

Heidegger and the *polis* in ancient Greece

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Martin Heidegger is one of the great German philosophers to whom ancient Greece, even more than ancient Rome, has given many inspiring examples. Heidegger thinks that the development of Rome, Christianity and later European civilisation meant the abandonment of the good traditions of ancient Greece, and that a real cultural gap separated the ancient Romans from the Greeks.

This also appears in Heidegger's idea the Greek city state. The Greeks understood the concept of politics in a completely different way from what the Romans and especially the later Europeans thought about it. Politics did not only mean looking after common things, war, politicising or organising economic life; in addition to the armed forces, the navy, the popular assembly and the council of citizens, the Greek city state included – as the Romans saw it – many other things as well: philosophers, poets, gods, temples, public festivities, tragedy. The morals, too, were controlled by the polis. Heidegger's view on politics has its roots in the Greek tragedy rather than in "The Republic" by Plato, even though it may have influenced his way of thinking to some extent.

This view on the essence of Greek "politics" explains, in a tragic way, Heidegger's own political error. In the political reality of his own time, he tried to find something that would have surpassed the liberalistic concept of "political" politics and would have demanded of society to have a more holistic view on life, piety and culture.