



Rethinking ‘Bodenständigkeit’ in the Technological Age

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Abstract

Although the concept of “groundedness/autochthony” (*Bodenständigkeit*) in Heidegger’s writings receives far less scholarly attention than, for example, that of “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*), a careful examination of the famous “*Gelassenheit*” speech of 1955 demonstrates that, in fact, *Bodenständigkeit* is the core concept around which everything else turns. Moreover, in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech and the writings on Hebel that follow, Heidegger understands *Bodenständigkeit* to be, fundamentally, something made possible by language in its particularities of tradition and locale. Thus, there is an intriguing continuity of meaning between that concept and the concept as it was used phenomenologically in his writings from the summer 1924 course up to *Sein und Zeit*.

Keywords

Gelassenheit, Heidegger, Hebel, technology, autochthony, mystery

... for I am convinced that there is no essential work of the spirit that does not have its roots in an originary groundedness [*in einer ursprüngliche Bodenständigkeit*].

—Martin Heidegger (*GA* 16: 551).¹

The title of this essay restates the philosophical task that Heidegger takes up most explicitly in his *Gelassenheit* speech, which he presented in his hometown,

¹ In what follows I shall cite the German text in parentheses after quotations—most often referencing the German text as presented in Heidegger’s collected works, or *Gesamtausgabe* (*GA*) (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976ff.), indicating volume and page number. However, there are additional German texts that will be cited, for example, Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* (*SZ*), 12th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1972); *Denkerfabrungen 1910–1976* (*DE*), ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983); and *Hebel der Hausfreund* (*HdH*), 5th ed. (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1985). Although these texts are cited, unless indicated otherwise, translations of Heidegger in this article are my own. At times I have altered somewhat the published translations of Heidegger from which I quote.

Messkirch, Germany, in October, 1955. The speech that Heidegger gave is most famous for its use of the concept *Gelassenheit*—typically translated as “releasement” or “letting be”—but the concept of *Bodenständigkeit* (“groundedness” or “autochthony”) also figures very prominently in the speech.² Indeed, despite the fact that scholarly treatments of Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* outnumber by far those devoted to the concept of *Bodenständigkeit*, it should be remembered that Heidegger introduces the thought of *Gelassenheit*—or, more precisely, the companion-thoughts of “releasement toward things” and “openness to the mystery”—in order to rethink the possible meaning of *Bodenständigkeit* in the technological age.³ Consider the movement of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* speech: he begins by reflecting on “homeland” (*Heimat*), since the speech marks his return to Messkirch, his hometown (*GA* 16: 517); he commemorates the 175th anniversary of his fellow Messkircher, Conradin Kreutzer; but then, soon enough, Heidegger directs his audience toward the “thoughtlessness” and “flight-from-thinking” characteristic of the age (*GA* 16: 518–19). A symptom of this situation is detailed in Heidegger’s portrait of calculative thinking as not bringing itself to reflect or meditate (*kommt nicht zur Besinnung*) (*GA* 16: 519–20). He writes, “Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking (*besinnliches Denken*), it is not a thinking that attends-in-thought to the meaning that holds sway in everything that is”

² A note on translation: there is no particularly good English equivalent of the German word, *Bodenständigkeit*, just as there is no particularly good English equivalent of *Gelassenheit*. The difficulty involved in translating *Bodenständigkeit* is shown by the fact that it is rendered in English with the words, “autochthony,” “subsistence,” “indigenous character,” “native ground,” “ground-hold,” “groundedness,” “rootedness” or “rootedness in the soil”—all of which are correct, to be sure, though each falls short in some specific way. In certain contexts, something like “rootedness” seems the best choice and for this reason has been chosen by translators, but it misleadingly suggests that Heidegger is using one of the many words he uses with the root, *Wurzel*, “root”—such as *Verwurzelung*, *Entwurzelung*, etc. “Autochthony” is the preferred translation by Alfred Denker, Theodore Kisiel, and Joan Stambaugh; this rendering has the advantage and disadvantage of being a word seldom ever used in English—which is an advantage, certainly, inasmuch as it thereby catches the attention of the reader as a concept worthy of noting; the disadvantage, however, is that the adjective, “autochthonous” does not parallel the ordinariness of *bodenständig* in German, which means something more like “native” or “grounded” or “down to earth” in English. Schürmann’s “ground-hold” has what may be the greater advantage of being a word never used in English—although, conversely, it has no adjectival form whatsoever. In what follows I have opted to vary the translation of *Bodenständigkeit* in cases where I do not simply leave it untranslated.

³ It is a sign of how central the concept *Bodenständigkeit* is to Heidegger’s concerns in that essay that the word *Bodenständigkeit*, along with other forms of *Boden* (e.g., “Heimatboden,” etc.), appear more than two dozen times in a thirteen-page essay.

(GA 16: 520). Yet, for Heidegger, “attentive thinking” (*Nachdenken*) or “meditative thinking” (*besinnliches Denken*)—he uses these terms interchangeably in the speech—signify nothing that is esoteric. While the popular view may have it that “mere attentive thinking floats above reality...it loses touch [*Es verliert den Boden*]” (GA 16: 520), Heidegger contends that to engage it, one need only stay with what lies near and reflect/meditate on what lies nearest of all: namely, he writes, “on that which matters to us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of earth that is our home [*auf diesem Fleck Heimaterde*]; now, in the present hour of the world” (GA 16: 520).

It is at this point in his speech that Heidegger draws the audience’s attention to “ground” or “soil” of a homeland (*Boden einer Heimat*), the Swabian soil, and having drawn their attention in this way, he reads some lines from the poet Johann Peter Hebel:

We are plants, which—whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not—
must rise out of the earth in which we are rooted,
if we are to blossom in the ether and bear fruit.⁴

[Wir sind Pflanzen, die—wir mögen’s uns gerne gestehen oder nicht—
mit den Wurzeln aus der Erde steigen müssen,
um im Äther blühen und Früchte tragen zu können.]
(*Werke*, 3: 314).

About these lines, Heidegger asks how it stands today with what Hebel’s poetry addresses: “Is there still that calm dwelling of human beings between earth and sky? Does the meditative spirit still hold sway over the land? Is there still a rootedly-capable homeland in whose soil human beings stand fast [*Gibt es noch wurzel-kräftige Heimat, in deren Boden der Mensch ständig steht*], i.e., are grounded [*boden-ständig ist*]?” (GA 16: 521). Rhetorically, these questions derive their force from Heidegger’s observations that, in the technological age, the various instruments of our lives, the multiple media in which we are all immersed, are nearer to us than the earth on which we dwell—“nearer than the sky over the land, nearer than the passage of time from day to night, nearer than the customs and mores in the village, nearer than the world of homegrown tradition” (GA 16: 522). And at this point Heidegger addresses himself most explicitly to *Bodenständigkeit*, as he writes: “The *groundedness* [*Bodenständigkeit*] of human beings today is threatened at its core. Even

⁴ Bambach’s translation of Hebel, in *Heidegger’s Roots*, 330. For complete bibliographic information, see Works Cited at the end of this essay.

more: . . . the loss of groundedness arises from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born” (GA 16: 522). The loss of *Bodenständigkeit* that he has in mind shows itself in how world and nature appear to us: “The world appears now as an object open to the assaults of calculative thinking. . . . Nature becomes a gigantic fuel station, a source of energy for modern technology and industry” (GA 16: 523). But Heidegger then wonders whether, if the old *Bodenständigkeit* is already being lost, “a new ground and soil” (*ein neuer Grund und Boden*) might not be granted to human beings—and if so, he asks, “What would be the ground and soil for a future groundedness [*künftige Bodenständigkeit*]?” (GA 16: 526). It is only in response to this question that Heidegger introduces the thought of *Gelassenheit* as a comportment through which we see things not merely in a technological way—a comportment that expresses, at the same time, a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’ toward the technological world (GA 16: 527). And thus, Heidegger brings together the threads of his discussion as follows:

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in an entirely different way. They promise us a new ground and soil [*Grund und Boden*] upon which we can stand within the technological world and withstand it, not being harmed by it.

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery offer us the prospect of a new groundedness [*eine neue Bodenständigkeit*]. This could one day be capable of summoning back the old, now rapidly vanishing groundedness in an altered form. . . . If releasement toward things and openness to the mystery awaken within us, then we might enter upon a path that leads to a new ground and soil. In this ground [*Boden*] the creating of lasting works could put down new roots. (GA 16: 528–29)

Heidegger then closes the speech by reading, once again, the poetic lines from Johann Peter Hebel that begin, “We are plants . . . [*Wir sind Pflanzen*. . .]”

Certainly, Heidegger’s focal concept of *Bodenständigkeit* in this speech is provocative enough that, even if it remains rather indeterminate in its meaning, it is sufficiently interesting on its own to justify articulating it further, say, by recourse to other texts of Heidegger’s—and in what follows I shall focus particularly on the lectures and essays on Hebel’s poetry from the mid-1950s to 1960. But the concept is all the more worthy of our examination given how important it is to Heidegger’s writings in the mid-1920s, from the summer 1924 lecture course, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* (GA 18), where it first appears in Heidegger’s thought, to the 1925 lecture course, *History of the Concept of Time* (GA 20), and then, finally, to *Being and Time*. In the summer 1924 lecture course, Heidegger is concerned exclusively with what he calls

“the indigenous-character/groundedness of conceptuality [*Bodenständigkeit der Begrifflichkeit*] by way of an explication of being-there as being-in-the-world” (GA 18: 9). For example, he writes: “We must recover the indigenous-character/groundedness [*Bodenständigkeit*] as it became vital in Greek science. . . . What is meant by *λόγος*, by *οὐσία*, by *λόγος οὐσίας*? By clarifying that, we will find the indigenous-character/groundedness of the concept [*Bodenständigkeit des Begriffes*]” (GA 18: 18–19). Then, in an effort to further characterize his own self-described “philological” work in going back to recover the meaning of Aristotle’s basic concepts, he writes: “This regression/going-back is nothing other than the *overhearing of the speaking of natural being-there to its world*. . . . Only when we are assured of this will we have the possibility of understanding the basic concepts in their raw, native character [*Urwüchsigkeit*]” (GA 18: 41).⁵ The precise character of the regression or going-back that Heidegger has in mind is sketched out a bit further in a section of his handwritten manuscripts.⁶ There, he writes:

Basic concepts in their conceptuality, e.g. *οὐσία*. What is meant, fundamentally, by the return to the customary meaning, to the expressing and addressing of beings as being in the customariness of everyday being-there? The everydayness of the being of life, of human beings, human life as a mode of being. In this connection, speaking in a special sense basic phenomenon [*Grundphänomenon*]. Thus, conceptuality: interpretedness and possibility of this being, of being in the sense of the there, of the there grasped in the moment, discoveredness [*Also Begrifflichkeit: Ausgelegtheit und Möglichkeit dieses Seins, des Seins in der Weise des Da, des jeweils ergriffenen Da, Entdecktheit*]. The Aristotelian explication of this being presented in such a way that the understanding of *λέγειν* and *λόγος* are thereby made more determinate and concrete. (GA 18: 352–53)

This passage is, admittedly, extremely compressed, as we might expect of Heidegger’s own handwritten lecture notes. Nonetheless, we can glean from the passage above the basic structure of what he wishes to accomplish in the 1924 lecture course: namely, to trace Aristotle’s basic concepts back to the conceptuality (*Begrifflichkeit*) that is their ground—and, specifically,

⁵ Notice that, in the last sentence, he glosses what he otherwise always calls “*Bodenständigkeit*” as *Urwüchsigkeit*, which signifies “originality,” “earthiness,” “naturalness,” “nativeness,” “ruggedness,” “unaffectedness,” “sturdiness”—and which, therefore, parallels “*Bodenständigkeit*” in its range of meanings.

⁶ On the complicated relationship between Heidegger’s own manuscripts and the lecture course in its edited form, see the Editor’s Afterword, by Mark Michalski, to volume 18 of the *Gesamtausgabe*.

conceptuality in the sense of Dasein's "expressing and addressing of beings as being in the customariness/ordinariness of everyday existence (being-there)." In other words, the basic phenomenon that we are to attend to, philosophically, is the way that Dasein expresses and addresses beings. In this way Heidegger connects conceptuality with Dasein's own interpretedness—i.e., the "discoveredness" (*Entdecktheit*) of Dasein in expressing and addressing beings. It should be clear, then, that the groundedness of the concept (*Bodenständigkeit des Begriffes*) that Heidegger thereby means to pursue is understood by him as being at odds with the theoretical construction by which interpreters of Greek philosophy set out to fix the meaning of basic concepts. Accordingly, in the 1924 lecture course, Heidegger devotes a great deal of attention to carefully laying out the specific hermeneutic principles by which we might get at the *Bodenständigkeit* of basic concepts in Greek philosophy.

Yet, already in his December 1924 talk, "Being-There and Being-True According to Aristotle," Heidegger's attention shifts away from these hermeneutic principles to what we might call a *critical* use of the concept of *Bodenständigkeit*—for example, in his argument that the tradition according to which truth is a determination of judgment is not *bodenständig*, since "truth is not a characteristic of judgment but instead is a fundamental determination of the Dasein [openness] of human beings themselves."⁷ Anticipating the later phenomenological distinctions in *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes: "[S]omething that was already originally discovered once, and at one time had been a proper possession of someone who had original knowledge of it, submerges once more and thus becomes something that 'everyone' understands, 'everyone' repeats and says to others until it becomes 'valid.' What was brought forth once in an originary and creative way now becomes uprooted. It loses its ground [*Boden*]."⁸

This shift in Heidegger's recourse to the concept, *Bodenständigkeit*, is carried out further in his *History of the Concept of Time*, where he relates it directly to the phenomenological directive "to the things themselves"—a directive that is addressed over against "construction and free-floating questioning in traditional concepts which have become more and more groundless" (*bodenlos*). According to Heidegger, the directive, *zu den Sachen selbst*, means, on the one

⁷ "Being-There and Being-True According to Aristotle," in *Becoming Heidegger*, ed. T. Kisiel and T. Sheehan, 219–20. On the relative chronology of the 1924 lecture course and the essay "Being-There and Being-True According to Aristotle," see the discussion in Kisiel, "Situating Rhetorical Politics in Heidegger's Protopractical Ontology," 189–90.

⁸ "Being-There and Being-True According to Aristotle," 225.

hand, the demand that we do research that is “autochthonously demonstrative” (*bodenständig ausweisend*), so that, on the other hand, we may arrive at and secure this ground (*Boden*) once more—in other words, the demand that we lay open the ground (*Freilegung des Bodens*) (*GA* 20: 104). Then, in the discussion of “being-covered-up” as the counter-concept to phenomenon, where Heidegger distinguishes between something not yet being discovered and something being buried-over, he writes:

The originally seen phenomena are uprooted, torn from their ground, and are no longer understood in their origins [*Die ursprünglich gesehenen Phänomene werden entwurzelt, ihrem Boden entrissen und bleiben in ihrer sachmäßigen Herkunft unverstanden*]. . . . Every phenomenological proposition, though drawn from original sources, is subject to the possibility of concealment when it is communicated as an assertion. Transmitted in an empty and predisposed way of understanding it, it loses its roots in its native soil [*seine Bodenständigkeit*] and becomes a free-floating naming. (*GA* 20: 119)

This last formulation, of course, is echoed most distinctly in the famous formulation of *Being and Time*: “It is possible for every phenomenological concept and proposition drawn from genuine origins to degenerate when communicated as a statement. It gets circulated in a vacuous fashion, loses its autochthony [*Bodenständigkeit*] and becomes a free-floating thesis” (*SZ*, 36).⁹

However, as numerous commentators have observed, this specifically phenomenological conception of *Bodenständigkeit* in the writings leading up to, and culminating in, *Being and Time* gives way to another sense of *Bodenständigkeit* in his writings of the early to mid-1930s. Although, in some places, the new conception of *Bodenständigkeit* seems, on the whole, continuous with the earlier, phenomenological conception, albeit with a different cast—for example, his statement in the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, “Through our questioning, we are entering a landscape; to be in this landscape is the fundamental prerequisite for restoring rootedness [*Bodenständigkeit*] to historical Dasein”

⁹ English translation by Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996). See also his claim in *Being and Time*: “The tradition uproots the historicity of Dasein to such a degree that it only takes an interest in the manifold forms of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophizing in the most remote and strangest cultures, and with this interest tries to veil its own groundlessness [*Die Tradition entwurzelt die Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins so weit, daß es sich nur noch im Interesse an der Vielgestaltigkeit möglicher Typen, Richtungen, Standpunkte des Philosophierens in den entlegensten und fremdesten Kulturen bewegt und mit diesem Interesse die eigene Bodenlosigkeit zu verhüllen sucht*]” (*SZ*, 21).

(GA 40: 43)¹⁰—still, at other times, Heidegger’s use of the term, *Bodenständigkeit*, is less than philosophically radical. For example, in his 1933 essay, “Creative Landscape: Why Do We Remain in the Provinces?,” he writes: “The inner belongingness of my own work to the Schwarzwald and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness [*Bodenständigkeit*] in the Alemannian-Swabian soil” (DE, 10–11).¹¹ But far worse is the fact that this ontic sense of rootedness is racialized in Heidegger’s regrettable letter on behalf of Eduard Baumgarten, dated 2 October 1929, in which he tells his addressee that they face the following choice: “either to infuse, again, our German spiritual life with genuine indigenous forces and educators [*echte bodenständige Kräfte und Erzieher*], or to leave it at the mercy, once and for all, of the growing Jewification [*Verjudung*], both in a larger and a narrower sense.”¹² It should go without saying that any conception of “autochthonous/indigenous forces and educators” that draws its force by contrast with a perceived “Jewification” (*Verjudung*) is a conception that falls well short of our philosophical expectations.¹³ It would appear that the language Heidegger uses here is of a piece

¹⁰ The English translation is that by G. Fried and R. Polt (London: Yale University, 2000), 42. Bambach’s comment is apt: “The task of ontology is to restore historical rootedness to the tradition of Western thinking, to win back or recuperate from the ingrained habits of centuries-long philosophical practice the sense of original wonderment that pervaded early Greek *theoria*. In this recuperation of Greek antiquity amidst the free-floating speculation of contemporary life, Heidegger finds an originary ground in which to think” (*Heidegger’s Roots*, 23).

¹¹ Translated by Thomas J. Sheehan as “Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?,” in Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York: Continuum, 2003).

¹² I have altered the English translation by Manfred Stassen in Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*. This letter was first published in *Die Zeit*, December 22, 1989, in an article titled, “Die Verjudung des deutschen Geistes: Ein unbekannter Brief Heideggers,” by Ulrich Sieg. The longer passage from which the quotation is taken reads as follows: “Was ich in meinem Zeugnis nur indirekt andeuten konnte, darf ich hier deutlicher sagen: es geht um nichts Geringeres als um die unaufschiebbare Besinnung darauf, daß wir vor der Wahl stehen, unserem deutschen Geistesleben wieder echte bodenständige Kräfte und Erzieher zuzuführen oder es der wachsenden Verjudung im weiteren u engeren Sinne endgültig auszuliefern. Wir werden den Weg nur zurückfinden, wenn wir imstande sind, ohne Hetze und unfruchtbare Auseinandersetzung, frischen Kräften zur Entfaltung zu verhelfen. Mit Rücksicht auf dieses große Ziel wäre ich besonders dankbar, wenn Herrn Baumgarten, den ich mir zu meinem Assistenten ausersehen habe, durch ein Stipendium geholfen werden könnte.”

¹³ I take his remarks in the letter to indicate the “primitive nationalism” that Hans Jonas observed: “[Y]es, a certain ‘blood-and-soil’ point of view was always there: [Heidegger] emphasized his Black Forest roots a great deal; I mean his skiing and the ski cabin up in Todtnauberg. . . . [I]t also had something to do with his ideological affirmation: one had to be close to nature, and

with those passages in his Rectorial Address where he writes of the “joint rootedness in the essence of the German university” that students and faculty share, as well as his claim that the “spiritual world of a people . . . is the power that most deeply preserves the people’s strengths, which are tied to earth and blood [*die Macht der tiefsten Bewahrung der erd-und-bluthaften Kräfte*].”¹⁴ In any case, we might ask ourselves how the phenomenological concept of *Bodenständigkeit* and the “*volkisch*” concept of *Bodenständigkeit* relate to, or bear interpretively upon, the concept in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech that we wish to examine and articulate further.

As one might imagine, there has been some scholarly controversy about the various interpretive possibilities open to us. On this matter, Charles Bambach’s book, *Heidegger’s Roots* is exhaustive in its research on how right-wing theorists used the language of *Heimat*, *Blut und Boden*, etc., in the 1920s and 1930s, how Heidegger related himself discursively to these thinkers, and further, Bambach argues that we must ask “whether in this postwar Heideggerian discourse of a new autochthony there are traces of another form of the old autochthony of National Socialist blood and soil that animates the Rectorial Address, the Schlageter memorial speech, and the other political writings from the 1930s.”¹⁵ However, Bambach does not simply pose this question for readers of Heidegger like ourselves; rather, he presents his own response to this question in no uncertain terms:

[Heidegger’s pastoral images of rootedness in the landscape] constitute the subterranean or chthonic depth-dimension of a National Socialist metaphysics of racial exclusion and superiority that will be dislodged from the biological sphere of *eugeneia*, blood and consanguinity even as it is reconfigured rhetorically in the pastoral language of autochthony. Such a maneuver is political to the core, even if it engages in a rhetoric of the anti-political. And the logic of autochthony is always marked by such exclusion. Autochthony affirms the privileged status of one group while at the same time designating the autochthonous groups as the ‘other.’ Heidegger’s elegiac reveries about the homeland, rootedness, the Alemannic soil, and German affinity with the Greeks are all marked by the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion. (Bambach, 211)

so on. And certain remarks, also ones he sometimes made about the French, showed a sort of (how could I say it?) primitive nationalism” (quoted in Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* [New York: Continuum, 2005], 168).

¹⁴ English translation by Manfred Stassen may be found in Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, 2–11.

¹⁵ Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots*, 332.

If *Bodenständigkeit*, or “autochthony” in this passage, is conceptually determined by the binary logic of inclusion and exclusion such that it is essentially exclusionary, then it follows that Heidegger’s attempt to rethink *Bodenständigkeit* in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech must itself be constrained by this binary logic. Indeed, this is just what Bambach argues about Heidegger’s recourse to the concept in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech:

[T]hroughout this entire period, continuing right through the last published texts from 1976, Heidegger will still cling to the old metaphysics of the earth, the land, the native soil, and rootedness that he outlined in the Schlageter speech and the Rectorial Address. Even the turn to Eckhartian language of *Gelassenheit* in the 1940’s and ’50’s will still reveal the underlying metaphysics of *Bodenständigkeit*, autochthony, and the Alemannic soil that pervades Heidegger’s work of the 1930’s. . . . And yet, despite the muted effect provided by the softer accent and his conciliatory tone, the underlying message remained the same. (Bambach, 134–135)

“The underlying message remained the same,” Bambach says—but are we clear as to what the “underlying message” even says? At the very least, Bambach has excluded, from the outset, interpretations of *Heimat* and *Bodenständigkeit* in Heidegger’s thinking where the traditional understandings of these words are called into question: for example, the interpretation offered by Reiner Schürmann in his book, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher*, according to which Heidegger’s “*Gelassenheit*” essay thinks the mystery itself as homeland—“the *Geheimnis* is the *Heimat*.”¹⁶

In an essay, titled, “*Heimat: On the Threshold with Heidegger*,” Will McNeill has addressed precisely the question at issue here in Heidegger’s thinking of *Bodenständigkeit*, *Heimat*, and related concepts—or, to say it a bit differently, McNeill has problematized any simple response we might offer to this question, if we are to do justice to Heidegger’s thinking in these texts.

¹⁶ Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart*, 199. Schürmann fleshes out this idea a bit further when he comments: “‘Mystery is the fatherland’ . . . yields no philosophical thesis. It says that as long as man holds things in his obstinate disposition, as long as his thinking remains calculative, he errs in the quest for a presence that would be everlasting, fulfilling, grounding—a presence understood as durable (*beständiges Anwesen*)” (199). Clearly one can embrace this part of Heidegger’s thinking in the “*Gelassenheit*” essay while taking issue with what some commentators have called Heidegger’s “provincialism,” as Schürmann himself does when he writes: “We need not be content with Heidegger’s rural idyll, in which man’s ground is his fields, and his native land the familiar countryside in which he feels at home. As the country-born has ‘his’ plot, so the city-born has ‘his’ neighborhood. From this we understand what it means to have a horizon,” p. 198.

Specifically, McNeill takes issue with the tendency among interpreters to attribute to Heidegger, without needed qualification, “the belief in a soil-like rootedness of the identity of the German people . . . and further, to straightforwardly identify it with the discourse of National Socialism and to use it as an ‘explanation’ of his erstwhile support for that movement.”¹⁷ While McNeill acknowledges that “a naive or nostalgic appeal to the ontic soil of the Black Forest sometimes enters Heidegger’s discourse,”¹⁸ he nonetheless directs our attention to the philosophical problematics that such imagery/language is meant to address. For example, on the “*Gelassenheit*” speech, McNeill writes:

Are we hearing an appeal to a merely ‘ontic’ rootedness in this address? . . . A cursory reading of this text certainly encounters the emphasis on the Swabian home soil, yet this emphasis must also be considered in the context of the overall theme of this address: the question concerning the relation of human beings and their finitude to the technological world. The emphasis on the factual situatedness, the ‘here and now’ . . . stresses the finitude and thrownness, the particularity of always existing in a specific place and time, in relation to and dependent upon the presence of particular, tangible things around us. It stresses this in contrast to the uprooting, alienating nature of formalizing, technological thinking in which the unsubstitutable particularity of individuals and things is drawn into a system of infinite substitutability and formalization, thus leading us to overlook the dependent and fragile finitude of our situatedness. . . . The theme of *Heimat* here is perhaps not so much concerned with any metaphysical or quasi-metaphysical prioritizing of the Swabian soil as with our very relation to particularity as such.¹⁹

To my mind, this interpretive approach to the “*Gelassenheit*” speech is a much more promising one to follow for our purposes. Beyond that, as I hope to show in what follows, thinking’s relation to “particularity as such,” as McNeill puts it, is made all the more salient when we read the “*Gelassenheit*” speech in

¹⁷ Will McNeill, “*Heimat*: Heidegger on the Threshold,” 319–20.

¹⁸ McNeill, *ibid.*, 327. We should note that Heidegger’s nostalgia need not have the significance that Manfred Stassen finds in it when he writes: “Heidegger’s thinking is characterized by a profound provincial and parochial chauvinism. . . . *Heimat*, *Blut und Boden* and so forth are constitutive for language and culture, and, above all, philosophy or rather *das Denken*. Only the conservation of these earth-bound forces leads to authentic thinking” (see Stassen’s Introduction to Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, xx).

¹⁹ McNeill, “*Heimat*”, 328. Immediately following the sentences quoted above, McNeill poses a question that could very well be directed to Bambach’s interpretation: “Indeed, is not the very *worry* concerning any emphasis on the significance of particularity already indicative of a (quasi-) metaphysical or technological thinking, a thinking that is already persuaded of the priority of a universalizing, formalizing interpretation of the world?”

the context of the full array of speeches and essays that Heidegger wrote on the poetry of Johann Peter Hebel in the mid to late 1950s.

But you might wonder: why Hebel, of all poets? According to Heidegger, Hebel lived in a brilliant nearness to language [*in einer hellen Nähe zur Sprache*]” (*HdH*, 11). Indeed, Hebel is well known for his poetry written in the Swabian dialect. “The essence of language,” Heidegger writes, “is rooted in dialect. Also rooted in dialect is the home-character of the ‘at home,’ the homeland [*die Heimat*]” (*DE*, 88). But is it, again, simply a matter of a sort of *volkisch* attachment to the *Heimat* that leads Heidegger to say that Hebel’s poetry is “rooted in the indigenous/autochthonous [im *Bodenständigen* gewurzelt]” (*GA* 13: 125)? Admittedly, if one were suspicious about Heidegger’s reliance on the language of *Bodenständigkeit*, one might very well be suspicious of his recourse to Hebel’s poetry—since, as Bambach has emphasized, Hebel was appropriated by the National Socialists in the mid-1930s in a volume of essays to which Heidegger himself contributed.²⁰ Nonetheless, such a swift dismissal of Heidegger’s thinking with Hebel in the years around the “*Gelassenheit*” speech misses the distinctively philosophical aims of those essays. In his essay from 1960, “Language and Homeland [*Sprache und Heimat*],” Heidegger writes that, in Hebel’s *Alemannischen Gedichte*, “language speaks in a dialect, i.e., rootedly from a region in whose landscape a lineage of people occupy their homeland [*seine Heimat bewohnt*]” (*DE*, 90). But Heidegger then goes on to distinguish two different kinds of poetry-written-in-dialect (*Mundartdichtung*):

The one [kind of poetry-written-in-dialect] describes or perhaps transfigures land and people by way of its language-region [*Sprachbereich*]. The other [kind of poetry-written-in-dialect] brings forth, for the first time, its entire region into the construct of poetry, but in such a way that, therein, the self-concealing as such comes to appear [*bringt erst seinen ganzen Bereich in das Gebild des Gedichtes hervor, dies jedoch so, daß darin das Sichverbergende als ein solches zum Vorschein kommt*], and we ourselves are brought into this appearing/shining of the mysterious [*und wir selbst in dieses Scheinen des Geheimnisvollen gebracht werden*]. (*DE*, 108)

The last point made in this passage is key for understanding how Heidegger’s continued thinking with Hebel in these years goes hand in hand with his rethinking of *Bodenständigkeit* in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech. A “new” *Boden-*

²⁰ The volume is *Alemannenland: Ein Buch von Volkstum und Sendung*, ed. Franz Kerber (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1937).

ständigkeit would require openness to the mystery, and in the quotation above Heidegger signals that, by way of poetry like Hebel's, we ourselves are brought into "this appearing/shining of the mysterious" [*dieses Scheinen des Geheimnisvollen*]. Likewise, in his 1957 essay, "Hebel der Hausfreund," Heidegger writes the following about Hebel's poetry: "What we ordinarily see of the world, of matters human and divine, is reshaped through poetic saying into what is precious and into the surplus of mysteriousness [*in den Überfluß des Geheimnisvollen umgeprägt*]" (*HdH*, 12). The last word in that quotation recalls the language that Heidegger uses in his *The Principle of Reason* lectures—written at the same time as the "Gelassenheit" speech²¹—in which Heidegger reflects on what it would mean to live in the "atomic age," and he remarks, "Human existence—molded [*geprägt*] by the atom."²² Whereas the *Prägung* of the "atomic age" issues in the *informing* of a public through the various technological devices of media, poetry (and perhaps most of all the poetry-written-in-dialect) effects a remolding or reshaping that involves openness to mystery.

To appreciate this vital capacity of poetry, we must think about language as something other than an instrument (a theme prevalent in Heidegger's writings of this time, of course)—and, indeed, Heidegger stresses the way in which Hebel hears and responds to the mother-tongue. Heidegger announces to the reader that "Hebel knew of this relation of dialect to the Ur-language—he knew, that is to say, of the poetic essence of destined grounded language [*d.h. vom dichterischen Wesen der geschickhaft bodenständigen Sprache*]" (*DE*, 109), and in the essay "Hebel der Hausfreund," he writes:

Whenever and however the human being speaks, he speaks only in that he always beforehand listens to language [*zuvor schon auf die Sprache hört*]. . . . We call this language: the mother-tongue [*Wir nennen diese Sprache: die Muttersprache*].

²¹ Just how concurrently Heidegger wrote the lecture course, *The Principle of Reason*, and his "Gelassenheit" speech is made clear in his letters to his wife in October 1955, where, in more than one letter, he remarks that he is working on these texts over the same stretch of time (see Martin Heidegger, *Letters to his Wife, 1915–1970*, ed. Gertrud Heidegger, trans. R. D. V. Glasgow [London: Polity, 2008], 249–50) and *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991]; originally published as *Der Satz vom Grund* [Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1957]).

²² Then, after talking about TV, radio, newspapers, etc., Heidegger writes: "The word 'Information'—which is not a word of German provenance—speaks more clearly here insofar as it means, on the one hand, the instant news and reporting that, on the other hand and at the same time, have taken over the ceaseless molding/forming of the reader and listener" (*GA* 10: 45; Lilly translation, 29).

...In a genuine sense it is language that speaks, not the human being. The human being speaks only insofar as, in each case, he corresponds to language [der Sprache entspricht]. (HdH, 26)

It would appear that, for Heidegger, the great insight of a poet writing in dialect, like Hebel, is that listening and responding to language is, ultimately, a matter of attending to the rich particularity of one's mother-tongue. He begins the essay "Language and Homeland" by noting that when we try to think (*nachdenken*) about what the words 'Language' and 'Homeland' mean, we find ourselves afloat in the indeterminate and groundless [*ins Unbestimmte und Bodenlose geraten*] (DE, 87). He then writes:

There is no 'language' [*Die Sprache gibt es nicht*]. To put it more cautiously, there is as yet no language in the sense of a universally intelligible and, for that reason alone, universally binding world-language...

Rather, language is only ever the particular language into which peoples and tribes are destined to be born, and in which they grow up and dwell. Similarly, there is no homeland upon this earth [*Die Heimat gibt es nicht auf dieser Erde*]. Homeland is this particular destiny and as such a destiny [*Heimat ist jeweilen diese und als solche Schicksal*]. Language is, spoken from out of its holding sway and essence, this particular language of a homeland [*jeweils Sprache einer Heimat*]—language that awakens indigenously and speaks in the 'at-home' of the parental home [*Sprache, die einheimisch erwacht und im Zubaus des Elternhauses spricht*]. Language is language as mother-tongue [*Muttersprache*]. (DE, 87–88)

Here we find Heidegger underscoring the matter of particularity that was central to his rethinking of *Bodenständigkeit* in the "Gelassenheit" speech: homeland is *this* particular destiny; language is *this* particular language of a homeland—"language that awakens indigenously and speaks in the 'at-home' of the parental home." Conversely, the attempt to communicate irrespective of the particularities of context and tradition necessarily threatens *Bodenständigkeit*, as he indicates in his Bremen Lectures: "The international character of scientific language is the strongest proof of its rootlessness and homelessness [*Boden- und Heimatlosigkeit*]" (GA 79: 66). Even so, that sentence ends in such a way as to address the suspicions expressed by Bambach and others: "this in no way signifies that rootedness and the native character of language [*Bodenständigkeit und das Heimische der Sprache*] are in the least vouchsafed and determined or even established by the merely national" (GA 79: 66).

To be sure, the most important element of Hebel's capacity for listening to, and responding to, language concerns the poetic dimension of saying (*Sagen*)

as showing (*Zeigen*). As he presents it most vividly in the essay “Language and Homeland”: “The old meaning of our verb, saying [*sagen*], is showing [*das Zeigen*], the letting appear of something [*das Erscheinenlassen von solchem*]. . . . Saying is the originary and determining mode of bringing-forth, i.e. of building, which conveys and carries along all modes of human bringing-forth” (DE, 103–04). For this reason Heidegger says that we call ‘poetic’ a saying that shows more than ordinary saying (*das zeigender ist als das gewöhnliche Sagen*)—in other words, a saying that *shows* or *brings-forth* more than ordinary saying does. But what, ultimately, is it that is shown by poetic saying? Heidegger answers this question by recourse, once again, to the concept of *Bodenständigkeit*:

Poetic saying brings forth, for the first time, the look/face of the fourfold into appearing [*das Gesicht des Gevierts hervor ins Scheinen*]. It is poetic saying that, for the first time, allows mortals to dwell upon the earth, beneath the sky, before the divine. Its poetic saying brings forth, inceptually, care and preservation, shelter and hospitality, for an autochthonous locale that can be the abode of mortals along their earthly passage [*für eine bodenständige Ortschaft hervor, die Aufenthalt im irdischen Unterwegs der wohnenden Menschen sein kann*]. (DE, 112)

The strong claim made by Heidegger here—that it is only poetic saying that allows mortals to dwell *upon the earth, beneath the sky, before the divine*—articulates the earlier point made about Hebel, namely, that the ‘Hausfreund’ “knows for sure how essentially the life of mortals is determined and borne by the word” (HdH, 18), and further, “poetic saying thus precedes mortals along their path from birth to death” (HdH, 17). For our purposes, what is most significant about this last quotation is that it points to poetic saying—in its fundamental capacity as “showing”—as that which makes possible an autochthonous or grounded locale (*eine bodenständige Ortschaft*) for dwelling human beings. Whatever merit there may be in questioning Heidegger’s prioritizing of the Swabian soil, or preoccupation with a poet writing in the Swabian dialect, at the end of the day his thinking is directed at the general phenomenon of language as it occurs in its rich particularities of tradition and locale—i.e., language as mother-tongue, *Sprache als Muttersprache*. An illustration of how central language is to his late conception of *Bodenständigkeit* is the fact that he unpacks the Hebel poem that begins “We are plants [*Wir sind Pflanzen*]”—the poem, mind you, that leads to his extended meditation on *Bodenständigkeit* in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech—in terms of language being that which opens up, and keeps open, the space between earth and sky. On this point he writes:

“Language holds open the region in which human beings occupy the house of the world, upon the earth, beneath the sky” (*HdH*, 29).²³

To conclude, then, we may state our findings as follows: if, in the “*Gelassenheit*” speech and the writings on Hebel that follow, Heidegger understands *Bodenständigkeit* to be, fundamentally, something made possible by language in its particularities of tradition and locale, then there is an intriguing continuity of meaning between that concept and the concept as it was used phenomenologically in his writings from the summer 1924 course up to *Sein und Zeit*. Like those earlier writings, where Heidegger is concerned to reengage the radical philosophical questioning of the ancient Greek tradition, the “*Gelassenheit*” speech and his other writings on Hebel are also principally concerned with our relation to tradition—indeed, Heidegger makes explicit this question of relating ourselves to tradition in the technological age when, in his lecture course on *The Principle of Reason*, he writes:

Today nothing in us takes root anymore [*Heute wächst bei uns nichts mehr*]. Why? Because the possibility of a thoughtful conversation with a tradition that invigorates and nourishes us is lacking, because we instead consign our speaking to electronic thinking and calculating machines, an occurrence that will lead modern technology and science to completely new procedures and unforeseeable results that probably will push reflective thinking [*das besinnliche Denken*] aside as something useless and hence superfluous. (*GA* 10: 22; Lilly translation, 29)

In order to address this question, Heidegger turns our attention to language in all of its particularities as that which makes possible *Bodenständigkeit*—both the “groundedness of concepts” that he pursues in his 1924 lecture course, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, as well as the “new groundedness” that is his concern in the “*Gelassenheit*” essay and in the related essays on Hebel. But this means that we should not see Heidegger’s writings of the mid- to late-1950s as a radical departure from his philosophical work of the 1920s—as John Caputo, for example, sees it, when he writes that, with Heidegger’s turn to the discourse of *Gelassenheit* in the 1950s, “[t]he concerns

²³ On this point, see his famous lines from the “Letter on Humanism” (1947): “Das Sein ist die Hut, die den Menschen in seinem ek-sistenten Wesen dergestalt zu ihrer Wahrheit behütet, daß sie die Ek-sistenz in der Sprache behaut. Darum ist die Sprache zumal das Haus des Seins und die Behausung des Menschenwesens. Nur weil die Sprache des Wesens des Menschen ist, können die geschichtlichen Menschentümer und Menschen in ihrer Sprache nicht zu Hause sein, so daß sie ihnen zum Gehäuse ihrer Machenschaften wird” (“Brief über den ‘Humanismus,’” [*GA* 9: 361]).

of the 1920s with the hermeneutics of factual life had completely vanished.”²⁴ Rethinking *Bodenständigkeit* in the technological age is, for Heidegger, ultimately a matter of rethinking what it would mean to dwell within language in the technological age, rethinking the key differences between language in its revealing particularities and language pared down to propositional content. Perhaps, then, it is precisely the concern for a “new groundedness,” as announced so famously in his “*Gelassenheit*” speech, that can be seen to unite Heidegger’s thinking on *Bodenständigkeit* throughout his long career, whether in the context of retrieving Greek philosophy or in that of thinking through poetry like that of Johann Peter Hebel.²⁵

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²⁴ Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 118.

²⁵ An earlier version of this essay was presented in Messkirch, Germany, at a conference titled, “Martin Heidegger: Natur, Kunst, Technik,” May 2011. I am indebted to the conference organizers, Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski, as well as to fellow conferees who commented on the earlier version of the essay—above all, to Julia Davis, Jeffrey Gower, and Theodore Kiesel.

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