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An Economic Turn: A Hermeneutical Reinterpretation of Political Economy with Respect to the Question of Land

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Abstract

The philosophy of economics has been largely guided by analytic philosophy. Even Marx has been appropriated without much scandal by economists who separate his scientific contributions from his politics. In this article, I place philosophical hermeneutics (i.e., Heidegger and Ricoeur) in dialogue with the conventional understanding of land as a factor of production. The history of political economy misunderstands land as an entity classifiable as property and capital. I argue instead that land's ontological role, deriving from Heidegger's concept of earth, suggests that economics needs to account for it in a new way according to David Ricardo's notion of land rent.

Keywords

hermeneutics, economics, land, rent, David Ricardo

This article is interdisciplinary in its scope, attempting to place in dialogue economics and the philosophical hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Paul Ricoeur.* The title “An Economic Turn” is intended to denote the turn within hermeneutics from theory—in this case, ontology—towards practical application within economics. Although Heidegger's ontology will feature more prominently as a direct subject of investigation, Ricoeur's hermeneutics is nonetheless driving the movement from ontology to economics, since it is Ricoeur's explicit intention to develop ontology and methodology for the

*1 Earlier versions of this article were delivered at The Annual Meeting for the Society for Ricoeur Studies, The Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (October 2008), and “Towards a Philosophy of Life: Reflections on the Concept of Life in Continental Philosophy of Religion,” Liverpool, United Kingdom (June 2009). My thanks to Joseph Milne and L. Sebastian Purcell for reading earlier versions of this article.

human *sciences*. Due to the scope and constructive nature of this article, I cannot comment in detail on how I understand the relation between Heidegger and Ricoeur. I have dealt with this question elsewhere, and let it suffice to mention here that despite the differences between ontology (*Wahrheit*), which can be associated with Heidegger, and application to the sciences (*Methode*), which can be associated with Ricoeur, I do not construe jointure of the two as something that would result in the loss of their respective meanings and distinctions.¹

My analysis begins from a familiar post-structural allegation: modern conceptual prejudices that privilege the human being in one way have detrimental effects in another. My claim is that such a prejudice is operating in our conception of land that fails to recognize how it is ontologically given, and therefore assumes it to be subject to unilateral human ownership. Running parallel to Heidegger's question of being, I see the question of land as one whose sense (*Sinn*) cannot be thought, insofar as we cannot think of land but as an extant entity there for our rights of "use, profit and transmissibility."²

Where I differ from typical post-structural criticisms is in my proposal for practical revision. If land can be linked to the kind of givenness that features so strongly in Heidegger's attention to disclosure, then we are left with the question of how we can relate to land in such a way that its givenness is appropriated into our manner of being. Economically speaking, can hermeneutics really respond adequately to this kind of reflective burden? As Don Lavoie et al. have shown,³ hermeneutics can be significant and relevant to the development of economics beyond the limits of what John Kenneth Galbraith famously referred to as "the conventional wisdom" of economic theory.⁴ This nevertheless entails a rather arduous path facing a double inertia where, on the one hand, ontological concepts tend to resist development into scientific concepts, and on the other hand, economic theory is generally uninterested in

¹ Todd Mei, *Heidegger, Work, and Being* (London: Continuum, 2009). Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 43–62.

² Kenneth R. Westphal, "Do Kant's Principles Justify Property or Usufruct?", *Annual Review of Law and Ethics* 5 (1997): §1.5.

³ Don Lavoie, ed., *Economics and Hermeneutics* (London: Routledge, 1990). My project differs from this in that my analysis and criticism are more radical, not isolating a specific feature of current methods but rather identifying how a conceptual oversight has determined the history of economic thought.

⁴ John K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, updated edition (London: Penguin, 1998).

concepts that make for complex models of human agency. This being said, some indication of the path I wish to pursue would be helpful.

Beginning with hermeneutics, my analysis will capitalize on the notion of ontological disclosure, also referred to by Ricoeur as truth as manifestation (as opposed to correspondence), in a way that does not merely repeat the originality of Heidegger's analysis of the relation of Dasein to being-in-the-world. Building on this, I argue that the kind of disclosure that Heidegger refers to not only offers a new understanding of spatiality but also asks us to reconceive those relations involved in our everyday relation to things. This point may seem superficial, but a distinction can be made between the theoretical insight disclosure provides and how we actually start to rethink those relations deriving from the understanding of space Heidegger repudiates. What I will focus on is how Heidegger's notion of world is driven from the abstract space of conceptualization to an attention to ground (*Grund*). Metaphorically speaking, the concept of ground appears at once abstract and concrete; we can think of grounds as reasons; and yet, at the same time, this way of grounding provides a foundation upon which we can act and dwell. The momentum of this turn towards the concrete culminates in what Jeff Malpas and Maria Vilella-Petit note as the later Heidegger's emphasis on earth (*Erde*). It is precisely here that the ontological meaning of ground, as giving and disclosing, can be infused into an economic concept of land.

Moving from hermeneutics to economics will involve inscribing an ontological account of land into economic definitions and relations. An effective redress will take the shape of digging beneath the economic conceptual origin of land. Once this obstacle is dissolved, it will be possible to link the ontological givenness of land to a course of economic practice first noted by David Ricardo as the law of economic land rent (hereafter shortened to "economic rent")⁵ and George's rephrasing of this law in view of the role of the community and how land is to be understood as possessed yet not owned. As I will argue, the ontological givenness of land has its economic correlate in economic rent, or what is defined as *unearned income*. It is unearned because it is a value not attributable to labor alone. It therefore cannot be described as a wage or form of profit, since it results from the interaction of the human community and land. While this anticipates defining economic rent as a source of

⁵ I realize that in making this abbreviation, I am going against the conventional economic thinking that attributes rent to other kinds of property. The reasons for this will become clear in the course of this article, as I see economic rent as something specific to land. Other types of rent have to be distinguished apart from land.

public revenue, my claim is not normative (ethical or political) but ontological—that is, because land has a specific ontological status, it follows that its value should be treated uniquely.⁶

This study is divided into four parts. Part one entails the analysis of ontological disclosure as it relates to ground. Part two provides a brief transition accounting for the pivot from hermeneutics to economics. Part three is devoted to a destructive retrieve of political economy. Part four consists in a brief discussion of the law of economic rent.

1. Ontological Disclosure

The design of this section can be described as a movement from a general account of truth as ontological disclosure to concreteness of this truth in terms of earth. The relevance of truth in the ontological sense moves from indicating its significance (in opposition to the traditional account of truth) towards practicality as to how we are then to reconceive our immanent existence. Thematically, this movement passes from disclosure to space, from space to ground, and from ground to earth.

It is worth remarking that I see this path that drives towards an ontological recognition of the earth as particularly hermeneutical insofar as it articulates the way in which Heidegger sees being and concreteness as distinct yet not separated. For example, the term οὐσία indicates how the actualization of a being within temporality and its so-called essence cannot be divorced. The Greek οὐσία refers to presencing as a constance. “What we mean here,” writes Heidegger, “is not mere presence [*Vorhandenheit*], and certainly not something that is exhausted merely in stability; rather, *presencing*, in the sense of coming forth into the unhidden, placing itself into the open.”⁷ The omission of “stability” from an understanding of οὐσία precludes the reduction of beings to extension and extant predicates that would appear to endure through time and can therefore be identified as a being’s ontological properties. With the emphasis on presenc-*ing*, the way in which a being *is* refers to how it stands

⁶ Economic arguments for seeing economic rent as a source of public revenue have been proposed by Henry George, Léon Walras, Knut Wicksell, William Vickrey, Mason Gaffney, and Fred Harrison, to name a few prominent economists. Philosophically, however, their understanding of land has not been explored or justified, and their position on the matter has often been seen as non-economic and more political and ethical.

⁷ Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 208.

in being. Here the verb *stand* should be understood in its active sense, as standing forth. Disclosure is therefore tied inextricably to the particular concreteness of that being in which it can take its stand. Thus, Heidegger remarks that “[f]or the Greeks ‘being’ basically meant this standing presence.”⁸ How, then, is earth a standing presence? To answer this, one is required to consider the nature of disclosure.

a) *Ontological Disclosure and Truth*

If one were to summarize the notion of truth as disclosure, one could say that its orientation to being allows things to disclose their own nature through our willingness and openness to recognize an encounter with them.⁹ Disclosure gives priority to the ontologically given nature of things that arrives before us and that we come too late to question in a world already in being, that is, a world already disclosing (and concealing) itself. Ricoeur, in this sense, wishes to appreciate first the way in which beings reveal themselves: “let us allow the space of the manifestation of things to be, before we turn toward the consciousness of the thinking and speaking subject.”¹⁰ Hence prior to a traditional epistemological approach (i.e., correspondence) that attempts to reduce beings to an ontic representation of attributes about which propositions can be made, manifestation grants the fullness of the thing itself that approaches us, or shines forth ($\phi\alpha\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$).

The difference is crucial to mark. Correspondence theory aims at the certainty of knowledge as it can be justified in statements about things (i.e., beliefs *that*). Disclosure aims at the encounter that does not have certainty as its concern; rather, it seeks to have the immediate precinct of being illuminated by the encounter with things in order to understand what is asked of us in thought and action. Its end is not certainty but appropriateness, that is, a

⁸ Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 61.

⁹ “The *Da* is the clearing and openness of what is, as which a human stands out. . . . Thus the clearing in which something present comes to meet something else present” (Heidegger, *Heracitus Seminar*, trans. Charles H. Seibert [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993], 126). See also Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 193.

¹⁰ Ricoeur, “Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation,” trans. David Pellauer. *The Harvard Theological Review* 70 (1977): 21. This appeal to disclosure is, of course, something Ricoeur will use to set up his notion of narrative truth, thereby insisting on a distinction between ἀλήθεια as disclosure and *mimetic* truth.

degree of concern that takes shape according to relations which temporalize temporality—i.e., which actualize the world.¹¹

Though speaking not of disclosure but order, Alasdair MacIntyre attempts to show that the correspondence between our mind and external reality exists only because of an ordered whole in which propositions can be true or false.¹² So in this sense the statements concerning correspondence are subsequent to the manifested, or disclosed, order of the whole. This expressly ancient Greek line of supposition in MacIntyre refuses to take the self in isolation and as the originator of meaning (or meaningful statements).¹³ Order therefore means more than mechanistic perfection, cohesion, or an objective reality, since the Greek cosmos is situated in the ἀρχή of intelligence.¹⁴ To recognize order and to act well go together; this recognition is not, in the first instance, a matter of human judgment that determines if the propositions made correspond to reality. Rather, the recognition of order is more primary. So what is this other way of seeing? It is truth according to ontological disclosure. In fact, the inclusive relation between correspondence theory and ontological disclosure has its historical origin in Aristotle's problematic reference to being and truth in *Metaphysics* Θ, 10. While Aristotle is the “father of logic,” initiating the notion of truth as correspondence, this description of truth, as Heidegger notes, is “by no means proposed as an explicit definition of the essence of truth.”¹⁵ Arguably, it is elsewhere that the essence of truth arises for Aristotle.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle does not quite say “truth as disclosure,” but he is clearly speaking of another, more primary kind of truth than correspondence when referring to being (εἶναι) and thinking (voεῖν) (cf. *Met.* 1052a1),¹⁶

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), H353–354. Following the Macquarrie and Robinson translation, the “H” denotes the pagination of the later German editions of *Sein und Zeit*.

¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 200–206. On value and fact, see MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 79–87.

¹³ For example, part of the isolation of the self is the divorce of propositions and statements from the speaker. Both Ricoeur and MacIntyre therefore refuse a severing of statements from the speaker since it truncates the scope of meaningful relations. (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40–55, and MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy*, 205).

¹⁴ Thus the relation of *dikē* to *aretē* and thinking well (*eu phronein*) (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988], 14–15).

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H214.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. H. Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); hereafter *Met.*

as opposed to correspondence and reason (λόγος). The fact that Aristotle speaks of νοῦς instead of λόγος suggests a direct kind of witnessing of what appears. Νοῦς describes the apprehension of entities as they are in their manner of being. Or, as Aristotle states in a terse way that would be problematic for modern ears, “Truth means to think these objects, and there is no falsity or deception, but only ignorance [ἄγνοια]” (*Met.* 1052a1–2). This passage, which has often been neglected by those scholars placing Aristotle within the tradition of the correspondence theory of truth (cf. *Met.* 1011b25–28, 1012a4–5), brings to light a rather startling conclusion, which Mark Sinclair summarizes: “Aristotle does not *restrict* truth to being a property of the proposition.”¹⁷ Truth in the sense of manifestation—that is, in terms of νοῦς—means that any “error” is a matter of not apprehending the essence of a thing (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι), or how it shows itself and presences as οὐσία.¹⁸ Unlike the theory of correspondence, which relies in some way on sense perception (αἴσθησις) as a foundation for correct statements, νοῦς refers to the act of seeing in which we witness beings in their manner of being. While this seeing might come through the eyes, it is not reducible to empirical observation, since it is received by the intellect.¹⁹ Its error cannot then be one of mistaking predicates as either true or false but one of failing to see and witness a thing in its being.²⁰ Sinclair therefore interprets the juxtaposition of νοῦς and ignorance to mean that being manifests or discloses truth in such a way that the only possibility for humans is to “see it” or “not see it.”²¹

Presumably, then, the inability to see in this noetic sense precludes an appropriate relation to how things are in their being. Within the hermeneutical reception of Aristotle (i.e., a Heideggerian reading of Aristotle), the notion of ontological disclosure does indeed precede truth as correspondence.

¹⁷ Mark Sinclair, *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art: Poiesis in Being* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006), 124 (my emphasis).

¹⁸ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 124.

¹⁹ This is why animals may have sight, but they do not share in action. Also consider that character habits are not possible to develop without the intellectual virtue of φρόνησις. Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1139a20 and 1144b21–24.

²⁰ Suffice it to say that the meaning of νοῦς and the earlier form νόος is problematic. For a study of the various meanings and possible ways in which νοῦς was later to be confused with αἴσθησις, see Kurt von Fritz, “Nous, Noein, and Their Derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Excluding Anaxagoras): Part II. The Post-Parmenidean Period,” *Classical Philology* 41:1 (January 1946): 12–34.

²¹ Sinclair, *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art*, 122–26.

Ontologically speaking, one cannot have correspondence without there first being those beings that in fact appear in being as the subject of statements. As Walter Brogan elucidates, what Aristotle notes in relation to νόυς, is how being itself carries within it a form of concealment that is prior to, and not related to, the falsity that may arise through statements or epistemological experiments like the argument from illusion.²² One of the reasons for this, as Brogan notes and which lies outside the scope of our theme, is how Aristotle defines each meaning of truth in relation to a specific kind of movement—correspondence with κίνησις and manifestation with γένεσις (cf. *Physics* 225a ff. and *Met.* 1012a5–9).²³ This qualification between the two meanings of truth is not simply one of superiority, since clearly correspondence has its place within Aristotle’s elaborate analyses. Nonetheless, the privileging of disclosure provides the context in which correspondence theory seeks its analysis of truth; that is, it admits the ontological clearing in which specific events seeking adequation are conducted.²⁴ Ricoeur of course makes his hesitance plain in refusing an unmitigated acceptance of disclosure as the primary basis for truth and is cautious in accepting this Heideggerian appropriation of Aristotle.²⁵ But his refusal has more to do with Heidegger’s solitary focus on being than it does in rejecting the fruits of his analysis. “I shall not adhere to the letter of Heidegger’s philosophy,” writes Ricoeur “but shall develop it for my own purposes.”²⁶

What, then, is the gain from this turn to disclosure? It is this: Because Heidegger sees truth as ontologically disclosed, we are asked to reconceive space not as something projected by the subject but as that which is occasioned and disclosed by the thing itself that stands there according to its manner of presencing.²⁷ However, this gain only opens more questions, one of which is, If space is no longer projected by the subject, then how are we to reconceive those entities that we tend to see as being within space? Heidegger,

²² Brogan, *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), 186–87.

²³ *Ibid.*, 187. In part, generation (γένεσις) is movement into being, while κίνησις is movement as the change of a thing.

²⁴ Kenneth R. Westphal addresses the pitfalls of regarding correspondence theory as a criterion of truth (versus an analysis of truth); (*Hegel’s Epistemological Realism* [Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989], 47–67, 111–14).

²⁵ Ricoeur accepts to some degree this appropriation but, as he usually does with Heidegger, rejects it for being too total (*Oneself as Another*, 308–15). The unitary function of πρᾶξις is too totalizing according to its theoretical bias (*ibid.*, 312–13).

²⁶ Ricoeur, “Phenomenology and Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 109.

²⁷ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 154. Cf. Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), 237.

of course, provides his examples in terms of the bridge, the Greek temple, and various equipment. But there seems something much more radical at play than specific examples in which the being of the thing breaks through our prejudices. As we will see, part of this radicality is predicated on dissolving the dominance of correspondence theory that inevitably gives prominence to properties in isolation, thereby reinforcing the concept of space as a void or vacuum.

b) *From Space to Ground*

Heidegger's account of ontological disclosure offers a new understanding of spatiality, and the convention against which he is reacting has largely to do with its Cartesian conception in which entities are defined according to the kinds of attributes we deem necessary and sufficient. For Descartes the notion of space is secondary to, and thus defined by, the criterion of bodily extension, since *being* is not perceivable in-itself but only through the attributes of length, breadth, and depth.²⁸ In other words, space is transparent and instrumental for the identification of attributes. As Heidegger is keen to note, the criterion of extension acts as the substantive definition of beings in which presence (*Vorhandenheit*) is the conceptual foundation on which we encounter real being.²⁹ In this way of enframing reality, ontological givenness is no longer understood as that which is disclosing itself but as that which is inert and there to be determined by human understanding. The modern concept of space in this respect is a representation of space as emptiness that is there already before being, as if being was nothing more than the filler of this space. Space is but a void in which beings are held in suspension, knowable not according to their temporal presencing but by their enduring, physical predicates: "being is equated with constant presence-at-hand."³⁰

I do not wish to revisit this criticism of Cartesian space in any more detail, since it has been addressed elsewhere.³¹ Instead, I would like to assume the momentum of Heidegger's criticism, noting how disclosure provides for a different conception of space that requires the concept of ground.

²⁸ Cf. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. J. Cottingham (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21.

²⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §§20–21, H94–96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, H96.

³¹ See, for example, Maria Vilella-Petit, "Heidegger's Conception of Space," *Critical Heidegger*, ed. Christopher Macann (London: Routledge, 1996), 134–57, and Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 70–74.

Let us note that there is no encounter with being in the abstract of representation. Where is this Dasein that is *in* the world? Where is its disclosedness, its thereness? How does it have access to any of these answers, let alone these questions? The meaning of “access” should be read concretely. Heidegger says, “Being is there [*gibt sich*] primordially and in itself, when it gives access to its beings.”³² Access, in other words, arrives through the way in which we dwell. Lived existence is not suspended in a Cartesian container but is grounded and situated; it is *gründend*.³³ Ground provides for our dwelling or, in another manner of speaking, our groundedness, so that we can be in the world. So the capacity to be Dasein—that is, to disclose through our understanding—is possible only because there is something like ground that is given, or what Heidegger refers to elsewhere as “making possible the why-question in general.”³⁴

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the metaphors that permeate philosophy or in the ways in which concepts will expand in their scope. The alreadiness of the world that Heidegger explicates in terms of our thrownness has as its essential feature the *horizon*, which we understand metaphorically to constitute both the limit under which we dwell and the limit of our understanding. We find that our reference to horizon, being grounded, giving grounds as reasons, and having a foundation upon which to build do not simply refer to an empty figurative sense but presuppose the givenness of ground in order that we can participate in an understanding. The correlation between the ways in which we speak of grounding, cultivating, and transcending, on the one hand, and the fundamental condition of our facticity as being “grounded,” on the other hand, refers to an ontological coincidence that is meaningful. It is not simply that philosophical concepts and examples are representations in our mind, says Heidegger. Rather, in conceptualizing, thinking “opens up world”; thinking therefore “persists through” to provide groundedness.³⁵

In this sense, Heidegger can say of *Der Satz vom Grund* that its obvious meaning as “the principle of reason” reveals an ontological significance: the movement (*Der Satz*) of thinking must first recognize what is already lying there in being (*Grund*). Reason, broadly understood, is thus wedded to the

³² Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 153.

³³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H366.

³⁴ Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” in *Pathmarks*, 129 (original italics omitted).

³⁵ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 156.

notion of ground, which it takes to constitute its project.³⁶ Such relations are not linguistically contingent in the respect that it just so happens we speak of grounding because of our physical situation, whereas in another possible world we might speak of X-ing, where X defines a fundamental feature of dwelling in that world that is not grounded. Whatever X may be, it still denotes the way in which beings require and refer to “grounds” as reasons for a manner of being and acting. Having a ground is the basis upon which we can provide grounds for reasoning; and we might therefore twist Sartre’s famous dictum to declare: we are condemned to give grounds... and live them.³⁷ This is why Dasein is the being who is the Open, as Thomas Sheehan notes. Its gaze cannot but look in such a way that it clears, or illuminates, in order to cultivate its relations and hence belong in the world.³⁸

To highlight the jettisoning of Cartesian space, let us note that ground provides the occasion in which beings can presence; ontological disclosure and ground are therefore conceptually distinct yet inseparable. To illustrate this, Heidegger focuses on the thing as a particular event of disclosure. It is the thing, Heidegger maintains, from which space emerges. Things provide locations; they delimit in order that Dasein can belong to the world.³⁹ The Opening (*Lichtung*) occurs through the specificity emerging through things. This, as Malpas and Vilella-Petit argue, signals the shift to the significance of place (*τόπος, Ort, Ortschaft*) in the later Heidegger. “[T]he happening of the thing,” writes Malpas, “is itself always an opening up into things, and so into the world.”⁴⁰ In every instance, ground is that which provides for the thing to emerge, to generate space in its ontological movement of being (*γένεσις*).

c) *Belonging to Earth*

But does not ground anticipate more than ontological foundations?⁴¹ It would appear that when speaking of ground there is an inevitable connection to our

³⁶ Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 15–16, 95–101.

³⁷ Perhaps Levinas is an unexpected ally? See his comments on biological relations that are not simply biological but instantiate a deeper relation, which for him is ethical (*Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 277, 279, 306).

³⁸ Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 195. Ricoeur notes that this feature for self-discovery is lacking in Levinas (*Oneself as Another*, 339).

³⁹ See, for instance, Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 154.

⁴⁰ Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, 248; cf. Vilella-Petit, “Heidegger’s Conception of Space,” 151.

⁴¹ I do not intend foundations to constitute a hierarchy. See, for example, Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, 144–45.

existence. Ground, in other words, has a kind of “corporeality” that prevents us from reducing the surface of the earth to mere matter.⁴² The as-structure through which Dasein “makes sense” of things applies also to the ground upon which we dwell, and it is precisely because we see ourselves as beings who dwell that ground is more than just the surface upon which we tread. Ground becomes for Dasein the place or locality for self-discovery (and therefore the recognition of others).

Ricoeur notes in relation to being embodied that “the feature of selfhood belonging to corporeality is extended to that of the world as it is inhabited corporeally.”⁴³ This is, as Ricoeur clarifies, a productive, imaginative variation of selfhood (akin to what I mentioned earlier in relation to linguistic terms relating to ground). This is not to say that ground is therefore a part of the body, even through some Lockean kind of appropriation of ground through one’s labor; rather, it is to assert that our sense of personhood presupposes a relation to ground in order to have a more complete sense of what it is to live. Ground is earth, where earth names a personalized or, as Ricoeur states, “mythic” bond that we live.⁴⁴ Earth is the wholeness of what it means to dwell as a human; and etymologists often note the relation between *humanus* and *humus*.⁴⁵

Following the path from ground to earth as a trajectory for reading Heidegger, Maria Vilella-Petit states, “It is clear that ‘being-in-the-world’ is henceforward to be understood in terms of dwelling. . . . It encompasses all the dimensions of our human sojourn here on earth.”⁴⁶ Malpas affirms, “It is indeed the appearance of this concept of ‘earth’ . . . that introduces a new direction in Heidegger’s thinking.”⁴⁷ But what new direction is this, or can this be? Both Vilella-Petit and Malpas do not specify, as their immediate concerns lie in substantiating the reading that there is a turn to earth and place in the corpus of Heidegger’s work. Let us therefore return to the question of bond.

It is precisely because of our corporeality that earth is not simply matter to be used and consumed but that which we recognize over against our being

⁴² Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Place World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 211.

⁴³ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 150.

⁴⁴ Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 150.

⁴⁵ The same can be said of *adam* and *adama*. See, for instance, the entry for “human” in Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1966). My thanks to Duane Williams for providing clarification on the etymology.

⁴⁶ Vilella-Petit, “Heidegger’s conception of space,” 148.

⁴⁷ Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology*, 197.

thrown into the world. Earth is given. Its givenness is primarily an abundance that emerges from itself and, because of this, is self-sufficient (cf. φύσις). Its self-sufficiency, which both reveals and conceals, therefore eludes our attempt to grasp it in its totality. Earth, as Heidegger comments, “is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing.”⁴⁸ The uniqueness of earth as there already and as self-secluding suggests that it is not material provided for us but rather material that provides for us and that is never mastered. In other words, the provision offered by earth is active in the sense that in providing, Dasein must respond through interpretation. Heidegger refers to this as the struggle between earth and the Dasein who “worlds the world”: “In the struggle each opponent [earth and world] carries the other beyond itself.”⁴⁹ While this inevitably sets up a strife (which is not destructive) between earth and the world-disclosing ability of Dasein, it is important to note that Dasein cannot be itself without earth actively giving to Dasein.

Thus to speak no longer simply of ground or grounds, but of earth, is to refer at once to the conditions in which ontological givenness arises and to how these conditions are inscribed in lived existence and practice. Disclosure is no longer simply an idea, even if a profound one. It opens our belonging to the earth and therefore shifts the locus of our care: How to dwell on the earth?

2. The Economic Turn: From Earth to Land

Turning from hermeneutics to economics requires isolating givenness as a way of reinterpreting economic concepts. Part of the radical transformation that was expressed in the foregoing analysis is how givenness is seen to precede the human subject so that “to be given” is no longer that which the subject presumes as his or her own (like a proof in geometry that is taken as given in order to proceed). Givenness, on the contrary, elicits a response in the recipient whereby the recipient comes to understand what it means to receive appropriately. This response is what constitutes the turn; it is a move, not away from givenness, but *into* givenness by appropriating it as a feature in economic theory. This turn is therefore a specific rendering of givenness that derives from the way in which humans dwell in relation to other things and subsequently interpret this relation. Where economics is concerned, the givenness of earth

⁴⁸) Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 48.

⁴⁹) Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 49.

is *turned into*—i.e., conceptualized *as*—land, since it is the concrete entity presupposed in any act of production (even virtual).⁵⁰

However, land remains one of those equivocal concepts within the history of economics that had some prevalence in the classical period but then was concealed by its reduction to capital with the emergence of the neoclassical period.⁵¹ Some classical thinkers, such as Thomas Malthus and John Stuart Mill, will readily speak of the meaning of land as given by nature as gift. But historically (with few exceptions), the movement from land as gift to our economic interaction with land betrays this recognition, as if the gift was never recognized by us. Adapting a phrase of Derrida's, against his own intentions, one can say that *homo economicus* does not recognize the gift of land as gift.⁵² The next section attempts to trace this historical autism.

3. A Destructive Retrieve of Land in Political Economy

Conceptually, it is important to note at the outset that the right to own land is squarely embedded in the Western liberal idea of the sanctity of private property and the inalienability delineating the *suum* (what is one's own) and how one gains ownership of things by virtue of improving them through

⁵⁰ The argument here is that even virtual trade takes place on land (from offices or homes) and has an outcome that is inevitably tied to the economy that affects profit, income, etc., that are unambiguously land-based in application (i.e., in living). For a discussion of George in relation to modern criticisms, see Jürgen Backhaus, "Henry George's Ingenious Tax: A Contemporary Restatement," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 56, no. 4 (October 1997): 453–74.

⁵¹ I use the term "neoclassical" loosely, as I am aware of the marginalist revolution (ca. 1830–1930) and that so-called neoclassical economics is by no means uniform, nor is it simply a revival of classical analyses. For discussion of the history of economic theory, see Jürg Niehans, *A History of Economic Theory: Classic Contributions, 1720–1980* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990). Concerning the conflation of land into other factors of production, see Vilfredo Pareto's unequivocal claim that land is capital (*Manual of Political Economy*, trans. Ann S. Schwier [London: Macmillan Press, 1971], 321). Mark Blaug argues that the distinction of land as given and nonproducible results from a classical confusion—i.e., thinking materially rather than economically. This means that land is like any other kind of "long-lived" good. Thus rent now is applied to all things that accrue value above and beyond the expenditure of labor and capital. See Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 86.

⁵² Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13. Derrida, of course, sees the decision not to recognize the gift as the one way of breaking the circle of reciprocity, which is vicious.

labor.⁵³ Through this interpretive lens, land enclosure and land monopoly are justified according to a right of ownership, itself based on the identification of how one's labor has creatively mixed with (or improved) the resource of land, and subsequently either inherits this land or is willing to buy this land from its owner in order to obtain its title and use.⁵⁴

What is elided, however, is the question of the status of land itself. Ontologically, as I have argued, it is given in such a way that we cannot simply appropriate it as we do other items we designate as property. Land, ontologically speaking, cannot be made to fit the category of property at all (or even primary goods as referred to by John Rawls), precisely because, as earth, it provides the place upon which human labor occurs. We should not forget the tacit, but nonetheless very real, complement to the thing, which generates space. In order for there to be a thing, labor presupposes an already existing place in which it can produce, build, design, and exchange. So the place (*Ort*) delimited by the thing as it presences presupposes the already existing places in which work can occur. The meaning to the earlier mentioned word *access* has now gained more force: "Being is there [*gibt sich*] primordially and in itself, when it gives access to its beings." If the givenness of land (earth) is fundamental to Dasein's manner of being, Dasein's manner of being must have access to land in order to dwell. Too basic a point?

The history of political economy says otherwise when foregoing givenness for rights of ownership over land. The current socio-economic *habitus* is so infused with ownership of land as a regulating idea that the vast majority of Daseins, as it were, are not granted access unless a fee is paid for its use. So the earth's originary givenness, in this respect, has been concealed so that we cannot think land in its givenness but only in terms of *requiring* what is given (because we lack it in the first place). This pre-understanding prevails to the extent that the majority of landless people aspire to own land but do not think it unjust not to be given access to it without paying a fee to another.

Even within the modern natural law tradition, questions concerning the natural status of land are not given significant attention. Grotius and Pufendorf

⁵³ Stephen Buckle follows the development of private property via the transformation of natural law theory (*Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1991]). The thesis of property to which I refer is often traced to Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1986), §§26–27.

⁵⁴ Jacob Viner points out that the emergence of the term monopoly (*monopolium*), though ancient in origin, first appears in the English language around 1600 and is mainly associated with monopoly of land rents (*Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics* [Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1991], 63–64).

utilize the conception of a negative community, in which *dominium* refers to property owned in common, in order to construct a quasi-historical and phenomenological origin for property rights.⁵⁵ When maturing from a negative to a more civilized society, property rights, arising either through consensus (e.g., Grotius) or as a result of labor (e.g., Locke), mark the formation of positive community, and property law is necessary in order to maintain peace and justice. Land, grouped under the category of property, then becomes something that can be owned according to whatever precepts of consensus are affirmed or, as with Locke, according to how labor mixes with and improves it.⁵⁶ The problem here is that the quasi-historical nature of this account turns from a thought-experiment attempting to explain a theory of property to a supposition asserting that it is a natural, historical process for land to be owned.

It is Locke's conceptualization of private property that is arguably the most prevalent in today's notion of the right to the fruits of one's labor. With respect to land, which is finite in availability, this view becomes extremely problematic, since the transition from land understood as a common good of distributive justice (i.e., within negative community) to a good of private ownership presupposes criteria that facilitate the assignment of land to those within a community, especially as it grows in population within a confined geographical area. A narrow reading of private property proves to be insufficient when applied within the operations of an economy of large scale. Economic progress magnifies questions concerning access to the very ground upon which a community can flourish: Who is entitled to land? Is a principle like "original acquisition" fair in determining land rights?⁵⁷

When looking at political economy, Smith, Malthus, Mill, and Marx, despite their variation, share in failing to recognize how land's *natural* status as something already given strongly implies that it has an ontological meaning, distinguishing it from other entities in economic production. Smith and Malthus assume a stance within social convention that upholds landownership as an essential feature of economic distribution, while Marx, even though critical of political economy, reduces land to labor's value-creating capacity. Mill proves a more complex matter but one that in the end remains situated in the quagmire of personal property.

⁵⁵ Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property*, 11, 164.

⁵⁶ Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government*, §43.

⁵⁷ On original acquisition and justice, see for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 174–81.

a) *Smith, Malthus, and Mill*

Adam Smith presents a peculiar case of insight and confusion, the heart of which concerns his recognition of injustice that is only to be supplanted by deference to social convention. This confusion arguably determines the course of the development of political economy, since it establishes the foundational concepts and principles to which others will react.⁵⁸ This will especially become true with respect to how, for Smith, the role of the landlord is assumed not only to be a convention too late to be questioned but one that is beneficial to the whole of society.

In a few well-known passages from *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith recognizes the problems of landownership but then justifies its convention because it benefits the society in terms of the distribution of wealth. Concerning the first point:

[T]he landlords... love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce. [The laborer] must then pay for the licence to gather [this produce]; and he must give up to the landlord a portion of what his labour either collects or produces.⁵⁹

Elsewhere, Smith comments that “[a]s soon as land becomes private property, the landlord demands a share of almost all the produce which the labourer can... raise.”⁶⁰ Smith appears unequivocal: the power of exacting payment from the laborer, or what we generally call rent,⁶¹ is unnatural because the landowner does nothing to contribute to the production of wealth, or as Smith says, “the landlords... love to reap where they never sowed.” Yet this unequivocal criticism is never sustained.

Social convention intervenes. It is not simply, as Paul H. Douglas remarks, that “[l]andlords... were dominant in the society in which he [Smith] wrote

⁵⁸ Cf. J. S. Mill, *Collected Works*, Volume 5, ed. J. M. Robson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 671.

⁵⁹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, vols. 1–3 (London: Penguin, 1999), 152.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶¹ As Henry George notes, rent has to do with “the produce which accrues to the owners of land or other natural capabilities by virtue of their ownership” (*Progress and Poverty* [New York: Robert Schalkenbach, 1992], 165). The narrow meaning concerns the grouping of payments for the use of buildings and machinery, for example, and the use of land. The narrow meaning does not distinguish “the price for the use of improvements from the price for the use of the bare land.” Rent in a proper economic sense has to do with the payment for the use of land.

and he accepted them as part of the order of nature.”⁶² There is more to Smith’s deference to convention than the influence of the socio-cultural *habitus*. For Smith, the justness of landownership is reasoned according to how it provides for the natural distribution of the whole annual produce of land where each person gets his just share: landlords receive rent, laborers receive wages, and a business owner (i.e., the farmer) receives the profit.⁶³ At the top of the hierarchy are the landlords who act as distributors of the annual produce, since they provide access to desirable land on which production can occur and benefit the nation by allowing for production. Indeed, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the passage referring to “the invisible hand” uses landowning as its paradigmatic example, arguing that such ownership does not descend into a purely selfish appropriation of the land’s annual produce, because the landlord recognizes the obligation to distribute wealth.

They [landlords] are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants.⁶⁴

It is worth noting that Smith’s qualification that the landlord’s distribution occurs as if “the earth had been divided into equal proportions” suggests that the landlord distributes what is originally his. However, this right and role are claimed solely by virtue of owning the land.⁶⁵ Is the fruit of labor, joining with land, really the landlord’s? We will have to wait until the final section for this

⁶² Paul Douglas, “Smith’s Theory of Value and Distribution,” in *Adam Smith 1776–1926* (New York: Kelley, 1966), 98. As Viner points out, Smith adapted much of the theology and philosophy concerning natural law and providentialism, though it is questionable whether or not landownership is part of the natural order (*Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 88–98).

⁶³ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, vols. 1–3: 153–57. Cf. *Ibid.*, vols. 4–5: 250. Viner notes that though Smith detested monopolies in any form, he was less critical about land rents because he believed landlords were the least possible to organize in order to seek profit on a large scale (*Essays on the Intellectual History of Economics*, 67).

⁶⁴ Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976), IV.i.10–11, 184–85.

⁶⁵ My thanks to Joseph Milne for making this clear to me. Henry George therefore sees land monopoly as the source of unjust distribution of wealth and not something subject to the law of distributed goods *Progress and Poverty*, 329. Kant, interestingly, maintains a similar understanding when noting that access to land is what makes possible the notion of right (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996], §49; see also Academy Edition, 6:323–24). My thanks to Kenneth R. Westphal for pointing me in this direction.

answer. If it is not, and landowning is legitimated only on the basis of a normative claim to the rights to land, then Smith's defense fails.

Similar to Smith, Malthus sees landownership as beneficent to the wealth of the nation, because no one more than the landlord is interested in the productivity of the land and the nation's well-being.⁶⁶ And like Smith he sees this function negating the criticism that the landlord contributes nothing to production. It is apparent that Malthus retains to some degree the concept of feudal nobility, where being lord of the land is informed by ethical, if not theological, principles of care. He even refers to land as a gift of nature.⁶⁷ For Malthus, the landowning social structure is conducive to appreciating land as gift, and he goes so far as to say it would be detrimental to turn rents over to the actual farmers who use the land, because this would unnaturally make them "gentlemen" and result in poor care and neglect of the land.⁶⁸ What Malthus perhaps could not foresee were the malicious effects of a large-scale market economy anticipating land monopoly. Or perhaps, the privation characteristic of monopoly is merely a necessary outcome of the dismal science and the natural conditions of scarcity?

Mill appears a more complex case, since he advocates a fair distribution of land, and certainly in his later thinking he sees the seizure of economic rent by a landowner as inimical to the common good.⁶⁹ Mill states clearly that "[n]o man made the land. It is the original inheritance of the whole species" and that unless landowning is expedient, it is "unjust."⁷⁰ Despite this, as Henry George notes, Mill makes a decisive qualification in his *Principles of Political Economy* that contradicts this initial stance: "But though land is not the produce of industry, most of its valuable qualities are so."⁷¹ Here, Mill ties land to a version of a labor theory of value, since although land itself is not "the produce of industry," its value is. Arguably, the force of this qualification opens the door to the idea that one can legitimately and privately claim economic rent because, in the last analysis, it is human labor that improves land.⁷² Indeed, this view constitutes the default position within neoclassical economics since

⁶⁶ Malthus, *Nature and Progress of Rent* (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2006), 36–37, 62.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 28–29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁹ Mill, *Collected Works*, 5: 659–95.

⁷⁰ Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), II.ii §6, 237–38; here, 237.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II.ii §5, 234–35, quoted in Henry George, *The Science of Political Economy* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1992), 463–66.

⁷² Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, II.xvi. §6, 413.

it recognizes that while land is given to all, its economic meaning resides in how individuals improve it and are therefore entitled to its value.⁷³ (I will show later how entitlement to the fruit of one's labor is one thing, while entitlement to economic rent is qualitatively another.) Whether or not Mill genuinely held this view is debatable, and one should therefore note two competing policies he advocated: 1) he supported small land holdings, even for peasants,⁷⁴ and believed that each owner was entitled to the economic rent of the land; and 2) at the end of his life, he put forth a plan to tax future increase in economic rent (landlords are thereby entitled to the present value). It is difficult to see how Mill saw this latter platform in relation to his earlier work on political economy,⁷⁵ and at the very least, one can say that his concern for land ends where George will assume a more radical proposal.⁷⁶ At most, Mill's proposal to tax future rents still does not go far enough in contesting private ownership of land outright and perhaps is a concession in view of maintaining the stability of the whole of society without drastic social reform. But are not my criticisms merely anticipating Marx's critique that land has become commoditized—"the dominion of private property begins with property in land"⁷⁷—and that the real problem is commodification (and exchange value)?

b) *Marx, Labor, and Land*

Assessing Marx's suppositions concerning land is a manageable task given the expressed scope and focus of this essay. What I am not attempting is an analysis of his complex treatment of absolute ground rent. This latter concept is Marx's attempt to offer a more accurate account of the relation between production price, market value, and labor-value that inevitably evinces the

⁷³ Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 86.

⁷⁴ Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, II.vi–vii, 278–96. See also, Robert B. Eckelund, Jr. and Robert D. Tollison, "The New Political Economy of J. S. Mill: The Means to Social Justice," *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue canadienne d'Economique* 9, no. 2 (1976): 224.

⁷⁵ John Medaris argues that the reason for this change is largely owing to Mill's later rejection of the labor theory of value ("Labor, Democracy, Utility, and Mill's Critique of Private Property," *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 1 (January 2005): 135–49).

⁷⁶ Mill, *Collected Works*, 5: 659–95. George himself notes an article he wrote applauding Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, and its description of the causes of wages (which is integral to George's theory of rent) was commended by Mill (*The Science of Political Economy*, 201).

⁷⁷ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. M. Milligan (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), 63.

exploitation of labor.⁷⁸ My task here is more rudimentary: I will demonstrate in this sub-section that Marx maintains in error that rent (in any form) is derivative solely from, and therefore owed to, labor.

For Marx, the role of labor is primary and paramount in its service as the creator of value, and this becomes clear in *Capital* when he holds that “Value is labor. So surplus value cannot be earth [*Erde*].”⁷⁹ What Marx intends by this is to highlight the injustice that Smith first noticed with respect to landlords: the value we take to be rent is really created by labor as a surplus, so why should a landlord have the right to claim it? Thus rent really is surplus-labor that remains unpaid because it is taken by the landlord.⁸⁰ “Rent,” Marx states, “is the sole prevailing and normal form of surplus-value, or surplus-labor.”⁸¹ Therefore, the economic rent arising from production cannot be claimed by any one individual. Decisively, the concept of rent is really a fiction engendered by the capitalist mystification; it is a term given by political economists who fail to see that, really, rent is labor-value.⁸²

For Marx, the notion of land as a factor of production is an abstraction that conceals the role of labor, and certainly one can see that prior to his deconstruction of political economy’s trinitarian formula (land, labor, and capital) is a philosophical justification. In his earlier writings Marx refuses the conceptual elaboration of nature beyond its role as the stock of matter. When Marx says “nature . . . is nothing,”⁸³ he refuses a theoretical determination of nature, because it potentially interferes with the praxical response; in theoretical thinking, nature is already too much of an abstraction from necessity and the necessary human response to matter through $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$. Land, as part of nature, should conform to this necessity; for Marx land is but matter for

⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, trans. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 892. It is important to note that absolute ground rent refers to a specific historical period in which agricultural products are sold above their price of production (thus accruing surplus profit) but for less than their labor-value (thus the exploitation of the laborer).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 954.

⁸⁰ The landlord then becomes for Marx a personalized, alienating force, since he/she claims from labor part of its own self-consciousness (objectification) and therefore legitimates the existing relation as if it was a historical necessity (Marx, *Capital*, 3: 927–28, 930–31, 962–65; cf. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 55).

⁸¹ Marx, *Capital*, 3: 930–31: “The surplus product which forms rent is the product of this combined agricultural—industrial family labour” (931). Rent, in other words, is not attributable as an unearned income owing to the quality of a piece of land itself but to labor as a surplus of labor.

⁸² Marx, *Capital*, 3: 930–32, 953–70.

⁸³ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 165.

production. Elsewhere I have shown how an interesting passage from Marx, when interpreting William Petty, translates the English “Land” as *Die Erde*, or earth.⁸⁴ What is the significance of this seemingly minor point of translation? Unlike how Heidegger intends the meaning of earth, Marx no longer sees earth as an entity unique in its own right but as matter to be rendered. We can recall that in *Grundrisse* it is the collective labor power that attains “[t]he full development of human mastery over the forces of nature.”⁸⁵ Nature and land are thus entities to be subsumed under the economic will of the laborer, that is, as a means for objectification and the augmentation of material consciousness. What results from this is a denigration of land and any possible distinction it may have apart from labor. Since land is really “nothing,” it is therefore easy for Marx to view rent as that which originates from labor.

Economists like David Ricardo hold, in contrast to Marx, that land plays a role in creating unearned income that takes the form of rent and land value. Land attains value as a result of human labor *but only so long as* there is at least another piece of land used for the same production, yet has an inferior yield. Land value, for Ricardo, arises through what he noted as the law of economic rent, where the innate qualities of a piece of land or its location will confer some advantage that manifests in economic value and yet is not entirely attributable to labor. To be sure, Marx contested Ricardo’s theory with vigor, concluding, as mentioned earlier, that there was an *absolute* value for land that was correlative to his labor theory of value.⁸⁶ While Marx acknowledges the pertinence of Ricardo’s understanding, he maintains that the phenomenon of rent in a capitalist society occurs with respect to a factor Ricardo did not see. This has to do specifically with how Marx understands the market value of commodities dictating whether or not rent can arise. In other words, where for Ricardo rent arises with respect to fertility grades (and for George for all land that is desirable due to relevant factors), for Marx rent can be generated on any land if the market value of commodities rises above their price of production.⁸⁷ Thus, for Marx difference between the qualities of lands, for whatever reasons, is a moot point in determining rent, since it is the value of the commodity produced on any given piece of land that is the real factor. But in a capitalist system, we fail to see where price determination originates—i.e., the labor-

⁸⁴ Mei, *Heidegger, Work, and Being*, 26–27. For citation in German, see Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Erster Band (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1971), 58; cf. 848 n. 21.

⁸⁵ Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1973), 488.

⁸⁶ Louis Dupré, *Marx’s Social Critique of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 175–76.

⁸⁷ Marx, *Capital*, 3: 889.

time socially necessary for its production. In this respect, there is no difference of value inherent between pieces of land, since value is determined by labor-time. To speak of rent is to alienate the value produced by labor, for labor.

To conclude this section, my intention in looking at a few of the major classical economists is to suggest that the background of philosophical suppositions relating to land have failed to recognize its ontological givenness. What I will do in the final section of this article is provide detail to the way in which land has a specific kind of value tied to it. Bearing the foregoing analysis in mind, it will become apparent that Smith, Malthus, and Mill end up allowing this value to be appropriated by those who have no legitimate (read ontological) claim upon it. Marx assumes another route, where any land value is simply reduced to labor-value. So in effect there is no value specific to land, and labor can make a claim upon it. This, as we will see, differs from Ricardo's theory of economic rent, though it will take George to follow through the greater ramifications of this theory.

4. The Law of Economic Rent

In beginning my concluding analysis, I return to the basic question motivating this investigation: If land can be described as ontologically given and its nature as one of providing, bestowing, and enabling, then should not this givenness be accounted for in our economic practices that use the land? In other words, is there an appropriate relation to land as given? The answer would appear to be yes, for there is a symmetry between the kind of givenness land grants and the kind of parameters that delimit our activity.

For a short while since the Physiocrats, political economists recognized land as that which stood for the givenness of nature and provided for human beings so that they could in turn produce by their own labor.⁸⁸ Yet at the same time, if land gives, it does not give infinitely or equally; nor does it exist in an unlimited supply. Its givenness requires a response appropriate to its manner of being present. Our encounter with land, as Heidegger might say, reveals specific conditions that determine to a large extent how we mediate land use within a community. So land use and possession reside within a tension: on the one hand, its scarcity and variety, and on the other hand, the essential need of a community to have access to it.

⁸⁸) An interesting historical account where the change in how land is conceived occurs in Blaug, *Economic Theory in Retrospect*, 86.

Ricardo notes therefore that our relation to land manifests according to three factors: 1) land is limited in quantity; 2) land is not equal in quality; and 3) as population increases, marginal land is called into use.⁸⁹ So the necessity of land for production involves conditions of quantity and quality, and this means that in any given community use of land will be comparatively valued in relation to available land of inferior quality that can be put to the same use. Essentially, this comparative practice identifies economic rent, or what is often phrased as a cardinal (but now forgotten) doctrine of classical political economy.⁹⁰ George provides a precise formulation of Ricardo's principle: "The rent of land is determined by the excess of its produce over that which the same application [of labor and capital] can secure from the least productive land in use."⁹¹ A classic illustration of economic rent involves agriculture and soil grade: one piece of land has a higher grade of soil in relation to another of inferior quality; all other things being equal (i.e., the exertion of labor and capital), the land with a higher grade of soil will allow the farmer to produce more units than the other land of inferior quality. The comparative difference between these two pieces of land ultimately gets measured in terms of the end products to be sold (net produce). So, if Land A produces a net annual yield of 1000 bushels of wheat more than Land B, the 1000 bushels constitute the economic rent of Land A. (There is no rent for Land B.)

The comparative value mentioned above is an *unearned income*, as first recognized by the Physiocrats.⁹² The phrase unearned income is used to denote, in relation to the example above, how the *advantage* that Land A has over Land B is not due to human labor (contra Marx's labor theory of value). Rather, the advantage arises from the qualities of a particular piece of land to be used by human labor in meeting the subsistence level.⁹³ Thus Ricardo's theory is often referred to as differential rent. So in the example above, Land A's ability to produce 1000 more bushels than Land B equates to an unearned income of 1000 bushels (whatever amount below that constitutes wages).⁹⁴ Ricardo demonstrates that as more marginal land is called into use, the greater the rents will be for lands of superior quality, since the difference between the

⁸⁹ David Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1996), 47.

⁹⁰ Cf. George, *Progress and Poverty*, 168, and Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 405.

⁹¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 168.

⁹² George, *The Science of Political Economy*, 150.

⁹³ Ricardo, *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 50.

⁹⁴ The reader may have noticed that I do not subsume wages under the category of cost of production; see George, *Progress and Poverty*, 50–70.

unearned income amounts at the extremities will be comparatively greater. In short, the advantage a piece of land confers over another constitutes its economic rent, that is, its unearned income that arises due to the qualities that that a piece of land affords when utilized by labor.

George provides a substantial supplement to Ricardo's insight into differential rent. George notes how economic rent does not just apply to agricultural land but to all land whose use confers some advantage.⁹⁵ Thus, commercial land in the city center affords a higher rent than land near the margin of a community because the city center is the location where the concentration of activity occurs. Similarly, even land used for housing has a range consisting of high desirability for the standard of living and of marginal land that for some reason or another is less desirable. In every instance, the use of marginal land becomes the determining factor that sets the rent of land of higher quality, the baseline for use of marginal land being determined by the subsistence level. George's supplement not only rebuts a classical prejudice concerning the designation of manufacturing lands as non-productive but it also makes the law of rent "universal." Let us pause for a moment before continuing with George's analysis to see if it fits ontology.

There appears an immediate correlation: if difference in land is due to scarcity, scarcity is possible only because of the ontological condition of finitude. Sheehan makes a crucial point about the role of finitude in Heidegger:

for Heidegger human openness is intrinsically "in-complete." . . . Our lack makes us be open and finite by ever remaining a lack, privatively "absent" and "concealed." We cannot encompass and incorporate it. It is *intrinsically* withdrawn from our powers—"self-withdrawn," if you will. Our lack-in-being "causes" and maintains our openness.⁹⁶

In short, the ontological feature of lack is a necessary feature of being's givenness, since any completeness would make obsolete the movement, temporalizing, and becoming of being.⁹⁷ Economically speaking one can assert correlatively: while land is given, its manner of giving is conditioned by its availability. Where being is set within finitude, land is set according to scarcity

⁹⁵ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 166; cf. 437.

⁹⁶ Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," 199.

⁹⁷ Aristotle here makes an interesting qualification that such lack does not mean incompleteness is pejorative but rather that where movement is concerned, such processes are complete over time. For an analysis of this, see Mei, "The Preeminence of Use: Reevaluating the Relation Between Use and Exchange in Aristotle's Economic Thought," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47, no. 4 (2009): 523–48.

(as a community grows). Furthermore, as finitude provides the context in which Dasein discovers itself, so scarcity of land can be viewed as the condition according to which Dasein becomes differentiated through appropriate use of land and appropriate vocations tied to these uses.⁹⁸ “To build,” as Heidegger reminds us, “means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care.”⁹⁹ Heidegger therefore links building to dwelling, where dwelling is a way of taking care by virtue of our contact with and relation to the land: “Building as dwelling, that is, as being on earth.”¹⁰⁰

In addition to scarcity, George provides another significant distinction. While unearned income arises owing to givenness of land in its variety, as noted parenthetically above, the variety is not actualized except by the community, where each person will use specific parcels of land.¹⁰¹ This is the only way in which Land A and Land B attain a differential value. What George then notes is that while the community is essential to the emergence of economic rent, no one individual laborer can claim the rent for the parcel of land he or she uses. The community is what in fact facilitates labor and exchange; and even if one were to live on one’s own, one would find that when the proximity and facility of the community disappears, so does differential rent. Or consider a small community: assuming good quality land to be readily available, economic rent is minimal. As this community grows, so does the drive to use marginal land to sustain production and wages. Rent will then increase for better parcels of land as marginal land is called into use. Thus as Mill points out, even if all land in a community were of equal quality, there would be another factor arising naturally with respect to the community that would force rent. For example, all farm land may be equally fertile but the proximity to the market would supervene as a further criterion making one piece of land more valuable than another.¹⁰² “Marginal” would here indicate the most remote land from the market used for farming.

It is important to remember that economic rent is a value in excess of returns to labor and capital; so in effect wages are already paid. This means, even in compliance with Locke(!), the laborer is indeed reaping the fruits of one’s labor. It just so happens that economic rent is that which is not the fruit

⁹⁸ Cf. Malpas on modalities of use and meaning; in *Heidegger’s Topology*, 248–49.

⁹⁹ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 147.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ See, for example, George, *Progress and Poverty*, Bk. IV, chaps. 2–3.

¹⁰² Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 412.

of any one laborer, but the relation obtaining from land and community. Furthermore, if rent arises due to the community that sustains economic exchange, then it should not be confused with property *on* the land.¹⁰³ While property on the land can be improved by labor, the land itself cannot be improved. It can only be used according to its suitability. Evidence of this is easy enough to spot in large cities where vacant land (with no improvements) will still garner a high rent. It is the surrounding community, or potential contact with a community, and its infrastructure that makes the land worth seeking.

George's elaboration of Ricardo's law attempts to maintain a balance between the humans who dwell on the land and the givenness of the land itself. Thus, in one respect, George is attempting to account for ontological disclosure and how Dasein is called to respond to this disclosure in becoming itself. The variation of land, on the one hand, is allowed to presence through the human community, and this is indicated through economic rent. Dasein, on the other hand, is allowed to gather together in a community, itself differentiated by land use. This differentiation of ground provides the foundation upon which each Dasein seeks its own possibility while at the same time cohering together as a community.¹⁰⁴

However, in a social *habitus* where landownership includes transmissibility of title and rights to the economic rent arising from this ownership, the mutuality between land and Dasein is confused. First, what gets lumped into owning the land upon which labor occurs is the right to the unearned income that was made possible only because of the advantage a piece of land conferred within a given community. In short, landowners reap the economic rent that has arisen only because of the relation between land and community. Economic rent then becomes a free source of private revenue making; it is lucrative to invest in land, especially in a growing market.¹⁰⁵ Smith's landlord, as the invisible hand, now reveals himself as an iron glove!

In contradistinction, as a form of public revenue, economic rent is conceptually tied to our dwelling on the earth, and therefore, by implication, there is an ontological bond with nature that can be seen to delimit what constitutes

¹⁰³ It is more commonly associated with a land value, or site value. This value does not include the value of real property. For practical questions concerning this kind of tax, see Dick Netzer, "What Do We Need to Know about Land Value Taxation?" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60 no. 5, Supplement (2001): 97–118.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ For a detailed study of this see, Fred Harrison, *The Power in the Land: Unemployment, the Profits Crisis and the Land Speculator* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1983).

appropriate use of such revenue.¹⁰⁶ The revenue does not appear from anywhere, cleansed of any immanent or human relation; rather, it is seen to arise from our dwelling on the land. So, in effect, if economic rent arises because the land gives itself to Dasein to use, use of rent as a form of public revenue falls into the category of counter-gift. While this counter-gift cannot be returned directly to land, it can be used in such a way that it takes the being of land into account.

There is one more point worth bearing in mind. Given the foregoing, the concept of ownership would need to be redefined. One can distinguish between use and possession of land from entitlement to economic rent. George will therefore speak approvingly of private possession of land and repudiate private ownership of land. The difference? For George, possession and use of land are fine so long as the rent is not claimed along with them; it is private ownership of land which claims both use and rent.¹⁰⁷ And here I leave technical definition aside and wish merely to highlight that what becomes public (or distributed publicly) is not the land itself but its economic rent. That land rent is publicly taken, while land is used in private, echoes Aristotle's observation that—if I might be allowed to revert back to the language of property—property is held in common but private in use.¹⁰⁸

What comes to mind here is the hermeneutical preoccupation with ipseity and the way in which mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*) is understood as the point of interiorization by which the self is opened up: "That being which is an issue for this entity in its very being, is in each case mine."¹⁰⁹ It is this interiorization

¹⁰⁶ The larger claim for George and Georgists is that, contra Robert Heilbroner's dismissal that rent is not sufficient as a form of tax, the tax on rent would be sufficient for public expenditure and therefore would be the only tax. Other assumptions related to this include the fact that unlike other subjects of tax (e.g., income), land cannot be hidden or concealed (*The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Ideas of Great Economic Thinkers*, 6th ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 190). For a recent argument in favor of land value tax, see Fred Foldvary, "The Ultimate Tax Reform: Public Revenue from Land Rent," *CSI Policy Study* (January 2006): 1–36; available at <http://www.foldvary.net/works/policystudy.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 405. For criticism of George on this distinction, see John Pullen "Henry George's Land Reform: The Distinction between Private Ownership and Private Possession," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 60, no. 2 (April 2001): 547–56.

¹⁰⁸ For an adept analysis of this, see Jill Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 54–80. As Frank points out (54–55 n. 4), the modern meaning of property is cumbersome when translating the different Greek terms, some of which are: *ta oikeina* (household things), *ta ideia* (what is one's own), *timema* (possession according to honor), *ktemata* (holdings) and *ousia* (estate, substance).

¹⁰⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, H42 (emphasis in original and capitalization of "being" omitted).

which is not an owning of being or even of oneself. Rather, as Sheehan notes, it is in and through this opening that one stands in relation; it is, according to Ricoeur, the view to living “with and for Others”.¹¹⁰ It may be difficult to draw a theory of ownership from this ontology, but it does in fact resonate with what I am claiming should be our appropriate relationship to land. Whatever can arise as mineness, which is ultimately an *ipseity* with and for others, is granted by the place upon which Dasein can be open for anything at all. In this respect, physical homelessness is the result of our failure to see not only that we are bound to land physically and biologically, but that our comportment towards being is grounded in such a way that we are perpetually faced with the question of our possibility only as it is mediated by the earth—that is, by the grounds we can recognize and from which we can think. Heidegger, I would suggest, understood this matter in terms of an open question: “But how else can mortals answer this summons [of how to dwell] than by trying *their* part . . . to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature?”¹¹¹

5. Concluding Remarks

It would be appropriate with respect to the sources informing my analysis to leave the last word to Ricoeur, if not for the very reason that he never wishes to provide closure, then for the previously mentioned reason that he sees the responsibility of hermeneutics as one of engaging with the human sciences under the aegis of recognition with and for others. Along this path there lies an area of further development in extending the question of land to that of rights and capacities, which Ricoeur sees as essential to the extension of mutual recognition within the practical sphere and which comprises the heart of liberalism in its many guises.¹¹² The jointure is precisely this: the notion of rights that guarantees and safeguards one’s capacities “to do” requires, in the words of Hayek, “a clearly delimited area of responsibility.”¹¹³ But where is this area? In abstract we can posit a neutral space mediating the tension between negative and positive liberties, but in practice—that is, in reality—this appears first as the location granted by the land. The movement of discourse—from an

¹¹⁰ Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” 198. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 180–81.

¹¹¹ Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” 161.

¹¹² Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 41–45.

¹¹³ F. A. Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 17; cf. the definition of property rights with respect to land, 20.

ontology of land to the rights and capacities of individuals—then forces the question of how access to land (by which I do not mean assigned distribution) forms the ground upon which one's individual gifts and talents can be actualized. Nonetheless, I have one hesitation: I would not go so far as to use the language of rights (e.g., “the rights to land”), since in attempting to understand land, we are not dealing first with the human subject but a recognition of our encounter with land. Yet regardless of the specific tenor and lines of development, this way of seeing the relation between land and human dwelling provokes several possibilities of transformation—if not socially, then at least theoretically. This “at least,” however, may be deceptive. As Ricoeur observes, “*Praxis* does not give us the whole of man. *Theoria* is its *raison d'être*.”¹¹⁴

The alternative I have sketched in this article is therefore not simply another option but proposes a way to reinterpret political economy from ontology. It proposes the correlation between an understanding of being-*there* and existing.

¹¹⁴ Ricoeur, “Work and the Word,” in *History and Truth*, trans. C. A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 218.