

IN WHICH WE FIND
OURSELVES:
THE OTHERNESS OF SELF
AND THE TRUTH
OF HETERONOMY

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ABSTRACT

In his essay *Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropos* Castoriadis contrasts the anthropogony presented in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* with the portrayal of self-creating humanity in the choral ode of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Underlying Castoriadis's interest in Greek anthropology is his conviction that there is a necessary correlation between a recognition of the self-creating nature of humanity and the project of autonomy. If we develop the capacity to give ourselves our own laws this is only because we conceive of ourselves as beings who have always created ourselves, albeit it unknowingly. Autonomy consists in the transformation of unconscious and uncontrolled self-creation into conscious and deliberate self-determination. Though valid in itself, Castoriadis's argument risks obscuring the difference between the unknowing self-creation most prevalent throughout human history and the knowing and deliberate self-institution of autonomy. In seeking to unmask the Others to whom humanity ascribes what is in truth its own self-creation, Castoriadis neglects the residual truth in the concept of heteronomy. The difference between autonomy and heteronomy implies an internal alterity, at the social-historical as well as the psychical level. The psychical level has often been explored, the social-historical much less. This essay explores whether the very authors Castoriadis criticises – Aeschylus and Heidegger – might be useful in helping us begin to understand heteronomy better, and whether Sophocles might aid us in understanding heteronomy as well as self-creation.

KEYWORDS

Heteronomy, Self-Creation, Other, Castoriadis, Heidegger

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1. *Social Self-Creation and Heteronomy* – 2. *Human Self Conception and Greek Tragedy* – 3. *Democracy and the Perils of Irreverence* – 4. *The Other of Heteronomy: between Heidegger and Castoriadis* – 5. *Before and After Self-Creation: Discontinuity and the Transcendent Other* – 6. *Varieties of Otherness and Types of Heteronomy*.

1. *Societal Self-Creation and Heteronomy*

Society is a form of self-creation, Castoriadis argues (CASTORIADIS 1982a). This is a cornerstone of his thought. Because society is self-creating it can be, to a limited degree it sometimes has been, and it ought to become autonomous. But almost everywhere society is in fact heteronomous. How are we to reconcile these two theses: that society is self-creating – universally and essentially – and that it is almost always heteronomous? We can say that this heteronomy involves the positing of extra-social sources of society's institutions, Others, however conceived, who have created and who continue to rule society. We can also say that this myth of the extra-social creator/s coincides with a closure of society's institutions, that the positing of an extra-social source protects existing institutions against most challenges, in particular, precluding autonomy – for the extra-social source of society's institutions is posited as either inviolable or sacred, rendering autonomy impossible or evil.

But this is not the whole of the meaning of heteronomy. Behind the myths of the Other is an experience of otherness that is real and deeply felt. There are all sorts of others, of course. There are other individuals, other societies, and a world that, since it is not simply a projection of ourselves, is also other than ourselves. But there is also an otherness that is involved in the creation of social institutions. This otherness may not be as it is portrayed in our myths. It may be conceivable in a way that is consistent with social self-creation, but if so then the self at issue must encompass otherness, it must be plural in some way, because we know that some of the most important institutions we inherit were not creations of our own any way of which we were conscious, nor were they creations of those who preceded us. We know what it feels like to create something for and as ourselves, and we know that it feels entirely different to receive something which we did not consciously create. Castoriadis recognized the reality of this experience when he posited the concept of the *anonymous collective*, a dimension of the social-historical

that transcends any concrete collectivity, and from which emerge institutions, particularly those that are most fundamental (CASTORIADIS 1975, 369-373). As the term suggests, the anonymous collective is not *We*; it cannot be named or identified in specific terms. It is the magmatic, essentially indeterminate, continuously forming and transforming “substance” of social imaginary significations and signifying out of which each transient *We* emerges.

If Castoriadis recognized and briefly described this dimension of the anonymous collective – which we might identify tenuously as the social-historical counterpart of the Unconscious psyche – he did not explore it in detail. He spent more time exploring the Unconscious. Castoriadis was much more concerned to articulate the concept of social-historical self-creation, and to investigate its historical roots and its relationship to historical examples of autonomy, for the very good reason that promoting autonomy was his primary aim, and for this purpose understanding the antecedents and preconditions of autonomy is vital. But this does not mean that the social-historical other and the truth of heteronomy are unimportant questions. Indeed, these questions may prove vital to developing a viable conception of autonomy.

2. *Human Self-Conception and Greek Tragedy*

In his essay *Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropos*, Castoriadis explores the development of a conception of humanity as self-creating in ancient Greece, specifically Athens, as exemplified in two tragedies by two of the greatest Athenian playwrights: Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Castoriadis’s argument is that over the roughly two decades between the writing and original performance of the two plays the experience of the burgeoning Athenian democracy was accompanied by a changed understanding of humanity, its nature and origins. As a result, the idea presented in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* that all of humanity’s skills were a gift from the god Prometheus was supplanted by the understanding of humanity exemplified in the choral ode of Sophocles’ *Antigone* in which humanity is represented as inventor of its unparalleled skills. Castoriadis goes to some pains to stress that his argument is not about the attitudes of the two poets as individuals. Rather, he is suggesting that the portrayal of humanity’s origins and nature in *Prometheus Bound*, which was acceptable in circa 460 BCE (the date Castoriadis gives for the work), would have seemed implausible and anachronistic in Athens of 443 or 442 BCE, when *Antigone* was performed. Castoriadis does not address the debate over the authorship of *Prometheus Bound*, which not only questions whether Aeschylus was its author, but the date of its writing, some estimating its date of composition to be later than that of *Antigone* (GRIFFITH 1977; WEST 1990; CONACHER 1980). The issue of the date is

obviously more crucial to Castoriadis's case than the authorship. Even Griffith, who doubts Aeschylus' authorship on stylistic grounds, admits certainty on the matter is unlikely (GRIFFITH 1977, 34). In view of this, what we can say is that Castoriadis's argument is plausible if not totally proven. Anachronistic literary works are produced, of course, and old-fashioned ideas persist and are welcomed by a limited audience, but the essential point that literary works in the main reflect the attitudes of those by and for whom they have been created remains valid.

Castoriadis's argument is that autonomy is only possible in conjunction with a self-understanding that accepts human self-creation as a reality, because it is only on the basis of recognizing this self-creation that autonomy can be grasped as a real possibility. The precise sequence of this development is open to question. What Castoriadis regards as an essential precondition of the Greek creation of democracy is an understanding of the undetermined nature of cosmic order and the freedom-introducing gulf between that order and the human realm (CASTORIADIS 1983a). A fuller recognition of human self-creation may be something that develops in response to the experience of democracy rather than as a precondition for its emergence. This is what his argument on the contrast between *Prometheus Bound* and *Antigone* suggests. The experience of Athenian democracy wrought a change in the Athenians' understanding of themselves as well as of humanity in general. We may quibble that humans are capable of acting in ways that contradict their own belief systems, by ignoring those contradictions, or by partitioning contradictory sets of beliefs into different action contexts. It is possible that some Athenians could have a belief in the divine creation of human capacities and still participate quite willingly and even wholeheartedly in the democracy. But what Castoriadis would dismiss is the suggestion that a political form such as democracy could emerge without a shift in the preponderant and socially effective ideas, those that motivated a significant proportion of the most influential and active people, and those that informed the structure and operation of the chief institutions.

If Castoriadis's case is convincing, where does this leave us in relation to the task of articulating the truth of heteronomy and clarifying the difference between heteronomous self-creation and autonomy? Castoriadis's single-minded pursuit of the cultural preconditions and corollaries of autonomy leads him to ignore or dismiss clues to such an understanding. Consequently, it is precisely within those things Castoriadis ignores or dismisses in his analysis that we should look for clues and insights. This includes the heteronomous portrayal of human creation presented in *Prometheus Bound*, as well as those parts of *Antigone* that Castoriadis chooses not to analyze, and even within the translation and interpretation of the choral ode from *Antigone* by Heidegger that Castoriadis, for good reasons, roundly criticizes. Within his tendentious translation, and his idiosyncratic and philosophically self-serving interpretation of Sophocles, Heidegger touches on truths about heteronomy that Castoriadis never adequately articulates.

Interestingly, exploring this potential within Heidegger will cause us to remark upon consonances between Heidegger and Castoriadis that are seldom recognized or discussed, but are worth exploring.

At this point, let us briefly review the passages in *Prometheus Bound* and *Antigone* upon which Castoriadis focuses in his discussion. In *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus is being punished for disobeying Zeus and saving mortals, whom Zeus had decided to destroy. Not only does Prometheus save mortals, but he gives them the essential skills they need to raise themselves above a state that is not only lamentable, but, as Castoriadis points out, impossible to imagine as consistent with any form of survival (CASTORIADIS 1991, 5-10). Prometheus describes mortals as incapable of forming coherent thoughts, confusing things as though they were dream shapes, living in holes dug from the ground, incapable of writing, counting, recognizing the seasons or the heavenly bodies, building, hunting, farming, domesticating animals, weaving, and of course, making fire (Lines 441-471). In short, he says, I gave mortals all their skills (Lines 505 f.). Here is a picture of humans as having invented nothing at all for themselves, but having received everything as a gift from the gods – or from one god alone. Prior to this gift, not only are they less fortunate and weaker, they are impossibly helpless. They are like babies before they learn to speak. (This is how Castoriadis translates lines 443 f., which in Christopher Collard’s English translation is replaced by the far less evocative, and presumably less literal, “they were silly” (AESCHYLUS 2009, 113).) Castoriadis remarks how this incredible picture of helpless humanity resembles the unsocialized psyche of the infant (CASTORIADIS 1991, 6). It is a vision of a humanity totally outside the institutions of society, and it shows that such a humanity is – to use Castoriadis’s own phrase – radically unfit for life (CASTORIADIS 1982b, 311). The prehuman animal that became human was obviously not such a helpless creature, but in its transformation into the human things that are essential to animal survival are jettisoned, to be replaced by the institution. This fundamental truth about humanity is recognized, however dimly, in Aeschylus’ anthropogony.

In the choral ode from *Antigone* Castoriadis finds an understanding of humanity that exemplifies the new awareness of human creativity and power in the burgeoning Athenian democracy. Here humanity is described through the word *deinos*, a word that may be untranslatable, but which Castoriadis renders by the string of terms: «stunningly forceful, powerful, provoking wonder and admiration, probably even a sense of strangeness», and also «terrifying, formidable, amazing, achievement-capable» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 15). What is said of humanity is not just that it is *deinon*, but that nothing is more *deinon* than humanity. *Deinos* defines *anthropos*, writes Castoriadis, and *anthropos* defines *deinos* (CASTORIADIS 1991, 15). Humanity is the epitome of the terrifying, formidable, etc. Not even the gods are more terrifying or formidable, Castoriadis remarks (CASTORIADIS 1991, 15). One critic, to whom we shall return, finds in this exclamation of Castoriadis an

expression of his own hubris (ABAFFY 2012). But behind this exclamation, whether there lies a sense of satisfaction and pride or not, there lies a question. Since the gods' power is so extraordinary, how can anyone declare that mortals are the most *deinon*? What explains this?

Castoriadis has an explanation, but in preparation for it let us explore the portrayal of humanity in the choral ode further. What are the achievements remarked upon there that make humans so *deinon*? Without recounting all of the ode, we can summarize as follows: humanity has developed skills and powers that allow it to master and, most importantly, to refashion even the most wild and terrifying aspects of the natural world; what is more, humans have *taught themselves* language and thinking and how to live together in cities. Other translators – Heidegger prominent amongst them – disagree with this translation of *edidaxato*. Some translate it as “learn” (SOPHOCLES 1947, 135). Heidegger translates it as «he found his way into», ridiculing the idea that humanity could have invented language or thought (HEIDEGGER 1953, 157 and 167). We will discuss this translation of Heidegger's later. But for Castoriadis the concept of autodidacticism is the essential meaning of the portrayal of humanity, and the translation is justified by grammatical factors alone (CASTORIADIS 1991, 16). In short, humans have made themselves what they are: that is what the chorus is telling us; that is why humans are so *deinon*. As Castoriadis explains, for all their power, not even the gods have made themselves what they are. What they are they cannot change: it is their ineluctable nature (CASTORIADIS 1991, 15-17). But humans can and have changed themselves, and continue to do so. The experience of the democracy had taught the Athenian audience, as it had taught Sophocles, the extent to which humans can change themselves and make themselves what they would. They extrapolated from this experience to conclude that this power to make themselves was the source of all human institutions and skills.

And so we have the contrast between the anthropogony of Aeschylus and the self-creating humanity of Sophocles. The reality of this contrast is not in itself questionable, if what it demonstrates about the Greeks or about democracy remains open for debate. The question we now wish to pose is how these visions of humanity relate to the conception of heteronomy and its contrast with autonomy. To that end we will begin by examining a critic of Castoriadis's interpretation, not so much to agree with this critic but to explore the implications and directions of some of the interesting questions she raises.

3. Democracy and the Perils of Irreverence

Abaffy's criticisms of Castoriadis are impassioned, sometimes to the point of descending into sarcasm and sneering contempt. They are not in the end

convincing, largely because they are not informed by a sufficiently thorough understanding of Castoriadis's thought. Abaffy misinterprets the intent of Castoriadis's critique of Aeschylus, which is not an attack on the merits of the poet, neither as a poet nor as a participant in the fledgling Athenian democracy, but an argument about the myths and cultural ideas prevalent in Athens at the time of the play's writing. Abaffy points out that Aeschylus was by all available evidence a patriotic participant in the Athenian democracy, and that his greatest works, the *Oresteia*, suggests a commitment to democratic processes as the highest path to justice and good governance (ABAFFY 2012, 48-52). None of this, true though it may be, contradicts Castoriadis's claims that the anthropogony in *Prometheus Bound* expresses an attitude to humanity that has yet to be significantly transformed by the experience of democracy. More serious and interesting is Abaffy's suggestion that the attitude exemplified in Sophocles is one that is symptomatic of a corrupted democracy, one that will lead to the kind of attitude to the natural world in particular that Castoriadis himself deplors as (pseudo) rational (pseudo) mastery (CASTORIADIS 1987; CASTORIADIS 1981). In the choral ode's description of the achievements of humanity in controlling natural forces and refashioning itself, Abaffy sees a hubris that will send both the Greek world and the later European world into a technocratic humanism in which the gods and Nature are dethroned and subjugated, a development that will lead to destruction and dehumanization. She associates Castoriadis with this trend, despite the fact that he himself identifies and laments it. This is because she identifies Castoriadis as belonging to a tradition she traces back as far as the Sophists with whom Sophocles associated. She sees Sophocles as expressing the ideas of the Sophists, especially their rejection of the gods (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19). But where Castoriadis regards the Sophist attitude of skeptical agnosticism towards the gods as an advance that opens up a space for autonomy, Abaffy sees it as the beginning of the disaster of European history (ABAFFY 2012, 52-58). Abaffy declares that Sophocles «is religious but it is a different kind of religion: not one that eventually leads to non-religion, but one that leads to Platonic religion» (ABAFFY 2012, 55). The worship of the gods is supplanted by the worship of order and logic. Abaffy underestimates Sophocles' continuing recognition of the transcendent and its importance. More on this later.

Let us respond to a few of Abaffy's criticisms immediately, before proceeding to explore some of the more interesting implications of others. Abaffy's interpretation of Castoriadis's concept of *Chaos*, the primordial groundlessness out of which emerges all being and meaning, is deeply flawed. Her equation of this *Chaos* with meaninglessness and nothingness is simply wrong (ABAFFY 2012, 56 f.). As I have argued elsewhere (KLOOGER 2009, 295-304), for Castoriadis *Chaos* is not *nothing* but a creative ferment which gives rise to a perpetual surplus of being and meaning, but being and meaning of an essentially indeterminate and non-determinable nature, hence being and meaning that confounds the deterministic *ensidic* dimension of

language and social institutions, including religious institutions, which are peculiarly involved in that they undertake to express and at the same time tame this indeterminable surplus (CASTORIADIS 1982b). It is not so much nihilism Abaffy fears, but humanism, the idea that all that keeps the nothingness of *Chaos* at bay is the mastery of humans. This is how she – wrongly – reads Castoriadis’s thoughts on *Chaos* and its relation to signification. In Abaffy’s reading, signification and the human institutions embodying them protect us from being overwhelmed by a *Chaos* that threatens meaning and order. Accepting conscious human responsibility for this struggle against meaninglessness leads in the end to the victory of pure, calculating logic, and a philosophy that seeks total control, which Abaffy finds in Plato (ABAFFY 2012, 52-55). If there is a contradiction lurking here – on the one hand, the threat of *Chaos* must be averted, and on the other hand, the traditional heteronomous significations and institutions that contained this threat are to be dismantled – Abaffy must think it lies within the thought of the tradition she is criticising. Instead, she sees Castoriadis’s position as itself contradictory, decrying pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery and at the same time advocating that which prepares the way for it. What Abaffy fails to understand is that, for Castoriadis, the *Chaos* is – as stated above – *creation*. As the *creation* of *meaning* as well as of *being*, it both inhabits and exceeds all human attempts to contain or domesticate it, and so it can never be reduced to its *ensidic* dimension, the dimension to which thought is reduced in the project of rational mastery. Abaffy does not appreciate that for Castoriadis autonomy is as much an imaginary creation as the gods, and as such, as much an expression and product of the *Chaos*, and that to reduce the *Chaos* to an *ensidic* order would be the death of autonomy every bit as much as the death of the gods. This hamstringing her critique of Castoriadis, and also arguably her understanding of the traditional religious meanings she seeks to defend. For all that, her concerns are not without merit.

We can see what, for Abaffy, reverence for the gods represents, and what its rejection risks. What it represents is humanity’s connection with and indebtedness to transcendent forces. Without such an acknowledgement, humanity risks hubris, the exceeding of all limits, and the degradation of both Nature and humanity itself to objects of manipulation and control. It does not take much effort to see in this understanding of the gods and what they represent an acknowledgement of the Other of heteronomy. This Other has given us so much of what we are and what we need, and failing to acknowledge and honour this gift may be wrong not just because it shows a lack of proper gratitude, and not because it is sacrilegious, but because it cuts us off from something of value, something we continue to need and something we are still connected to whether we acknowledge this or not. Castoriadis recognises this continuing connection to the Other in principle, both in relation to the psychical Other of the Unconscious and in relation to the anonymous collective (CASTORIADIS 1975, 273-339). But does Castoriadis’s approach offer us any guide as to

how this acknowledgement is to be enacted, or does it instead make such an acknowledgement seem hollow and abstract? Properly understood, Castoriadis's concept of *Chaos* can be a powerful and fertile representation of the creative source of natural and social-historical being and meaning. It is an attempt to articulate the real experience that lies behind all religious representations. As such, it is attractive to many religious believers, who see in it a rejection of idolatry, a refusal to reduce the transcendent to a concept. One could easily identify similarities between Castoriadis's concept of *Chaos* and the philosophical approaches of more radical theologians such as Paul TILlich (1952).

But for all this, Castoriadis himself was an adamant atheist and a fierce critic of religion. His own personal experience made him sensitive to the tyrannical and totalitarian potential in religious institutions far more than their liberating or transformative side. So much so that in his definition of religion he reduces religion to the existing institution and its status quo preserving drive, hiving off the critical and transformative manifestations of religion as not properly religious. The term he uses is "socially effective religion"; as though one could dismiss the radical transformations of society that have been driven by religion as social ineffective. It is an odd definition for a student of Weber to cling to, all the more so given that it involves divorcing the *instituted* dimension of the social-historical from the *instituting* dimension, something that Castoriadis's own account would seem to declare impossible (CASTORIADIS 1975, 369-373). It is true, perhaps, that certain of the more transformative, institution-transcending and mystical aspects of the religious impulse have proven incapable of forming the primary elements of the central institutions of a whole society. But that does not make them irrelevant or ineffective.

4. *The Other of Heteronomy: between Heidegger and Castoriadis*

We need to explore here whether Castoriadis, in his interpretation of Aeschylus and Sophocles, is sufficiently sensitive to the issue of connection to and acknowledgement of the transcendent. We shall see he is not, and that in his understandable zeal to identify and define the autonomy-promoting anthropology missing from Aeschylus and present in Sophocles, he disregards the heteronomy-acknowledging elements in both.

Before we turn to this, we will take a detour through Heidegger – not because this detour is an essential prequel to an investigation of Aeschylus and Sophocles, but partly because Castoriadis himself makes Heidegger an issue in relation to the interpretation of the Greeks and Sophocles in particular, and partly because, as suggested earlier, Heidegger offers some clues as to how we may conceptualise the Other of heteronomy. First, though, there are few additional aspects of Abaffy's critique of Castoriadis that bear examination.

Abaffy argues that Aeschylus is a better democrat than Sophocles, because Aeschylus' version of democracy incorporates a recognition of our indebtedness to the transcendent (ABAFFY 2012, 42-58). This acts as a bulwark against hubris, which otherwise is likely to expand and explode. As mentioned above, Abaffy sees in the choral ode from *Antigone* the origins of the project of rational mastery Castoriadis critiques. Interestingly, her complaint against the technocratic in thought and action is similar to one of the chief concerns of Heidegger's philosophical project. The similarity between Heidegger's critique of technocratic civilization and Castoriadis's critique of the project of rational mastery is perhaps obvious, and reflects little more than that they inhabited the same civilization, with tendencies and shortcomings clear to many of us. What is worth exploring, however, are the similarities between Heidegger's and Castoriadis's analysis of this element of Western civilization. For Heidegger it results from a degeneration of the Greek understanding of thinking, which previously had encompassed a much more fruitful and outward-looking relationship to Being, but which, in and even more so post Plato and Aristotle, becomes narrowed through its philosophical development to mere logic. This leads in modernity to a mathematization of Nature and a trivialization of relations both with Nature and within society. Humanity becomes trapped in the self, rather than encountering Being thoughtfully. We become inward-looking, narrow and superficial in outlook, aims and achievements (HEIDEGGER 1953, 176-210, 216-221; HEIDEGGER 1926, 71-77; HEIDEGGER 1962). For Castoriadis, the problem also has roots in philosophy – or is best viewed through its development in philosophy. The *ensidic* dimension of human institutions and instituting, the element of pure logic and calculation in thought and language, undergoes what might be described as a hyper-development. This occurs through a narrowing of ontological and logical conceptions, whereby “being” comes to be defined as “determinacy”, and the creative and imaginative dimension of human thought are reduced to purely logical manipulation and calculation or mere reflection of the already given (CASTORIADIS 1975, 221-272). So, Heidegger and Castoriadis agree that the conception of “being” – what Heidegger calls Metaphysics and what Castoriadis calls *ensidic* logic-ontology – is at the root of the development of those aspects of Western civilization they deplore. How they analyse this differs, but it is significant that they agree on the location of the problem. Castoriadis traces this development to a philosophical distortion of the concept of being with its roots in universal aspects of the social-historical and psychical. Heidegger traces it to a falling way from Being which involves the replacement of questioning with answers that narrow and hollow out our relation with the world and ourselves. Notwithstanding the important differences, there is much agreement here, and this is not the end of the agreement between them. There is even a recognition of creativity in Heidegger that sits well with Castoriadis's, despite the impression that Heidegger sometimes gives that *Daein's*

encounter with Being should be principally one of receptivity. What is more, this appreciation of creativity is to be found precisely in Heidegger's discussion of the choral ode. We will return to this later.

Neither Heidegger nor Castoriadis locate the origin of this development of Western culture where Abaffy does, in Sophocles and the Sophists, but later, with Plato, Aristotle and the Hellenistic and Roman Schools. Abaffy argues that the Sophists lay the groundwork for the development in Plato of a conception of humanity that unleashes hubris (ABAFFY 2012, 52-55). Leaving aside the merits of this argument (it would require a lot more evidence and analysis to be persuasive), we can see some justification for the identification of the risk of hubris in the burgeoning Athenian democracy. Castoriadis does not doubt it. Indeed, it is at the heart of his definition of Athenian tragedy. For Castoriadis, tragedy is a cultural form that grapples with the risk of hubris opened up by democracy (CASTORIADIS 1983a). Castoriadis regards the recognition that the social order is distinct from and undetermined by natural order to be a necessary precondition for the development of democracy and a recognition of humanity's self-creating character (CASTORIADIS 1983a), but he does not regard this as immediately or inevitably leading to pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery. Castoriadis might acknowledge that some part of the seed of the project of rational mastery lies here, but it requires further ingredients to germinate, especially the degeneration of the conceptions of being and thought described above. If the project of autonomy opens up the potential for a hubristic development, this hubris is combatted in democratic Athens precisely by the awareness of that danger expressed in tragedy. As long as the spirit of tragedy remains, the worst excesses of hubris may be kept at bay, even if the battle against hubris remains a perpetual one. As tragedy declines, the danger increases. Does this battle against hubris essentially also involve a recognition of the indebtedness to the transcendent? This is what Abaffy would argue. It is not how Castoriadis understands tragedy.

At this point let us explore the connections – and disconnections – between Heidegger and Castoriadis further. Castoriadis criticises Heidegger's translation of the choral ode from *Antigone* on a number of specific points. He criticises the translation as a whole on the basis that it represents an expression of Heidegger's own concerns and views rather than a valid interpretation of Sophocles' own ideas. It is, one might say, bad hermeneutical practice. Of course, this judgement depends on what you regard as the aim and measure of hermeneutical activity. Heidegger sometimes defends a style of interpretation that is guided more by the concerns and needs of the interpreter than those of the interpreted. This is a long-standing debate over the aims of interpretation¹; but what is surely of greatest

¹ See GADAMER 1960 for the most influential exploration of this hermeneutical problem informed by Heidegger.

importance is that we are clear about what is being done. Is the interpreter trying to reveal the thoughts and meanings of the original, or is s/he using the original, even to the point of distorting it by divorcing certain elements from their original sense and altering that sense to better adapt them to the current need? The trouble with Heidegger's translation and interpretation is that he wants to have it both ways. He wants to claim the freedom to interpret the Greek past in a way that allows him to address what he sees as the vital concerns of his day, and at the same time he wants to insist that this is how the Greeks actually thought.

Castoriadis, for one, is not so dismissive of Heidegger's interpretation that he cannot recognise in it patterns of thought that «may propel one towards thought and productively “incite” the indolent reader of ancient texts» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 2). But for Castoriadis, this value is outweighed by:

«an artificial and unsound construction, which (1) presents Sophoclean *anthropos* as a complete embodiment of Heideggerian *Dasein*, and (2) is characterized, incredibly and monstrously (like everything Heidegger has written about the Greeks), by systematic disregard for the polis, for politics, for democracy, and for their central position in ancient Greek creation» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 2 f.).

Castoriadis's criticisms of Heidegger seem justified. Here, though, the crime of mistranslation is less important than the potential of Heidegger's tendentious translations and interpretations to throw some light on the question of heteronomy. Can Heidegger's *Dasein*, as distinct from Sophocles' *anthropos*, tell us anything useful about the relationship between the social-historical self and Other? And is what it can tell us somehow related to what Sophocles thought, even if it is not identical to Sophocles' conception of *Anthropos*? Finally, is there any connection between Heidegger's *Dasein* and Castoriadis's conception of the human?

Before we turn to these questions we should clarify the main points on which Castoriadis takes issue with Heidegger's translation. The first relates to the understanding of the polis. Sophocles' phrase *astunomousorgas* Heidegger, in what Castoriadis characterizes as an explicitly Nazi interpretation, translates as «the passion for dominating cities» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 17). Stephens points out that Heidegger's German is literally the *courage* to dominate cities rather than the *passion* (STEPHENS 2014, 77) – a subtle difference, but one that perhaps indicates Heidegger's admiration of daring and the exceptional rather than the sheer lust for power. But what Sophocles really means, Castoriadis argues, is the *passion* for *instituting* cities. The phrase occurs as part of a list of the things that humans have taught themselves to do, to make and to become, and this capacity to institute cities belongs to this sequence as an essential and characteristic human accomplishment. Heidegger also makes much of the word *hupsiplois*, which he translates as «rising high in the site of history». (HEIDEGGER 1953, 162 f.) For Heidegger, *polis* should be

translated as «the site of history» rather than simply as the city or the city-state. His argument is that this is the essential meaning and nature of the polis, that it is the site of *Dasein*, of human being, and this human being is historical in nature. What this ignores is that, for Sophocles and for the Athenians, this “site” was not an abstract idea but a concrete reality, and that reality was the city. As often happens with Heidegger, he translates what he takes to be the implied or fundamental meaning of a term rather than the meaning it would have had in common usage at the time of the text or language in question. This is not without value – it is useful to think of the fundamental implication of the term *polis*, and Castoriadis for one would hardly wish to disagree that history is essential to humanity, and so the *polis* is in its essence a site of history. But of course it is only one possible site, and a specific one. The idea that *hupsipolis* means rising high, distinguishing oneself, even rising above one’s context, the city itself – the complete phrase is *hupsipolis apolis* – is in keeping with Heidegger’s program. He wants to promulgate an understanding of *Dasein* in which it aims at rising above the common and the trivial – with “trivial” understood as the mundanely social as well as superficial. *Hupsipolis* means, according to Castoriadis, someone who is great within their city, and its coupling with *apolis*, meaning “no true citizen” rather than “no city” or “outside the city”, is in the context of a contrast intended to reflect upon the failings of Creon, whose greatness is threatened by his failure to act in the way a true citizen should by listening to the views of others and not only the dictates of his own logic (CASTORIADIS 1991, 12).

In connection with this part of the text it is interesting to note that Castoriadis does not take specific issue with the remarkable Heideggerian translation mentioned above, whereby Heidegger translates *edidaxato* as «found their way into», not because there is anything in the word itself that would justify that translation but because he, Heidegger, refuses to accept that humans can really have taught themselves language and thought. In effect, he changes the meaning of the text because he thinks what it says is wrong and even absurd. Whether there might be some justification for his attitude we will explore later, but as a method of translation it leaves much to be desired.

Another specific point on which Castoriadis takes issue with Heidegger is in relation to the translation of *deinos*. Here Castoriadis’s criticism is relatively gentle. All that he says is that Heidegger’s translation is too partial. As explained above, the word has a plethora of associations, and “uncanny” – *unheimlich* in Heidegger’s German – is only one of them, and as such a very impoverished understanding of the word’s polysemy. Castoriadis makes it clear that polysemy is a characteristic of Greek due to its linguistic structure, and this means that Sophocles can allow the various possible meaning of *deinos* to coexist without having to narrow them (CASTORIADIS 1991, 14 f.). This obviously affects the way meaning is constructed within and from a Greek text (CASTORIADIS 2007). Heidegger uses the term

“uncanny” as the starting point for a series of interpretations that bring out other implications of the concept, but there is a difference between, on the one hand, choosing one interpretation of a polysemic term and broadening that, and, on the other, taking all the meanings of that term as equally available from the outset. Heidegger wants *deinos* to mean “uncanny” because it suits his purposes – which, once again, are not without their value – not because he really believed that is what Sophocles or the Greeks meant by the word.

Castoriadis declares that Heidegger’s manipulation of the ode to make it say what he, Heidegger, wants it to say with regards to Nothing, including altering its punctuation and covertly omitting words, is «a shameless violation of the text» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 3). Heidegger has the relevant passage of the ode say «going everywhere and yet left behind, without experience and without a way out, he comes to nothing» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 3). According to Castoriadis, what the passage actually says is «[c]apable of going everywhere, of traversing everything, of finding answers to everything; he advances toward nothing that is in the future without having some resource» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 3). The contrast is stark, but Castoriadis’s translation is the more faithful, as Stephens concludes (STEPHENS 2014). The reason Heidegger ends up with Nothing is because he needs it. He believes the encounter with Nothing is essential for the encounter with Being, and so it is unthinkable that the Greeks, who stand at the inception of the Western relation with Being, could be ignorant of *Dasein*’s encounter with Nothing and its importance.

Anthony Stephens has written about Castoriadis’s criticism of Heidegger’s translation of the choral ode, and with linguistic expertise in German and Greek to inform his judgements, he comes to the conclusion that Heidegger’s translation is as flawed as Castoriadis suggests (STEPHENS 2014). However, Stephens constructs his argument around an unsound premise, which is that Castoriadis attributes the failings in Heidegger’s translation to Heidegger’s Nazism. Castoriadis mentions Heidegger’s Nazism twice in his essay. One occasion is that mentioned above in which he characterises Heidegger’s translation of *astunomousorgas* as “the passion for dominating cities”. The second is a bit more subtle. Castoriadis says that the importance of the democratic polis in Greece is something that «the national-socialist Heidegger (1933-1945) does not want and is not able to see» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 3). This Stephens interprets as meaning that Castoriadis is claiming that Heidegger translates and interprets the choral ode as he does *because* he was a Nazi. Stephens actually uses the term *aetiology*, leaving no doubt that for him it is a question of cause and effect (STEPHENS 2014, 69). This is an oversimplification, and one that does Castoriadis an injustice. Castoriadis understood Heidegger enough to realise that Heidegger was a Nazi *because* he held these views about Greece, humanity, society and history, and not that he held these views *because* he was a Nazi. The roots of these views lie deep within Heidegger’s philosophical project and

predate his affiliation with National-Socialism. National-Socialism was attractive to Heidegger insofar as it seemed to him to express and further those ideas and aims (whether these are the only reasons it was attractive to him, and whether it ceased to be attractive to him solely because he realised that it could not be the vehicle for his philosophical-historical project or for other more personal reasons, are questions of a psychological and biographical nature that we cannot answer here). That Stephens shows Heidegger's interpretation of the choral ode remained unchanged after his exit from Nazism supports this interpretation, but for the reasons already mentioned, is irrelevant to Castoriadis's criticism of Heidegger.

Stephens' alternative explanation for Heidegger's mistranslation is not convincing either, partly because it relies on interpretations of key concepts such as violence, inception and alienation that are too one-dimensional compared to Heidegger's, and partly because of a misunderstanding of Heidegger's attitude to the choral ode and its place in the history of the West. Stephens seem to think that Heidegger regards the choral ode as an artefact that marks the beginning of the decline of *Dasein* and its alienation from Being, whereas for Heidegger it depicts the essential characteristics of *Dasein* before that fall. It is in terms of this alienation that Stephens explains Heidegger's interpretation of the choral ode. We see, according to Stephens, humanity defined «by isolation, violence, estrangement from his own Being and encountering nothingness» (STEPHENS 2014, 79). Stephens links this interpretation to the way Heidegger plays on the similarity between the German words *unheimlich*, uncanny, and *unheimisch*, unhomely. The latter is a very important connotation for Heidegger. This is how Stephens understands this concept, especially in terms of Heidegger's interpretation of the choral ode.

«What it boils down to is that humanity– for Heidegger – is *deinos*, is *unheimlich* because it is not at home in the world and commits violent acts in respect of what overwhelms it. As George Steiner put it very neatly in his study *Antigones* of 1984: “The great tragic current of ‘exilic’ sentiment after Kant is summarised in Heidegger’s image of man as ‘a stranger in the house of Being’”» (STEPHENS 2014, 75; quotation from STEINER 1984, 15).

This places *Antigone* and the choral ode after the exile, with its description of humanity a description of *Dasein* sundered from Being. But this is not what Heidegger intends. For Heidegger, this *unheimlich* that is also *unheimisch*, this uncanniness that is also unhomeliness, is essential to humanity and belongs to *Dasein* from the inception of its relationship with Being. It is the very character of that relationship. The violence that Stephens writes of as if it were a symptom of alienation is in fact for Heidegger the means by which *Dasein* encounters Being. This violence is not, as Heidegger is at pains to explain, a matter of brutality, but

of a type of relationship in which *Dasein* does not leave beings as they are but forces change upon them (HEIDEGGER 1953, 160 and 167-172)². It refashions them, it is creative (perhaps not in quite as radical a sense for Heidegger as for Castoriadis, but creative even so), because beings overwhelm *Dasein*, and because, as long as they merely overwhelm, they do not yet *speak*. It is only through this violence of changing, fashioning, taming, and creating that the *poetic* relation with beings can be awoken, and only then can beings be broken open to reveal Being. Sometimes Heidegger writes of the relation of *Dasein* to Being in a manner that might give the impression that it is a purely passive affair of reception, with *Dasein* being merely receptive to unconcealment, to truth as revelation. But here at least, in his discussion of the choral ode, it is clear that *Dasein* is essentially active in this relation. *Dasein* grasps Being only by making it come into view, and *Dasein* does this only by doing violence to the beings that overwhelm it.

Dasein is uncanny and unhomely, not because it has been sundered from or fallen away from Being, but because this is its essence. *Dasein* is incomprehensible because it is not just one thing, a *what* that could be defined once and for all, but a *who* that defines itself in and as history. *Dasein* is never at home because it does not fit comfortably and easily within the natural world that overwhelms it; instead it must make a home for itself by violently interfering with what is and changing it. This activity is ceaseless. The historicity of *Dasein* means that it will never be at home in the way other creatures are, that it must perpetually struggle to make its world and itself, and – what is most important to Heidegger – through that violent struggle, encounter Being. The fall, for Heidegger, is not this struggle and this violence, this uncanniness and this unhomeliness, but the retreat from it into a trivial manipulation of beings that never decisively encounters Being because it no longer dares to expose itself to Nothing, no longer dares to take the risk to stand out in the face of Nothing to do, make and become what is truly great, which for Heidegger means that which involves a questioning philosophical and poetic encounter with Being (HEIDEGGER 1953, 160-176, 216-221).

Heidegger's obsession with *Dasein's* encounter with Being aside, these thoughts have considerable points of contact with Castoriadis's ideas. Castoriadis, too, believes that humanity's relation with the world and with itself is never one of easy adaptation, of homeliness, but rather of a struggle where what humans struggle with and against are to a substantial degree their own creations. Castoriadis, too, sees humanity as self-defining, this being the essence of historicity. Despite the partial nature of Heidegger's translation of *deinos* as "uncanny", what he says about humanity is very similar to what Castoriadis says

² The German word Heidegger uses is *Gewalt*, meaning "force" and "power" – as Stephens tells us in a different connection (see nt. 3 below). It seems strange that Stephens should adopt so narrow an interpretation of it, especially as Heidegger expressly counsels against it.

about humanity being characterised by its lack of a fixed nature and its capacity to transform itself. The idea of the violence of the relationship between *Dasein* and beings is also similar to what Castoriadis says about the relationship between humanity, as psyche and as social-historical, and the natural world. The human subject, whether psyche or society, does not merely reflect, it creates, it brings into being what was not already given. What is more, in doing so it distorts. This is essential to Castoriadis's conception of the *ensidic* dimension of language, thought and instituting. The *ensidic* makes determinate what is not, in itself, determinate. It makes things *be* in a way that they would never *be* in and of themselves. It goes further – too far, according to Castoriadis – to claim that this being is all that being is and can be, to define being as this type of being that it itself creates: the determinate, the *ensidic*. In doing this, it does violence. It forces things to become what they are not. But it is only through this violence that we can come to know the world. Only by creating through our language and our thought a meaningful representation of the world, which is not what the world itself is, can we come to encounter the world meaningfully. The logic-ontology that equates being with determinacy can be overcome, or at least resisted and relativised. But the *ensidic* manipulation and distortion of the world cannot be dispensed with since it is essential to our human mode of being.

So, Stephens mistakes the choral ode for a document expressing *Dasein*'s alienation from Being when for Heidegger it is the opposite, an expression of the essential character of *Dasein* and its relation with Being in the golden age of Greece. In effect, Stephens confuses what is for Heidegger a description of the "incident" that inaugurates history as such with the origin of what Heidegger calls Metaphysics, the particular understanding and treatment of Being that rules throughout Western history. This Metaphysics is a particular history, whereas what is described in the choral ode is the originary encounter of *Dasein* with beings and Being. Metaphysics begins later, as Heidegger goes on to explain, in the reduction of thinking to logic in Plato and after (HEIDEGGER 1953, 176-210).

5. *Before and After Self-Creation: Discontinuity and the Transcendent Other*

Let us think about this question of the incident, the inauguration of history, because it is on this point that Heidegger, Castoriadis and Aeschylus can be brought together, and it is here that the question of the Other emerges clearly.

«As the breach for the opening up of Being in beings – a Being that has been set to work – the *Dasein* of historical humanity is an *in-cident*, the incident in which the violent powers of the released excessive violence of Being suddenly emerge and go to work as history» (HEIDEGGER 1953, 174).

Heidegger's English translator advises that 'in-cident' in the German text is *Zwischen-fall*, which means a between-case or a fall-between (HEIDEGGER 1953, 174, nt. 67). The beginning is always a moment between two realities, the old and the new. The word "incident" also conveys the idea that this beginning is an event. It is not a slow or gradual transition, but a sudden leap, something achieved all at once. At one moment there was no history, no opening of Being in beings, just an overwhelming bombardment that was mute and meaningless. Then, in one stroke, there is history, the inauguration of a new relationship with beings and with Being. This incident is the originary historical event.

Compare this with how Castoriadis understands the creation of the fundamental social-historical institutions of *legein* and *teukhein*. They cannot be assembled piecemeal. If they are created, they must be created complete, containing all the elements necessary for the essential activities of instituting – naming, counting, assembling, etc. Their creation is in effect the creation of a first act of instituting which contains within itself the rules or principles according to which future instituting can also occur. This creation is the first historical act, and it is an act that inaugurates history. It is the historical beginning of history – and of society, since for Castoriadis the two are inseparable (CASTORIADIS 1975, 165-220).

Now for the most difficult question: is this act an act of humanity, and if it is an act of humanity, is it an act of a humanity essentially the same as the humanity that exists downstream of this act? Aeschylus has an answer to this question. It is not an act of humanity. It is a gift to humanity. And he has good reasons for saying this, reasons with which Castoriadis in a way concurs. Humanity without these fundamental institutions is no humanity at all, but an abomination, a monstrosity, an impossibility. How is it possible to imagine that such a humanity, lost amid dream shapes, could have given itself these fundamental institutions? Heidegger also concurs. The idea that humanity could have invented language and thought is absurd. «How is humanity ever supposed to have invented that which pervades it in its sway, due to which humanity itself can *be* as humanity in the first place?» (HEIDEGGER 1953, 167). Without language and thought, without the fundamental institutions that make humanity human, there is no humanity. If there is no humanity, then humanity cannot be the inventor of these institutions.

Two things must be said here. The first is that this quandary, interpreted in a sense to which Castoriadis is adamantly opposed, but which he believes has been decisive in the history of Western thought, can lead to the conclusion that self-creation is absolutely impossible, that nothing can be truly created; hence that everything that will be must already exist in some form or another, that history is not the emergence of the new but the unfolding of the same, and so on: the whole apparatus of the logic-ontology of determinacy that denied creation. The second is

that if humanity did not create these institutions, the question that must be asked is who did create them. Heidegger does not say. Aeschylus answers the question, though: the god Prometheus. If we happen to think that this answer is wrong, it is less easy to fault the logic that leads to the search for some source of the institutions beyond humanity as we know it. The question that remains is this: who or what are the gods?

Here Sophocles can perhaps help us. «We don't know exactly what Sophocles thought about the gods», writes Castoriadis, «and it is difficult to infer it» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19).

«We do know that he belonged to the circle of Pericles, as did Protagoras, who said: “Concerning the gods, I can know nothing: neither what they are like, nor whether they exist or do not exist, nor what form they might take”» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19; quotation from O'BRIEN 1972, 20).

In *Antigone*, however, this is what Sophocles says about the gods. Antigone is speaking of Creon's order against the burial of those who fought against Thebes.

«That order does not come from God. Justice
That dwells with the gods below knows no such law.
I did not think your edict strong enough
To overrule the unwritten unalterable laws
Of God and heaven, you being only a man.
They are not of yesterday or to-day, but everlasting,
Though where they came from none of us can tell» (SOPHOCLES 1947, 138).

The rules of God and heaven are not of yesterday or today. They are not the products of history, in which humanity, whether individual ruler or democratic polis, can write whatever laws she/he/they may choose. But what does it mean to say that we cannot tell where the laws of God and heaven came from? Has not Sophocles – or Antigone – just said that they come from God and heaven? There are two possible answers. Either, though we can name God and heaven, we know nothing definite of them, and so even if we say the laws came from God and heaven we do not really know what this means. Or, God and heaven are really only place markers for a mystery that we cannot solve. When there are things that exist that we cannot deny but cannot explain, we say that they come from God and heaven, understanding that by these words we are saying no more than that they are precious, not to be tampered with carelessly, and that their origin is a mystery to us.

The crucial thing is that these unwritten laws exist. Not only do they constrain us, but they are essential to making us human. Sophocles links these laws to oath-making – the idea of swearing oaths arises again and again in the play as

something both vital and dangerous. When one swears an oath one ties one's actions to something beyond oneself as guarantee of one's promise. In the Greek setting, this transcendent Other is God or the gods. But the crucial thing is that it should be an Other. Ricoeur has argued persuasively that the capacity to make and keep promises is an essential aspect of personhood (RICOEUR 1990, 1-55).

So however we explain or to whomever we attribute these laws, they are real and important. And even Sophocles, the poet whom Castoriadis lauds for his recognition of the self-creating nature of humanity, recognizes that these laws are not the work of humanity in the same way that the laws of Creon are, or the laws of the democratic polis would be. This speaks to the quality of Sophocles as a poet. He can have the chorus extoll the self-creating nature of humanity, but he does not ignore the mysteries that this self-understanding leaves unexplained. It would be easy, perhaps, for a democratic polis dazzled by its own achievements to recognize its own self-creating nature, and to project that self-creation back to a period prior to itself, to the whole of history, or even pre-history, and in so doing to elide the difference between what happens in the democratic polis and what occurred before it – in effect, to elide the difference between autonomy and heteronomy. This the chorus may be guilty of, and this is what makes Heidegger so uncomfortable that he wishes to alter the text of the chorus at some points because it makes no sense to him. But Sophocles' play is more than the choral ode. In his longer analysis of *Antigone*, Castoriadis focuses on what he sees as the heart of the tragedy, the conflict between Creon and Antigone which thematizes the risk of hubris, of acknowledging one's own reason alone and of failing to acknowledge the legitimacy of the views of others and accommodate them (CASTORIADIS 1983a). This is valid, and yet an artistic work of real quality is always a complex whole. Another theme in *Antigone* is the need to balance human laws and holy laws, to keep holy laws in awe, to recognise that we are connected to something beyond the here and now, the particularity and partiality of today's laws and today's needs. Castoriadis does not ignore this aspect of the play altogether. He interprets it in terms of the distinction between what he calls "affirmative law" and "worldly law" (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19). But this begs the question: what is affirmative law? Where does it come from? How does it differ from worldly law, the law the polis and its rulers make deliberately for themselves?

6. Varieties of Otherness and Types of Heteronomy

Castoriadis observes that in *Prometheus Bound*, Aeschylus begins from a «nightmarish prehuman condition and presents the passage to the human condition as a gift, coming from the decision and action of a superhuman creature» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19 f.).

«There is nothing analogous in Sophocles, for whom there cannot be a prehuman condition as far as humans are concerned since from the moment *anthropos* exists he is defined by his own active self-creating practico-poetic activity, his self-teaching» (CASTORIADIS 1991, 19 f.)

Let us accept that the attribution of fundamental human skills to the actions of a superhuman creature is a mistake; or better, an attempt to explain and express a mystery that otherwise has no answer. But what of the assertion that there cannot be a prehuman condition as far as humans are concerned? What does this mean: there cannot be? But there must have been: since humans are not eternal, since they came to be, there must have been something prehuman. But this cannot be *for* humans? So humans cannot experience this prehuman condition, they cannot share in it without ceasing to be human. But experiencing is not the only way that something can be *for* us. We can also seek to know, to understand, however externally and imperfectly. It is almost as if Castoriadis is telling us that because we can never hope to understand perfectly we should stop asking questions. It is advice that he can offer, but humans being what we are, most will not listen. And should we?

Castoriadis has a habit of insisting that we stop asking questions he declares pointless, and then answering them, or attempting to answer them, himself. We should stop asking who created society, he insists, and then declares that society is a form of self-creation, thus answering the question of its creation himself (CASTORIADIS 1982a). Or he declares we should stop inventing myths about the origin of the cosmos and society, and then he invents a poetic-philosophical concept that is as resonant as any myth: the *Chaos* (CASTORIADIS 1982b). Humans will ask these questions, and we should. But we should not settle on just any answers.

Of the fundamental social-historical institutions we can say that their creation involves a transformation from the prehuman to the human. We need not argue endlessly about whether this is or is not self-creation, as though the term “self” entailed a complete and perfect identity into which otherness never enters. On the contrary, selfhood entails otherness essentially. The creation of humanity is the creation of one self by another, a new self by an old. The old self will then be the Other vis-à-vis the new self – and vice versa for that matter. This is self-transformation, self-surpassing. The former, prehuman self is destroyed in this creation – in its totality it is destroyed even if some elements of it remain within the new self – and a new human self is created. This new humanity continues to be self-creating, and is so to a much greater degree than the prehuman self, because the transformation was such that it freed the capacity for self-creation to a much greater degree than previously. Self-creation becomes the very mode of being of the human self. This self-creation, however, never equals the radicality of the originary creation of the fundamental institutions of humanity. This is not to say that it never can or will. But if it does, that may entail the emergence of something radically new, a new humanity, or something beyond the human.

Thus, self-creation can involve otherness as well as selfhood. The two are not mutually exclusive. There are a number of ways in which self and other may be involved in social-historical self-creation. First, there is autonomy *qua* deliberate self-determination by a self-conscious collectivity – what Castoriadis has called lucid self-creation (CASTORIADIS 1983b). Second, there is the heteronomy in which a quite radical Other creates institutions which transform the prehuman into the social-historical, inaugurating the social-historical through the first social-historical act or acts. We may call this *Primal Heteronomy*. The difference between primal heteronomy and autonomy is quite stark and relatively simple to delineate. Then there is the heteronomy in which social actors, individuals and groups create the laws but disguise their own authorship by tying these laws to the originary heteronomous source, however defined. Let us call this *False Heteronomy*. Finally, there is the heteronomy in which the Other that we may regard either as the remnant of that prehuman source or as its contemporary counterpart, something nebulous and obscure, something that is sufficiently indeterminate that the divisions between the psychical, the social-historical and the biological, and between the human order and the cosmos, if they do not entirely evaporate – because they cannot do so entirely – at least cease to be as assured. In this last heteronomy, the Other wells up inside us and springs forth in ways that we experience as beyond our control and not of our own making, and this activity can inspire us in the creation of institutions for which we deny responsibility because we feel they came from beyond ourselves. Let us call this *Living Heteronomy*. In *heteronomous societies* – that is, societies in which the closure of social institutions is enforced through the attribution of these institutions to an extra-social source – the work of this Other is immediately attributed to the extra-social. In *autonomous societies*, the source of these creations is recognised as something that is within the social-historical, within the human, even if it exceeds it, and as such the freedom and responsibility of contemporary social actors to judge and choose with regard to these creations is accepted as legitimate and necessary. Nevertheless, a difference between these creations and those of which we know ourselves to be the conscious authors is recognized. This is the difference Castoriadis marks by the terms *affirmative* and *worldly* law. Even in an autonomous society, a distinction may be recognised, as in Sophocles, between holy law and laws we may make and alter at any time as we see fit. We can even say that such a distinction *should* be recognised, that it is healthy, and that to fail to recognise it may be an expression of hubris and a risk for autonomy.

So, there are different types of heteronomy, including the primal heteronomy of the originary instituting, the living heteronomy in which the anonymous collective creates for and through us, and the false heteronomy of the creation of institutions that, by linking itself to the primordial Other, denies and disguises the responsibility of contemporary actors for their own instituting activity. The

motivation for this obscuring of self-creation is, as Castoriadis suggests, to bolster the existing institutions and preserve them from challenge, to close the instituted society from its own instituting impulse. But there is another impulse, which is to reach out toward and link our social-historical world with a continually present Other, to tie ourselves with the transcendent, under whatever name: the gods, God, *Chaos*. If we reject false heteronomy, if we claim for ourselves the right and freedom to create and determine for and as ourselves, we should not scorn the impulse to reach out to the unnameable within and beyond ourselves. To do this without becoming imprisoned by our myths: this is the challenge. We might reflect upon the *Chaos* within the magma of the anonymous collective, as Castoriadis suggests. We might even explore Heidegger's idea that society, like Being, is a *phusis*, an «emerging and abiding sway»³, within which we find as well as create ourselves (HEIDEGGER 1953, 15 f.). We should continue to ask such questions and invent answers. But we should never imagine that any answer exhausts the mystery of questions as profound as these.

³ Stephens remarks on the oddity of this translation of Heidegger (STEPHENS 2014, 74). He points out that what Fried and Polt render as “sway” is in the German *Gewalt*, which is more literally “force” or “power”. I can only surmise that the English translators were wary of the scientific and political connotations of these English words, and wished to convey something more physical in the sense of embodied. This is not necessarily a defence of their choice, and I think readers should bear the German word and its literal meanings in mind when considering Heidegger's term.

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