed reverberations" can be stilted, halting them to near stagnation. This stiltedness is the aesthetically drab. Experience of this sort describes the person whose existence appears lifeless and automatic. Second, he points out that experience consigned to habit offers no aesthetic value. Aesthetic experience is absconded when habit drives experience. When controlled by habit the individual cannot be passionately engaged within the environment. Rather, the individual is something of a machine. Experience devoid of the aesthetic value is characterized by the aimless or mechanistic doings of an organism. Whenever experience is either mechanical or aimless, as Dewey points out, the aesthetic quality is distant from experience. Third, Dewey speaks of the compartmentalization of experience that hinders the full force of the aesthetic. Meaning, one experience is quarantined from another. The aesthetic experience, by contrast, is a coming together, a completeness. This is one of the reasons Dewey seeks to remove dualisms whenever

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[68] Ibid., 559.
[69] Ibid., 559.

possible. Dualisms contribute to the compartmentalization of experience. A habit is a withholding of the individual.

As we have seen, the aesthetic life is defined as the process of one being presented with a situation from his or her environment and then the individual responding to the environment. Jazz is an excellent illustration of this process of alienation and reconstitution.[70] When the music starts, the rhythm begins, slowly at first but the tempo rises. Then once the rhythm is established the soloist begins. The jazz solo and the soloist exemplify the aesthetic life.

It is essentially the rhythm that the soloist maneuvers around. The musician's improvisation ebbs and flows and zigzags, over, around, and under the basic rhythm played by the other instruments. What is significant is how the soloist responds. When the soloist enters the music he or she knows that there are a number of notes open to them. The best kind of jazz attempts to stretch the possible number of notes the soloist plays. When the soloist is playing at times two instruments may come in and out of harmony or collaborate in some other way. The music can form a pseudo tension between the rhythm and the soloist. Because of this pseudo tension there can appear to be a kind of disagreement at times, usually from notes at the farthest outreach of the rhythm, but these moments give way to a return to the basic rhythm. When the musicians change key there is realignment or reconstitution with the music's rhythm.

[70] It is worth noting that for the following analogy hip-hop would also be an excellent example. The beat in hip-hop is similar to the rhythm in jazz and hip-hop's performer acts much like jazz's soloist. Each presents him or herself within and round the rhythm or beat.

The basic rhythm gives form to the music but the beauty comes from the novelty of the soloist.

There are three ways the soloist mimics the live creature. Firstly, the soloist is a paragon of Dewey's process of alienation and reconstitution. Dewey writes, "The line between the temporary alienation necessary for the enhancement of life and the gap of permanent alienation which spells death, physical or spiritual, is a thin one."[71] If the soloist strays to far from the rhythm, then the music dies. In the same way, Dewey said, "If the gap between organism and environment is too wide, the creature dies."[72] Conversely, if the soloist resigns to remain in the rhythm then the music becomes simple habit, safe and predictable. Similarly, Dewey says of the organism, "If its activity is not enhanced by temporarily alienation, it merely subsists."[73] The aesthetic life is a stretching to and a pushing from the common rhythm of one's surroundings. This is what Dewey means by "the stable and the precarious." Secondly, Dewey understands habit to be the killer of any meaningful aesthetic experience, an enemy to experience. In the above example, the jazz musician habit is likewise understood. In Jazz, the soloist's habit would also remove any meaningful music. If the soloist resigned to simply play the same notes as the rhythm, then the music would be drab, dreary, monotonous, and uninteresting. Thirdly, when the soloist is playing there is not time to remain still and reflect on the past notes. Dewey warns us, "We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each

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[71] Dewey, *John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. by John McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 535.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future."[74] If the soloist stopped to reflect on the past notes then the present notes would lack their thoughtfulness.

The aesthetic experience opens up possibility and potentiality. Aesthetic experience is a coming together, a completeness, and a unity. When one has *an* experience it creates an experience that is pregnant with connections. These connections bear fruit or nectar when these experiences are brought to consummation. In the buildup toward a consummation, singular experiences are connected and related to the others in the series. Theses relations give rise to new meaning and purpose which allows the organism to understand the world in a unique, novel, and creative way. These new meanings and purposes allow the individual a new way or perspective and, consequently, one's potential is opened. Dewey's own seduction into philosophy is an example of this process. He says,

> "there was derived from that study [on Huxley] a sense of interdependence and interrelated unity that gave form to intellectual stirrings that were previously inchoate, and created a kind of type or model of a view of things to which material in any field ought to conform…I got great stimulation from the study, more than from anything I had had contact with before; and as no desire was awakened in me to continue that particular branch of learning, I date from this time the awakening of a distinctive philosophic interest"[75]

First there was the experience of schooling, then that of reading Huxley. His experiences of studying at the university were brought to a consummation when he was able to study Huxley in his last year of studies. There was then another experience related to that study of Huxley that impacted his experience, namely the forming of a

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[74] Ibid., 523.
[75] Ibid., 2.

model or type of looking at the world. Finally this opened up John Dewey's possibility by affording him the possibility of experiencing something new, becoming a philosopher. As related to the analogy above, through this process of aesthetic experience the organism, or soloist, discovers more notes to play within the rhythm.

Art itself exemplifies this process of having *an* experience. That is to say, a work of art is a coming together. Aesthetic experience is a coming together such that it brings the aims or ideals of the individual to the materials of the environment. Art for Dewey is understood as the "union of material and ideal."[76] The aesthetic experience is an experience in which the organism attempts to confront the environment. This process is a unification of the materials or environment, with the ideal or the intent of the individual. Similarly, in a work of art the artists hope to actualize their vision by combining their intended ideal with the materials of the environment. Dewey reasons,

> In a work of art, different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into a unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character as they do so—just as in a congenial conversation there is a continuous interchange and blending, and yet each speaker not only retains his own character but manifests it more clearly than is his wont.[77]

Art represents our experience. The same essential relation whereby one can identify an aesthetic experience, one can notice the relationship within a work of art. Art is first understood as representing our experience and then second as a work of art. Dewey writes, "Art is thus prefigured in the very processes of living."[78]

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[76] Ibid., 548.
[77] Ibid., 556.
[78] Ibid., 545.

Art is an expression of *an* experience properly undergone. As Dewey reasons, "Mountain peaks do not float unsupported; they do not even just rest upon the earth. They are the earth in one of is manifest operations"[79] In the same way art does not float unsupported. Art is supported by experience and bears the same relation as an experience properly undergone. Fine art, then, is also a representation of the relationship of the individual to this surrounding environment. Fine art is considered art first because it represents this relationship between individual and environment. Consequently aesthetics are not bound to the note, the brush, or the canvas. Rather, aesthetics is bound to experience. Art is experience. Art then has poured out from just the work of art and into experience resulting in the stretching of the definition of art.

John McDermott writes, "In John Dewey's philosophy, the task of overcoming alienation and reconstitution the processes of living is one which is laced with chance, but the responsibility is ours and ours alone."[80] The individuals are responsible for their maneuverings. The responsibility is not an imperative from law, morality, or society but an imperative of a more general sort. For Dewey, the responsibility is generated from the need for meaningful experience. We are held accountable for the meaning in our lives because there is neither someone else having our experience nor someone else undergoing our experience. This argument for the need of personal responsibility from the emphasis will have two facets. The first facet will concern why we do have a

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[79] Ibid., 526.
[80] McDermott in the "Introduction" in The Philosophy of John Dewey, xxix

responsibility. The second facet will concern why one ought to conduct themselves as though they have a personal responsibility.[81]

Because the individual both bears the weight from the consequence of their experience and because they act in those experiences to either extract meaningfulness or meaninglessness from them, the organism is responsible. The individual's doings within his or her suffering is the basis by which one can extract meaning. If one consigns one's self to habit, then one bears the consequences of their decision. If one carries the experience to term, then one also bears the consequence of their decision. Another name for the bearing of the consequences of something is to be responsible for it.

Regarding the first facet of the argument, this emphasis on experience creates is the basis of the turn to personal responsibility. Someone else may not undergo for me. It is my responsibility. The failings, shortcomings, and successes are wholly my own because they are apart of the doings and undergoing that make up my experience. The fruit of experience, if any, is only the outcome of the individual's doings and undergoing.

One can experience aesthetics or a work of art and one can see the shifting of earth and world or aesthetically interact with their surroundings. However, if this were the end then experience would be mere undergoing. As Dewey tells us, experience is inundated with undergoing but also with doings. Even mere passivity is a doing. To say that overcoming nihilism is the organism's responsibility is to say that one's doings are

[81] It is important to note that for this particular argument to work it does not demand that it be possible for the individual to overcome nihilism. Although, I believe the individual capable of such a thing "either through effort or happy chance," as Dewey points out. The individual could be caught in an essentially tragic situation. However, this does not change the need for the turn to the individual and personal responsibility in order for society to make their escape.

his or her own. Meaning, the individual bears the full weight of the benefits or consequences of their experience. Another way to say that one bears the weight of the consequences of something is to say that one is responsible for it.

Regarding the second facet of the argument it is a much more existentially and philosophically nutritious outlook to declare the individual the locus of action. Take an example of one caught in a well. It may or may not be possible for one to escape from the well, depending greatly on the difficulty of the well. If one were to sit in the well and repeat to him or herself "it is only possible for me to get out with the help of another," then one resigns him or herself to the situation. Once the individual makes the decision to resign then his or her experience ceases to reverberate. The rhythm of alienation and reconstitution ends. Suppose for a moment that someone was working at a big corporation. Something goes terribly wrong at this corporation. As a result of the problems in the corporation, the laborer begins to have problems at home. Now it may be that the problems at home are unavoidable. It is also possible to blame the mistakes on the problems at work. However, there is something existentially and pragmatically significant about taking the responsibility. When one takes responsibility for the situation they find themselves in, it transforms the individual into the locus of action. An individual ought to be responsible for their actions.

There are two other possibilities to the argument put forth here. In overcoming nihilism it could either be the responsibility of another or there could be no responsibility. To say that someone else is responsible for one's overcoming of nihilism seems to suggest that someone else could be called to account for another's actions.

However, an individual bears the consequences of his or her own doings and undergoings. To say that no one is responsible seems to suggest that no one bears the consequences of the doings and undergoings of the individual. To say that the individual is not in some way responsible suggests that the organism is not acting, in some way, in the situation. From Dewey, we know that in experience even utter passivity is action and sheer evasion is a doing. Everything act is a way to do.

As we have seen the work of art can not be consigned away from experience. In fact art exemplifies our experience properly undergone. Because this process now finds an experiential bedrock, we are called to credit the individual for the nihilistic hold on them. This is significant because of where this emphasis has been placed. It is the job of the individual to remove him or herself from this nihilistic age. Although we have seen the necessary turn toward personal responsibility, this aesthetic process is not complete until the aesthetic finds its expression through us. The consequence of this turn is a radical turn towards potentiality and possibility that impacts a society's government, education, and art. The result of which is not just a removal from nihilism but a societal transformation that prohibits this nihilistic age from taking control.

In the end, Heidegger's poet saves the individual from nihilism. With the help of Heidegger we see that John Dewey calls the individual to save him or herself from nihilism. Dewey transforms each person into Heidegger's poet. In the following chapter we will see the implications of the aesthetic life turned towards personal responsibility. The most striking characteristics of Dewey's conception of art are where Dewey starts in

his conception on art and also the transformations that society and the organism undergo once the implications of art, the aesthetic life, and the aesthetic turn are unpacked.

Art, Dewey says, "is the process of making the world a different place in which to live."[82] Nothing seems broader than this definition of art, but it seems that if art ought to be anything then it ought to be the tool to impact the world. Under this understanding, all of Dewey's philosophy is the process by which one realizes their own ability to create art.

Dewey's emphasis on experience leads to two important conclusions. Firstly, there is a turn to personal responsibility. Secondly, Dewey tells us that the aesthetic process, and consequently, the aesthetic turn, is not complete until we find an outward expression to the art that has been imbued inside. The process of aesthetic development, as we have outlined here, is not complete until one has externalized the art within. The third chapter will chronicle the external manifestations of the art and its implications in the political sphere. The next chapter, then, will focus on this aesthetic externalization, what it looks like, and the implications from it. One need not strain to see these kinds of externalizations within society. They can be found in politics, education, relationships, as well as art.

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[82] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1958), 363.

CHAPTER IV

THE AESTHETIC TURN AND COMMUNITY

The occupants of Camus' fictional town of Oran are, at first, unremarkable. Their lives are like those of most any other town; shallow, selfish, and driven by monetary gain. The town is already in a state that would cause some to proclaim its citizens inauthentic or in bad faith; however, the condition gets much worse. What is remarkable is not that the condition gets much worse, most situations do. The situation at Oran becomes distinct because the potential and possibilities of the town's occupants are near completely restricted.

At the beginning of the novel the townsfolk are complacent and happy with their lives. This beginning condition of the town may or may not be a favorable one; however, it is from this beginning condition that the town deteriorates. The quarantine placed on the citizens because of the plague thriving within the city walls restricts their potential.

One way to view the story is as an allegory. This allegory focuses not on an individual in the town but on the condition of the town as a whole. As the situation gets more and more out of control it forces the occupants of the town to deal, interact, and understand their quarantine. The story of the quarantine is a story about restricted potential, about a town whose life became so stable and restricted that even the movie theater becomes frighteningly predictable. Consequently, "the whole town lived as if it

had no future" because, in a real way, the town did not have a future.[83] Their future was taken from them when their possibility and potential was so severely restricted.

The lesson from the town of Oran is not that we ought to seek after the status quo that the townsfolk had at the beginning of the novel—that we hope our lives are unremarkable as well. Instead, the lesson is that our condition must ascend rather than descend—that we must work against nihilism in order to achieve a kind of opening of possibility. Thoreau's statement, "most men lead lives of quiet desperation," is another way of saying that most people chose the quarantined life rather than a life of freedom and potential. Whatever shape this quarantine takes on, it is the individual's responsibility to work against the quarantines of life that end possibility. This denial or ending of potential is analogous to what Martin Heidegger points out as the condition of enframed society since the rise of technology.

Nihilism is a restriction, a compartmentalization, a stilling, and a quarantining. Heidegger and Dewey's message, then, is directed towards those who have knowingly and unknowingly placed themselves within a kind of quarantine. It is directed toward those individuals who have made seemingly irreversible choices, choices that constrict a life rather than those that set it free. These choices are quarantines and though some quarantines are thrust upon unwitting recipients, like the ones in *The Plague*, most quarantines are chosen for one's self. These choices are like someone choosing shackles for themselves. Accordingly, as is normally the case within existentialism, the choice and opportunity for removing these shackles and for change is placed in the hands of the

[83] Albert Camus, The Plague (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 258.

individual. Once art is internalized it must be externalized. Whatever comes into the body must come out of it. Heidegger's poet internalizes art but the individual must become the artist and complete the turn. The art inside must become art outside.

In this third chapter, I intend to demonstrate the societal implications of the aesthetic life and experience. Moreover, this demonstration will also bear the fruit of the societal implications to the aesthetic turn that we have been developing for the past two chapters. Dewey's aesthetics theory laid out in *Art as Experience* has a lot to offer, one of the upshots of Dewey's aesthetic life is a transformed understanding of the community. This transformed understanding is made possible because of the turn to personal responsibility that was made in the last chapter. Dewey's understanding of democracy is a radical egalitarianism that is only possible when each person acts together. For this to be possible one must be the arbiter of his or her doings. In other words, one must be personally responsible. The aesthetic life properly undergone has political implications for society. A community of people that are aesthetically engaged is called democracy and a community that is completely aesthetically engaged is called the Great Community. By contrast, an aesthetically impoverished, and ultimately nihilistic, society is a totalitarian dictatorship. The final pages of the chapter, on a concluding note, will hope to impress the importance of this work through outlining the implications to the individual who discards the importance of the aesthetic life. This is not a kind of moral injunction. Rather, these final pages are meant to impress and make provocative the importance of the aesthetic turn and the potential richness of experience one may gain. One of the most important contributions of an aesthetically engaged

community is the perpetual creation of possibility, potential, and freedom. Toward this idea, John McDermott writes that, for Dewey, "politics is the struggle to construct an optimum environment for the realizing and sanctioning of the aesthetic processes of living."[84]

Dewey's political philosophy is an extension of his aesthetics. As it was mentioned in the last chapter, art "is the process of making the world a different place in which to live."[85] Therefore, democracy, like the Great community, is a work of art. This aesthetic process is "a way of life" that yields a freer society.[86] As Dewey tells us, one's aesthetic experience is not complete until the affection of the experience finds an outward expression. The result of this outward expression is an opening of possibility within both the individual and society. The Great Community is the term Dewey designates for an aesthetically rich society. As we will see, the Great Community operates in much the same way as a work of art does. In fact, for Dewey, through the creation of democracy and the Great Community, one is creating a work of art. The conforming of one's societal, political, and governmental structure to that of the Great Community is one example of an outward expression of an aesthetic experience brought to consummation. Dewey writes, "The material of esthetic experience in being human…is social. Esthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization, a means of promoting its development, and is also the ultimate

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[84] John McDermott, "Introduction" in *The Philosophy of John Dewey: Two Volumes in One*, ed. by John McDermott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), xxix.
[85] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1958), 363.
[86] John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey, Volume One: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, ed. by Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 342.

judgment upon the quality of a civilization."[87] As mentioned in the last chapter, art for Dewey is union of material and ideal. And, since this material can be social, the democratic ideal provides the direction by which the experience is aimed. The idea of the Great Community is composed of both material and ideal. The Great Community is a work of art.

Dewey's politics is an outlook or a mode of life that sets itself up as a roadblock to nihilistic quarantines. Two reasons the Great Community and art are so beneficial are because of the relations that they create and the communication that they foster. Both art and the ideal democratic society create and foster connections, relations, and communication between the organism and his or her environment.

The Great Community is an implementation of the methods and structures that facilitate the perpetual opening of potential through experiences that are pregnant with connections. The Great Community is one that is characterized by an education that is given to all, communication inclusive of all, a community trust that neglects no one, and a respect that is withheld from no one. This society allows inquiry to drive education, which fosters an investigative spirit that demands freedom of the press.[88] This community does not divorce work from play and does not condone a life of habituation, which places power back into the hands of the proletariat. The promise of money does not distracted the community with opiates. Democracy is the name ascribed to the ideal mode or aim of society. Democracy is the collection of these actions and experiences properly executed by the community. Dewey states, "Democracy is belief in the ability

[87] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigee Books, 1980), 326.
[88] This kind of inquiry Dewey understands as the same governing basis for philosophical inquiry as well.

of human experience to generate the aims and methods by which further experience will grow in ordered richness."[89] This growth in ordered richness is the opening of potential. These actions under gird experience with an aesthetic richness.

The Great Community is not simply free in the negative sense of removing restriction; rather, it is free in the positive sense of a society perpetually moving toward freedom.[90] This means that a properly democratic society is not merely free but always progressing toward and opening up new freedoms—much like a jazz soloist always creating new notes to play. The belief in this perpetual movement is democracy. A democratic community always provides the greatest potential for its citizens because of democracy's methods and structures facilitate a society towards a freer community. Dewey said, "the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute."[91] The structures and methods formed to instill and inculcate a freer society are communication and community. Dewey writes,

> I am inclined to believe that the heart and final guarantee of democracy is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth what is read and uncensored news of the day, and in gatherings of friends in the living rooms of houses and apartments to converse freely with one another.[92]

The establishment and facilitation of community and communication create, form, and evolve relationships. This communication allows society to guard itself against being fractioned and isolated from its members. These relations that give rise to openness

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[89] Ibid.
[90] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1954), 168.
[91] Dewey, *The Essential Dewey: volume one,* 343.
[92] Ibid., 342.

imbues an aesthetic and a beauty in our experience. The greatest society provides the greatest amount choice.

The open inquiry, open communication, and open relations that find themselves within the Great Community are all to the individual's benefit. Although, the best community will not, *ipso facto*, create the best individual. If this were true, then it would remove the responsibility from the individual. Even the individual within the worst society has a responsibility to act, grow, communicate, and live within the community. If responsibility could be removed, then the community's impact on the organism would only be a kind of crass causal relation. The individual still must acknowledge, acquiesce, and accept the benefits.

Habituation in politics, as in aesthetic experience, is an enemy. In politics habit is that factor that keeps the society from realizing its potential. Dewey says, through quoting William James, that habit "alone is what keeps us within the bounds of ordinance and saves the children of fortune from the uprising of the poor…habit binds us to orderly and established ways of action."[93] Art shares this distaste of habit with politics because politics is a way of experiencing. More specifically, this distaste for habit is because habit sets itself up as a blockade to forming and creating new relations. Since aesthetic experience and the Great Community are both characterized as a wellspring of nutritious relations, habit is an enemy of both aesthetic experience and politics.

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[93] Qtd. in John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1954), 159-160.

Communication is not only a hallmark of the Great Community but is also an attribute of a work of art. It is within art's capacity to communicate that one can see how the aesthetic life directly impacts politics. Dewey writes, "In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience."[94] A work of art opens up possibility. The communication that art creates facilitates the Great Community because it is through communication that the Great Community is firmly established.

By contrast to the Great Community, a totalitarian dictatorship offers something like a nihilistic society. As we see in this quote from Dewey, a totalitarian dictatorship offers the same kind of depravity that a nihilistic society does for Heidegger. Dewey says,

> For everything which bars freedom and fullness of communication sets up barriers that divide human beings into sets cliques, into antagonistic sects and factions, and thereby undermines the democratic way of life. Merely legal guarantees of civil liberties of free belief, free expression, free assembly, are of little avail if in daily life freedom of communication, the give and take of ideas, facts, experiences, is choked by mutual suspicion, by abuse, by fear and hatred. These things destroy the essential condition of the democratic way of living even more effectually than open coercion which—as the example of totalitarian states proves—is effective only when it succeeds in breeding hate, suspicion, intolerance in the minds of individual human beings.[95]

Here Dewey not only identifies the creation but also the effects of a totalitarian dictatorship. Hindrances on freedom and communication are the perturbations of a malicious government, and its symptoms primarily hate, suspicion, and intolerance. The

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[94] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 105.
[95] Dewey, *The Essential Dewey: volume one*, 342.

erosion of communication allows the manipulation of society to the gain of those in charge and opens the door for societal alienation. These symptoms are caused by the erosion of connections and relations as a result of the division of human beings. In Heidegger's understanding, because one is divided from his or her environment, one is unable to experience the "thinging thing." Also, as in Heidegger, an aesthetic turn combats the problems set forth by a totalitarian nihilistic age. Dewey declares, "Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things…Because the objects of art are expressive, they communicate."[96] Art communicates in a way that allows relations and connections to be made despite the fracture of this nihilistic age.

The same compartmentalization that was seen as a hindrance to aesthetic living in the last chapter is also in the quote above to be the destruction of the Great Community. This compartmentalization comes about when the communication is removed between organisms. The removal of communication fractures the organisms from each other and alienates each organism for the others. A totalitarian government is a community of individuals stripped of communication with each other causing distance and ruptures from within the community. A totalitarian government is essentially the destruction of the community, which comes at the hands of the destruction of communication. From the destruction results the disharmony and disunity that allows the government to control or handle the now fractured organisms.

For Dewey, a totalitarian, and ultimately nihilistic, government is the name given to the destruction of everything Dewey's philosophy hopes to achieve: a community rich

[96] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 104.

and active in the aesthetic process of living. Both autocratic governments and nihilism destroy community by isolating the individual and destroying both proper education and communication with the other members of a society. It removes the societal spirituality outlined in Dewey's *A Common Faith* by destroying the community's ability to come together in action or operation, and, consequently, destroys that which allows each individual to be apart of something greater that ourselves, the community. A totalitarian dictatorship destroys aesthetic experience by fracturing and compartmentalizing experience, and one another. Therefore, both dictatorships and nihilism destroy relationships—the same relationships that form the basis of Dewey's notions of beauty, spirituality, community, and art. And then, nihilism fractures the only thing left as a result from such alienation and isolation, the individual.

Although I wish my final words were ones that spoke of the triumphs of men and women, my experience does not seem to validate this. For Heidegger as well, most people are enframed. My experience has taught me that this rebellion from the common place, from habituation, and from our nihilistic age lives within only a select few. My experience has taught me that the enemies of experience, of aesthetics, and of the Great Community grow stronger while humanity grows more entrenched in nihilism. The enemies of experience, habit, laziness, and resignation, leech onto experience. So, instead, my next words are of the walking dead, those who have removed any kind of potential in their life and who have restricted and quarantined themselves. As in Camus' *The Plague*, though death was all around the citizens of Oran, even the healthy townspeople were dying in a very real way. This severe restriction is precisely what

death is, the complete end of potential. Consequently, those who restrict their potential, resign themselves to the walls of Oran, and remain in their nihilistic state, are killing themselves.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have now accomplished the task set before us. Not only have we provided a proper account for an aesthetic annulment of nihilism, but within this annulment we also have a conception of democracy that prohibits nihilism's return. The aesthetic turn properly undergone in the face of nihilism, then, also improves our society. It is an aesthetic turn that brings about a moment of truth, confronts modern technology's enframing, and vitalizes the individual in place of religion's absence. I would like to take a moment and refract this recent ending toward some considerations in the beginning chapter, and then speak briefly as to what kind of further project may strengthen this thesis.

Heidegger teaches us that the current conditions of things are the fault of the individual. When religion ceased to be the arbiter of meaning, instead of the individual proclaiming that role, the role was designated to science and technology. As Heidegger points out, Technological enframing came about first from the condition of the individual and then modern technology took on these attributes. It was not the fault of technology but the fault of the individuals for shaping technology in this way. Heidegger instructs us in much the same way as Cassius did when he said to Brutus "The fault, dear Brutus, in not in the stars but in ourselves."[97] Dewey's emphasis on

[97] William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007), 61.

experience shows us that if the induction of the problem is our responsibility, then the abdication of the problem ought to be our responsibility as well.

The personal responsibility generated from Dewey's emphasis on experience shows us a particular insight in politics. When the genesis of action is placed on the shoulders of each individual it creates a kind of egalitarianism. The name for this particular egalitarianism Dewey calls democracy. Since Dewey's conception of democracy calls for a society ever increasing the potentiality of its citizens, the restricting hand of nihilism cannot take hold. Democracy is nihilism's stopbank. Though, were democracy to be abandoned, then the bank would crumble, the individual would fracture, and the aesthetic life would seek asylum in a select few. Much like it does today. The effort to increase the aesthetic life is a community effort, or, as Dewey says, "a way of life."[98] For Dewey, the complete aesthetic experience is one that finds an expression.

In order to strengthen and implement this thesis, one ought to consider how this nihilistic age still goes unnoticed. Working towards elucidating our present condition, could strengthen the importance and aid the implementation of this present work. Through this elucidation, the present erudition of this work might be noticed outside the walls of philosophy, which could allow for the potential aesthetic possibilities within our culture to open up. Politics is the study of community, but acting properly political can create art and beauty. Reconstituting one's society in order to make it freer and more humane will not only improve education, communication, trust, and experience as a

[98] John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey, Volume One: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy*, ed. by Larry Hickman and Thomas Alexander (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 342.

whole, but it will also create a beautiful and aesthetically rich community. The consequence of which is society indwelt with a beautiful pedagogy, beautiful communication, beautiful trust, and beautiful experience.

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