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Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective

Jürgen Habermas

Translated by John McCumber

Prefatory Note

This text was originally written as the foreword to the German edition of Victor Farias' book, *Heidegger et le Nazisme* (1988). I believe a separate publication is warranted because certain aspects of the general issue have not been sufficiently distinguished in previous discussion. The moral judgment of a later generation, which in any case is called forth more strongly by Heidegger's behavior after 1945 than by his political engagement during the Nazi period, must not be allowed to cloud our view of the substantial content of his philosophical work. But just as little should the legitimate distinction between person and work cut off the question of whether—and, if so, to what extent—that work itself may be affected, in its philosophical substance, by the intrusion of elements from what we Germans call "Weltanschauung"—an ideologically tinged worldview. This question takes a clearer shape in light of the historical investigations of Farias and Hugo Ott. But it cannot be answered with the methods of historical analysis alone.

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In his excellent critical bibliography of Heidegger's writings, Winfried Franzen introduces the section on "Heidegger and Nazism" with these

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words: "Meanwhile, the Federal Republic has also produced a whole series of pertinent discussions of the 'case of Heidegger'; . . . A genuinely open and unhindered discussion, however, has not yet taken place in Germany, notably not in the 'camp' of the Heidegger school itself." That was in 1976.¹ The situation has since changed. Discussion has been sparked by, among other things, the publication in 1983 of notes in which Heidegger sought to vindicate, from the point of view of 1945, his political conduct in 1933–34. (A reprint of the "Rektoratsrede," Heidegger's inaugural address as rector of the University of Freiburg, is also included.)² Most important, the work of the Freiburg historian Hugo Ott³ and of the philosopher Otto Pöggeler, himself associated with Heidegger for decades,⁴ have brought new facts to light, as did Karl Löwith's report (set down in 1940) of a 1936 meeting with Heidegger in Rome.⁵ In addition, the ongoing publication of the *Gesamtausgabe*, the complete edition of Heidegger's works, has shed light on the lectures and writings from the thirties and forties, themselves still not published in their entirety.⁶ It required, however, the efforts of a Chilean professor in Berlin to make, at last, a political biography of Heidegger available in Germany—by way

1. Winfried Franzen, *Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart, 1976), p. 78; all translations from German texts are mine unless a previous English translation could be found—TRANS.

2. Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität. Rede, gehalten bei der feierlichen Übernahme des Rektorats der Universität Freiburg i. Br. am 27. 5. 1933*, and *Das Rektorat 1933–34. Tatsachen und Gedanken* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983); trans. Karsten Harries, under the title "The Self-Assertion of the German University: Address, Delivered on the Solemn Assumption of the Rectorate of the University Freiburg," and "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (Mar. 1985): 467–502; quotations from "The Rectorate" are hereafter abbreviated "R."

3. Hugo Ott, "Martin Heidegger und die Universität Freiburg nach 1945," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 105 (1985): 95–128. See also Ott, "Martin Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus," in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, ed. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 64–77.

4. See Pöggeler, "Den Führer führen? Heidegger und kein Ende," *Philosophische Rundschau* 32 (1985): 26–67, and Pöggeler, "Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis," in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, pp. 17–63.

5. Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933. Ein Bericht* (Stuttgart, 1986), p. 57.

6. See Nicolas Tertulian, "Heidegger—oder: die Bestätigung der Politik durch Seinsgeschichte. Ein Gang zu den Quellen. Was aus den Texten des Philosophen alles sprudelt," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 Feb. 1988.

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of its French translation, however, and with recourse to the Spanish original. This detour through the viewpoint of a foreigner may provide the most appropriate response to the cramped discussion Franzen noted in Germany; the resulting distance of Farias' work, which must ultimately speak for itself, from the current German context may justify my attempt to relate the two.

From the perspective of a contemporary German reader, one consideration is particularly important from the start. Illumination of the political conduct of Martin Heidegger cannot and should not serve the purpose of a global depreciation of his thought. As a personality of recent history, Heidegger comes, like every other such personality, under the judgment of the historian. In Farias' book as well, actions and courses of conduct are presented that suggest a detached evaluation of Heidegger's character. But in general, as members of a later generation who cannot know how *we* would have acted under conditions of a political dictatorship, we do well to refrain from moral judgments on actions and omissions from the Nazi era. Karl Jaspers, a friend and contemporary of Heidegger, was in a different position. In a report that the denazification committee of the University of Freiburg requested at the end of 1945, he passed judgment on Heidegger's "mode of thinking": it seemed to him "in its essence unfree, dictatorial, uncommunicative."⁷ This judgment is itself no less informative about Jaspers than about Heidegger. In making evaluations of this sort Jaspers, as can be seen from his book on Friedrich Schelling, was guided by the strict maxim that whatever truth a philosophical doctrine contains must be mirrored in the mentality and lifestyle of the philosopher. This rigorous conception of the unity of work and person seems to me inadequate to the autonomy of thought and, indeed, to the general history of the reception and influence of philosophical thought.⁸ I do not mean by this to deny all internal connection between philosophical works and the biographical contexts from which they come—or to limit the responsibility attached to an author, who during his lifetime can always react to unintended consequences of his utterances.

7. Ott, "Martin Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus," p. 65.

8. Refraining from political and moral evaluation of Heidegger's conduct from that time ought to include renouncing comparisons that are only too easily set up in an endeavor to balance accounts. We can learn this lesson even from the circumspect Pöggeler, who not only compares Heidegger's engagement with Hitler to Ernst Bloch's and Georg Lukács' option for Stalin, but adduces as well a review in which Theodor Adorno, completely misunderstanding the situation in 1934, thought himself able to survive the nightmare in Germany. See Pöggeler, "Den Führer führen? Heidegger und kein Ende," p. 28. When in 1963 Adorno was confronted (in the pages of the Frankfurt student newspaper *Diskus*) with that review from 1934, he responded with a completely open letter; his words could not contrast more impressively with the shameful silence of Heidegger. See Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 22 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1973–78), 19:635–39. In these pages, one will find Tiedemann's editorial afterword, Adorno's letter, and a statement by Max Horkheimer.

But Heidegger's work has long since detached itself from his person. Herbert Schnädelbach is right to begin his presentation of philosophy in Germany with the comment that our "contemporary philosophy has been decisively shaped by . . . Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921), Georg Lukács' *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* [*History and Class-Consciousness*] (1923) and Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* [*Being and Time*] (1926)."⁹ With *Being and Time*, Heidegger proved himself, almost overnight, to be a thinker of the first rank. Even philosophers at some remove, such as Georg Misch, immediately recognized the "indefatigability" and "craftsmanship" of a leading philosopher. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger did nothing less than meld and recast, in an original way, the competing intellectual movements of Diltheyan hermeneutics and Husserlian phenomenology, so as to take up the pragmatic themes of Max Scheler and bring them into a postmetaphysical, historicizing overcoming of the philosophy of subjectivity.¹⁰ This new venture in thought was all the more amazing because it seemed to allow the impassioned themes of the Kierkegaardian dialectic of existence to engage the classical Aristotelian philosophical problematic. From today's standpoint, Heidegger's new beginning still presents probably the most profound turning point in German philosophy since Hegel.

While the *detranscendentalizing* of the world-constituting ego carried through in *Being and Time* was unprecedented, the *critique of reason* that set in later and built on Nietzsche was the idealist counterpart—somewhat delayed—to a materialist critique of instrumental reason that was itself indebted to Hegel while productively combining Marx with Weber. Heidegger paid for the wealth of his later insights, which among other things revealed the ontological premises of modern thought, with a narrowing of his view to the dimension of a resolutely stylized history of metaphysics. This abstraction from the contexts of social life may be one reason for Heidegger's reliance on whatever interpretations of the age happened by, unfiltered by, any knowledge of the social sciences. The more real history disappeared behind Heideggerian "historicity," the easier it was for Heidegger to adopt a naive, yet pretentious, appeal to "diagnoses of the present" taken up ad hoc.

With his detranscendentalizing mode of thought and his critique of metaphysics, Heidegger, whose work was of course criticized but whose position remained uncontested during the thirties and forties, had an *uninterrupted* impact on German universities. This academic, school-

9. Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophie in Deutschland 1831–1933* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983); trans. Eric Matthews, under the title *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 1.

10. For pragmatic themes in Heidegger, see C. F. Gethmann, "Vom Bewußtsein zum Handeln. Pragmatische Tendenzen in der Deutschen Philosophie der ersten Jahrzehnte des 20. Jahrhunderts," in *Pragmatik: Handbuch pragmatischen Denkens*, ed. Herbert Stachowiak, 2 vols. (Hamburg, 1986–87), 2:202–32.

founding impact continued until the late sixties. Its importance is well documented in a collection of essays keyed to "perspectives on the interpretation of his work," which Pöggeler edited for Heidegger's eightieth birthday.¹¹ The Heideggerian school retained its dominant position during the long incubation of the Federal Republic, to the beginning of the sixties; when analytical philosophy of language (with Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, and Karl Popper) and Western Marxism (with Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Ernst Bloch) then regained footing in the universities, that was really only a delayed return to normalcy.

Still more significant than its academic influence on several generations of scholars and students is the inspirational glow of Heidegger's work on independent minds who selected particular themes and made them fruitful in systematic contexts of their own. The early Heidegger, to begin with, had influence on the existentialism and phenomenological anthropology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In Germany something similar holds for the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Productive developments continue into my generation as well, for example, with Karl-Otto Apel, Michael Theunissen, and Ernst Tugendhat.¹² Heidegger's critique of reason has been taken up more strongly in France and the United States, for example, by Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, and Hubert Dreyfus.

Questionable political conduct on the part of a thinker certainly throws a shadow on his work. But the Heideggerian oeuvre, especially the thought in *Being and Time*, has attained a position of such eminence among the philosophical ideas of our century that it is simply foolish to think that the substance of the work could be discredited, more than five decades later, by political assessments of Heidegger's fascist commitments.

So what interest, apart from the detached one of historical and scientific concern, can examination of Heidegger's political past claim today—especially in the Federal Republic? I think that these matters deserve our attention primarily from two points of view. *On the one hand*, Heidegger's attitude to his own past *after* 1945 exemplifies a state of mind that persistently characterized the history of the Federal Republic until well into the sixties. It is a mentality that survives up to the present day, as in the so-called historian's debate about revisionistic interpretations of German war crimes.¹³ In order to ferret out what is symptomatic of

11. See *Heidegger: Perspektiven zur Deutung seines Werks*, ed. Pöggeler (Cologne, 1969).

12. An intensive engagement with the early Heidegger left its marks on my own work as well, up to *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston, 1971). See also the bibliographical references in Franzen, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 127. The Heideggerian Marxism of the young Herbert Marcuse fascinated me: see Alfred Schmidt, "Existential Ontologie und historischer Materialismus bei Herbert Marcuse," in *Antworten auf Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Habermas (Frankfurt, 1968), pp. 17 ff.

13. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"* (Munich, 1988). Even in the work of the historian Andreas Hillgruber,

deeper matters in Heidegger's refusal to change his mind and in his unwavering practice of denial,¹⁴ we must inform ourselves of what Heidegger, to his death, repressed, glossed over, and falsified. *On the other hand*, in Germany every tradition that served to make us blind to the Nazi regime needs a critical, indeed a distrustful, appropriation. That certainly holds for a philosophy that, even in its rhetorical means of expression, absorbed impulses from the ideologies of its epoch. One cannot bring the truth-content of a philosophy into discredit by associating it with something external to it; but no more can—or may—one make a complex, tradition-shaping form of objective spirit into an object of conservation like a national park, immunizing it against the question of whether issues of substance have been confused with those of ideology.¹⁵ What was always acceptable in Germany with respect to Stalinism must also be acceptable with regard to fascism.

Manfred Frank has recently expressed the opinion, with reference to the variations on the Heideggerian critique of reason currently disseminated in France, that the question of refurbishing a constellation of Weltanschauungen of German (that is, Young-Conservative) origin has not yet been laid to rest in Germany: "The new French theories are taken up by many of our students like an evangel. . . . It seems to me that young Germans are here eagerly sucking back in, under the pretense of opening up to what is French and international, their own irrationalist tradition, which had been broken off after the Third Reich."¹⁶ I would like here to supplement Farias' investigation with a few remarks, taking up a question I previously broached in another place:¹⁷ whether there was an *internal* connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his political perception of the world-historical situation.¹⁸

one could find in 1986 the same comparison of the German crimes with the expulsion of Germans from the Eastern territories, a comparison that Marcuse objected to in an open letter to Heidegger in 1949; on this correspondence, see below pp. 453–54.

14. Jaspers and Archbishop Gröber even demanded, or expected, from their friend Heidegger in 1945 a "genuine rebirth" and a "spiritual reversal" (Ott, "Martin Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus," p. 65).

15. Even Richard Rorty misses the point that the problem is not the relation between person and work, but the amalgamation of work and worldview. See Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously," a review of *Heidegger et le Nazisme*, by Victor Farias, *The New Republic*, 11 Apr. 1988, pp. 31–34.

16. Manfred Frank, "Philosophie heute und jetzt," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 5 Mar. 1988.

17. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 155–60.

18. Unfortunately, I was at that time unacquainted with the pertinent investigation by Franzen, *Von der Existentialontologie zur Seinsgeschichte* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1975), part 3, pp. 63–101 (hereafter abbreviated *E*), and with the afterword to the second edition of Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen, 1983), pp. 319–55; trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber, under the title *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1987); hereafter abbreviated *HPT*.

In 1963, Otto Pöggeler presented the “path of thought of Martin Heidegger” in a version that, authorized by Heidegger himself, mirrored Heidegger’s own self-understanding. It is this faithful collaborator to whom, twenty years later, doubts came: “Was it not through a definite orientation of his thinking that Heidegger fell—and not merely accidentally—into the proximity of National Socialism without ever truly emerging from this proximity?” (*HPT*, p. 272). Pöggeler has since presented a point of view that brings the history of Heidegger’s works closer together with that of his life than was previously done.

He distinguishes, in the first instance, the religious crisis into which Heidegger personally fell around 1917 from the general mood of crisis of 1929, into which Heidegger was drawn politically. As Heidegger, in 1919, withdrew at his own request from the philosophical training for Catholic theologians, he explained the step by saying that for him “epistemological insights . . . have made the system of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me—but not Christianity and metaphysics (these, of course, in a new sense)” (*HPT*, p. 265). When we connect this with Heidegger’s growing interest in Martin Luther and in Søren Kierkegaard, as well as with his intense communication with Rudolf Bultmann in Marburg, we can understand the point of view from which the problem of mediating historical thought and metaphysics must have posed itself for Heidegger; the attitude of methodical atheism did not yet require closing off the authentically Christian domain of experience. Heidegger pursued at that time a “phenomenology of life” that was grounded in boundary experience of personal existence. The experience of history, therefore, arose in contexts of self-reassurance on the part of concrete individuals in their current situations. This (a) suggested a hermeneutical interpretation of Husserl’s phenomenological method, (b) required an interpretation of the metaphysical question of Being from the horizon of the experience of time, and (c) called forth the pathbreaking transformation of the generative achievements of the transcendental ego into the historically situated life-projection of a factual being that finds itself in the world—*Dasein*. The connection between (b) and (c) explains, finally, why Heidegger’s interest *remained* fixed on the constitution of human existence as such, and required a clear differentiation of existential ontology from the then contemporary enterprise of existentialism (Jaspers). The “analytic of *Dasein*” carried through in *Being and Time* remained, however, rooted in concrete experiences, a *theory* of Being-in-the-world as such. This explains the contrast, remarked many times, between a pretension of radical historical thinking and the fact that Heidegger rigidly maintained the abstraction of historicity (as the condition of historical existence itself) from actual historical processes.

The pathbreaking achievement of *Being and Time* consists in Heidegger's decisive argumentative step towards overcoming the philosophy of consciousness.¹⁹ This achievement may be *illuminated* by the motivational background of a personal life-crisis, but is not *impeached* by it. Naturally the spirit of the times, with which our author was already imbued, shows itself in this central work. The prevailing critique of mass civilization finds expression particularly in the connotations of his analysis of "das Man"; elitist complaints about the "dictatorship of public opinion" were common currency to the German mandarins of the twenties, and similar versions are to be found in Jaspers, E. R. Curtius, and many others. Indeed, the ideology inscribed in the "hidden curriculum" of the German Gymnasium has affected entire generations—on the Left as well as the Right. To this ideology belong an elitist self-understanding of academics, a fetishizing of *Geist*, idolatry for the mother tongue, contempt for everything social, a complete absence of sociological approaches long developed in France and the United States, a polarization between natural science and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and so forth. All these themes are unreflectively perpetuated by Heidegger. More specific to him are the remarkable connotations with which he already at that time loaded terms like "fate" [*Schicksal*] and "destiny" [*Geschick*]. The pathos of heroic nihilism binds Heidegger to Young Conservatives, such as Oswald Spengler, the Jünger brothers, Carl Schmitt, and the circle connected with the journal *Die Tat*. But Pöggeler correctly dates the real invasion of such ideological motifs into Heidegger's self-understanding and, in fact, into the heart of his philosophical thought only from 1929—the time of the world economic crisis and the downfall of the Weimar republic.

If we understand the ideology of the German mandarins in the sense of Fritz Ringer,²⁰ we may see connections between the mandarin consciousness of the German professor Heidegger and certain *limitations* from which the argumentation of *Being and Time* cannot free itself. But even from the point of view of the sociology of knowledge one would hardly discover more than what immanent critique has already shown anyway. To put it in a nutshell: with his steady focus on the invariant structures of *Dasein*, Heidegger from the start cuts off the road from

19. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 141 ff. On the controversial prehistory of *Being and Time*, see the following contributions in *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften* 4 (1986–87): Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Erinnerungen an Heideggers Anfänge," pp. 13–26; Gethmann, "Philosophie als Vollzug und als Begriff. Heideggers Identitäts-philosophie des Lebens in der Vorlesung vom Wintersemester 1921/22 und ihr Verhältnis zu *Sein und Zeit*," pp. 27–53; and Theodor Kisiel, "Das Entstehen des Begriffsfeldes 'Faktizität' im Frühwerk Heideggers," pp. 91–120.

20. Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969); see my review of this book in Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971), pp. 239–51. See also H. Brunkhorst, *Der Intellektuelle im Land der Mandarine* (Frankfurt am Main, 1987).

historicity to real history.²¹ Attributing a merely derivative status to *Mitsein* (Being-with others) he also misses the dimension of socialization and intersubjectivity.²² With the interpretation of truth as disclosure, Heidegger further ignores the aspect of unconditionality that attaches to a validity-claim, which, as a claim, transcends all merely local standards.²³ Heidegger's methodical solipsism prevents him, finally, from taking seriously normative validity-claims and the meaning of moral obligations.²⁴ From all this it is already apparent why "the philosophy of *Being and Time* obviously cannot, whether for Heidegger or for a whole series of colleagues and students who stand near him, possess critical potential vis-à-vis Fascism."²⁵ Franzen, too, comes to the judgment that "much of what Heidegger said and wrote in 1933–34, if it did not necessarily follow from what was in *Being and Time*, was at least not incompatible with it" (*E*, p. 80).

I would like to close the gaps this negative explanation leaves open with the thesis that from around 1929 on, Heidegger's thought exhibits a *conflation* of philosophical theory with ideological motifs. From then on themes of an unclear, Young-Conservative diagnosis of the time enter into the heart of Heidegger's philosophy itself. Only then does he wholly open up to the antidemocratic thought that had found prominent Right-wing advocates in the Weimar republic and had attracted even original minds.²⁶ The defects that immanent textual criticism can detect in *Being and Time* could not be seen as deficits by Heidegger because he shared the widespread anti-Western sentiments of his intellectual environment and held metaphysical thinking to be more primordial than the vapid universalism of the Enlightenment. Concrete history remained for him a mere "ontical" happening, social contexts of life a dimension of the inauthentic, propositional truth a derivative phenomenon, and morality merely another way of expressing reified values. Blind spots in Heidegger's innovative *Being and Time* can be explained in this way. But only after

21. See *E*, pp. 47 ff. Adorno, by the way, had already noted this in his inaugural lecture of 1931. See Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *Telos* 31 (Spring 1977): 120–33.

22. See Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere: Studien zur Sozialontologie der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1977), p. 182; trans. Christopher Macann, under the title *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Buber* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984).

23. See Ernst Tugendhat, "Heideggers Idee von Wahrheit," in *Heidegger: Perspektiven zur Deutung seines Werks*, pp. 286–97. See also Karl-Otto Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt am Main, 1973), vol. 1, part 2.

24. Gethmann, "Heideggers Konzeption des Handelns in *Sein und Zeit*," in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, pp. 140–76.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

26. Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Wiemarer Republik: die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Munich, 1962). See also Christian von Krockow, *Die Entscheidung: eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart, 1958).

Being and Time would the “anti-civilizational” undercurrent of German tradition (Adorno) erode that approach itself.²⁷

3

Pöggeler is surely correct to emphasize the biographical turning point of 1929. Three things came together at that time. First, Friedrich Hölderlin and Nietzsche came into view as the authors who were to dominate the following decades. This paved the way for the *neopagan turn* that pushed Christian themes into the background in favor of a mythologizing recourse to the archaic; even at the end of his life, Heidegger placed his hopes in “a” god who can save us. Pöggeler asks himself:

Was there not . . . a road from Nietzsche to Hitler? Did not Heidegger attempt, from 1929 on, with Nietzsche, to find his path, by way of the creativeness of the great creators, back to the tragic experience of life and thus to an historical greatness, in order then to win back for the Germans the beginnings of Greek thought and a horizon transposed by myth?²⁸

Second, Heidegger’s understanding of his role as a philosopher changed. During his encounter with Ernst Cassirer at Davos (March 1929), he expressed brusque dismissals of the world of Goethe and German Idealism. A few months later, after his July inaugural address as a professor in Freiburg, Heidegger completed the break with his teacher Husserl. At the same time, he returned to a theme he had last engaged ten years previously: he lectured on the “essence of the university and on academic studies.” He seems at that point to have carried out a conscious break with academic philosophy, in order thenceforth to philosophize in another, nonprofessional way—in immediate confrontation with problems of the time perceived as urgent. As can be shown from the “Rektoratsrede” of 1933, Heidegger perceived the university as the preferred institutional locus for a spiritual renewal, to be brought about with unconventional means.

Third, Heidegger also opened himself up to Young-Conservative diagnoses of the times, even in his classroom.²⁹ In his lectures for the

27. Heidegger’s French apologists get things backwards when they seek to explain his commitment to National Socialism by saying that the thought of *Being and Time* is still too rooted in “metaphysical thinking” and still too bound up with the fate of nihilism. See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l’art et la politique* (Paris, 1987). For a critical treatment see Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger et les modernes* (Paris, 1988).

28. Pöggeler, “Den Führer führen? Heidegger und kein Ende,” p. 47.

29. See the early essay by Marcuse—still one of the keenest analyses of this relationship—“The Struggle against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State,” *Negations*:

1929–30 winter semester on “Basic Concepts of Metaphysics,” he relates himself to writers such as Spengler, Ludwig Klages, and Leopold Ziegler, and swears by the heroism of audacious Dasein against the despised normality of bourgeois misery: “Mystery is lacking in our Dasein, and with it the inner horror which every mystery bears with it and which gives Dasein its greatness.”³⁰ In the following years Heidegger studied the writings of Ernst Jünger: *War and Warrior* (1930) and *The Worker* (1932).

The invasion of the philosophy of *Being and Time* by ideology is not merely to be explained, however, by an awareness of the contemporary crisis that made Heidegger receptive to Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics; that also suggested the role of a savior in the moment of highest necessity for a philosophy freed from academic chains and for its site, the university; and that, finally, opened the doors to pickup critiques of civilization. The invading forces came together with a problematic that arose from the uncompleted opus itself, *Being and Time*.

Existential ontology had followed the transcendental approach so far that the structures it laid bare had to be attributed to Dasein *as such*; they had retained the character of being above history. This was not consistent with Heidegger’s aim of subjecting the basic concepts of metaphysics to a radically temporalized analysis. Two works from 1930–31 (which are however available only in a later revised version) attempt to make good on that claim.

In the lectures “On the Essence of Truth” and “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” the existentials change from basic constitutional features of Dasein into the products of a process coming from afar. They come forth from an idealistically deified history, which is supposed to have completed itself in the medium of changes in ontological frames, metaphysics, *behind* or *above* real history. The dialectic of revelation and concealment is no longer conceived as an interplay of invariant possibilities of Being that continually holds open to the individual the perspective of authenticity, but as the story of a fall, which begins with Plato’s metaphysical thought and proceeds in epochal fashion through different “peoples.” With this shift, Heidegger gains a dimension within which the analytic of Dasein can illuminate the conditions under which it itself arose. Theory becomes reflexive in a way similar to that of the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács—though with the essential difference that Lukács’ social theory conceives

Essays in Critical Theory (Boston, 1968), pp. 3–42. See especially p. 41 for references to Heidegger’s article in the Freiburg student newspaper, *freiburger Studentenzeitung*, 10 Nov. 1933.

30. Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, vol. 29/30 of *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), p. 244. For an analysis of the whole of section 38 of this work, see Franzen, “Die Sehnsucht nach Härte und Schwere,” in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, pp. 78–92.

of its own genesis in terms of a concrete historical context that is accessible to social-scientific research, while existential-ontological thought transcends itself towards a sublime, primordially operative domain that is removed from all empirical (and ultimately all argumentative) grasp. In this domain, philosophy rules alone; it can therefore contract a dark alliance with scientifically unexamined diagnoses of the times. Heidegger's reconstruction of an unfolding of metaphysics that lies before all history is guided by the consciousness of crisis of the present moment to which he continually appeals, that is, by a conservative/revolutionary interpretation of the German situation at the beginning of the thirties.

Interpreters of his thought today follow Heidegger's retrospective self-interpretation in holding that he completed his turn from existential ontology to the thinking of the history of Being with the two texts from 1930–31. But this is not wholly correct, for those essays merely open up a path that ultimately leads, in several stages, to the "Letter on Humanism" of 1947. The pathos of bondage and letting-be, the quietistic understanding of man as the shepherd of Being, the thesis that "language is the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it"³¹—all this is only the later result of the deliverance of philosophical thinking over to a "World-destiny" that, between 1930 and 1945, prescribed various twists and turns to a philosopher who was quite ready to go along.

At the beginning of the thirties, not only the word but the very concept of the "history of Being" is missing. What changes at that time in Heidegger's philosophical conception is not the activist demand for resoluteness and projection, but rather Heidegger's way of taking authenticity as the standard for the responsible acceptance of one's own life history. This standard is liquidated and along with it the critical moment of *Being and Time* provided by the *individualistic* heritage of existential philosophy. The concept of truth is then transformed so that historical challenge through a collective fate takes over. Now it is a "people" and no longer the individual, which ek-sists. Not we as individuals, but *We* with a capital *W* see ourselves exposed to the "need of turning" and the "prevailing of the mystery." But this does not yet free us from decision: "By leading him astray, errancy dominates man through and through. But, as leading astray, errancy at the same time contributes to a possibility that man is capable of drawing up from his ek-sistence—the possibility that, by experiencing errancy itself and by not mistaking the mystery of Da-sein, he *not* let himself be led astray."³²

After 1929 we see a "turning" only in the sense that Heidegger (a) relates the analytic of Dasein reflectively to a movement of metaphysical

31. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, J. Glenn Gray, and David Farrell Krell, *Basic Writings*, ed. Krell (New York, 1977), p. 213; hereafter abbreviated "LH."

32. Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trans. John Sallis, *Basic Writings*, p. 136.

thought conceived in terms of a history of the Fall (from Being); in that (b) he allows ideological motifs from a scientifically unfiltered diagnosis of crisis to filter into his present-oriented reconstruction; and in that (c) he dissociates the dialectic of truth and untruth from the individual's care for his own Dasein and interprets it as a happening, which challenges the people to a resolute confrontation with a common historical fate.³³ With this, the switches are set for a national/revolutionary interpretation of what in *Being and Time* was a self-heeding and self-assertion sketched in existential terms. Thus Heidegger, who had opted for the Nazi party before 1933, could explain Hitler's successful power-grab in terms of concepts retained from his own analytic of Dasein.³⁴ But he adds something: the nationalistic privileging of the *German* fate, the conflation of the collectivistically interpreted category of "Dasein" with the Dasein of the German people, and those mediating figures, the "guides and guardians of the German destiny," who can shape necessity and create the new, if only their followers keep themselves in hand.

The leaders [*Führer*] are, then, the great creators, who put truth to work.³⁵ But the relation of leader to followers only concretizes the decision, as formal now as it was previously, "whether the entire people chooses its own Dasein, or whether it rejects it." In Heidegger's agitation for the *Führer* and "the complete transformation of our German Dasein," the old semantics of *Being and Time* can still be recognized—though it is now obscenely recolored. For example, in the speech Heidegger gave to the election rally of German scholars and scientists held at Leipzig on 11 November 1933, we hear that from "a coordinated readiness to follow in regard to the unconditional demand of responsibility-for-self, there first arises the possibility of mutually taking each other seriously. . . . What sort of event is this? The people win back the truth of its will to exist, for truth is the manifestation of that which makes a people secure,

33. Some interpreters of Heidegger are inclined to view the final chapters of *Being and Time*, especially the talk of "fate" and "destiny," in a collectivistic sense. This way of reading, however, only repeats Heidegger's own retrospective self-portrait. See my remarks in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 403–4 n.41.

34. Johannes Gross, a trustworthy witness, has communicated, in the sixty-second installment of the new series of his "Notizbuch" in the magazine of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the content of a letter from Heidegger to Carl Schmitt of 22 August 1932 (!). The last paragraph runs: "Today I would just like to say that I am very much counting on your resolute collaboration in rebuilding the entire faculty of law from the inside out, both as to research and as to teaching. Everything is unfortunately very gloomy here. It becomes ever more urgent to gather together the spiritual forces that can bring about what is to come. For today I close with friendly greetings. Heil Hitler. Yours, Heidegger."

35. This figure of thought stands in the center of Heidegger's lectures on the "Introduction to Metaphysics" of 1935. See *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen, 1953); trans. Ralph Mannheim, under the title *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven, Conn., 1979); hereafter abbreviated *IM*. See also Alexander Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers* (Opladen, 1965).

lucid, and strong in its knowing and acting. From such truth stems the real desire to know.”³⁶

With *this* as background, the acceptance of the rectorship at Freiburg and the “Rektoratsrede” are not only compatible with Heidegger’s earlier work but result from his dismissal of academic philosophy, from his elitist understanding of the German university, from his unbounded fetishizing of *Geist*, and from the missionary view of himself that allowed him to see the role of his own philosophy only in contexts of an eschatological world destiny. It is doubtless a specifically German *deformation professionnelle* that gave Heidegger the idea of leading the Leader, Hitler. There is today no longer any controversy over the details of Heidegger’s behavior at that time.

4

The lectures and writings that mark Heidegger’s philosophical development during the Nazi period have not yet been completely published. Nonetheless, a careful reading of the two volumes on Nietzsche could teach us that Heidegger did not rid himself, even to the end of the war, of his original political option for the Nazis. The work of Franzen (1975–76) and Pöggeler (1983, 1985, and 1988) confirms the impression “that in the thirties, Heidegger himself placed the decision about the truth of Being as he sought it in a political context” (*HPT*, p. 278). The orientation of his thought, through which he “fell into the proximity of National Socialism,” kept him from “ever truly emerging from this proximity” (*HPT*, p. 272).³⁷ Heidegger’s philosophical trajectory between 1935 and 1945 shows itself to be a process of working through a series of disappointments, without any real insight, so as to *continue* the “turn” introduced with the texts of 1930–31. Three aspects must here be distinguished: (a) the development of the critique of reason through the history of metaphysics; (b) the essentially unchanged, nationalistic estimation of the Germans as the “heart of all peoples”; and (c) the position with regard to National Socialism. Only from this third aspect is the significant reconfiguration revealed, through which the concept of a “history of Being” first gains its definitive form.

A. Instigated by an increasingly intense confrontation with Nietzsche—also the authoritative point of reference for official Nazi philosophy—Heidegger works up an approach under which the “destruction

36. Quoted in *Nachlese zu Heidegger. Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Denken*, ed. Guido Schneeberger (Bern, 1962), pp. 149–50. Connections between the “Rektoratsrede” and *Being and Time* are explored in Harries, “Heidegger as a Political Thinker,” in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays*, ed. Michael Murray (New Haven, Conn., 1978), pp. 304–28.

37. Pöggeler formulates this as a question—though certainly a rhetorical one.

of metaphysics," which he had in view early on, merges completely with the known themes of his critique of the times. The thought of Plato—forgetful of Being, theoretically objectifying—hardens (in several stages) into the modern thought of subjectivity. Heidegger's analyses of "representational thought," though enlightening on several matters, now have as their target the ontological premises on which the determining spiritual powers of modernity, natural science and technology, rely. In the context of a history of metaphysics, "technology" is the expression for a will to will, which in practice makes itself felt in the phenomena of positivistic science, technological development, industrial labor, the bureaucratized state, mechanized warfare, the management of culture, the dictatorship of public opinion, and generally of urbanized mass civilization. Traits of totalitarian politics find their way into this template for the age of the masses, Nazi racial politics included. In spite of Heidegger's sustained relationship with one of the leading Nazi theoreticians of race, he was himself no racist; his anti-Semitism, so far as it can be confirmed at all, was rather of the usual, culturalistic breed. However that may be, *after* 1935 Heidegger subsumed political and social practice hastily under a few stereotypical code words without even an attempt at nuanced description, to say nothing of empirical analysis. His ontologizing talk of "technology" itself as a destiny that is at once mystery, security, and danger reaches globally, and with strongly essentialistic conceptions, through the foreground domains of the ontical. Even within the frame of this Weltanschauung, Heidegger pursues critical insights about reason that have not been superseded even today.

B. The crude nationalism Heidegger openly sustained even after 1933 remains, in a form more or less sublimated through Hölderlin, an invariant feature of his thought. The basic schema of interpretation is established by 1935. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* the German people, heir to the Greeks, is privileged as the metaphysical people from which alone a turning of the planetary fate can be expected. In the wake of an ideology of the "country of the middle," itself developed long ago, the Germans' Central European location is the key to their world-historical vocation: Heidegger expects "the peril of world darkening . . . to be forestalled" only "if our nation in the center of the Western world is to take on its historical mission" (*IM*, p. 50). Thus Heidegger relates "the question of being to the destiny of Europe, where the destiny of the earth is being decided—while our own historic being-there proves to be the center for Europe itself" (*IM*, p. 42). And further: "Europe lies in a pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same, namely in regard to their world character and their relation to the spirit" (*IM*, p. 45). Because Bolshevism stems from Western Marxism, Heidegger sees in it only a variation on something worse—Americanism. Pöggeler reports a passage in a lecture manuscript that Heidegger, tastefully, did not actually deliver. It relates to Carnap, who had emigrated in the

meantime: “his philosophy manifests ‘the most extreme flattening and uprooting of the traditional theory of judgement under the guise of mathematical-scientific method’. . . . It is no accident that this kind of ‘philosophy’ is both ‘internally and externally connected’ with ‘Russian communism’ and celebrates its triumph in America” (*HPT*, p. 276). Heidegger repeats his interpretation again in the Parmenides lectures of 1942–43 and the Heraclitus lectures of the 1943 summer semester, when he sees the planet already “in flames,” the “world slipping its moorings”: “Only from the Germans can world historical meditation come—provided that they find and defend what is German.”³⁸

C. After leaving the rectorate in April 1934, Heidegger is disillusioned. He is convinced that this historical moment was as if intended for himself and his philosophy; and he remains convinced of the world-historical importance and of the metaphysical meaning of Nazism to the bitter end. In the summer of 1942, he again speaks unmistakably, in a lecture on Hölderlin, of the “historical uniqueness of National Socialism.”³⁹ For Nazism is privileged by its particularly intimate relation to the nihilism of the time—and it remains so, even after Heidegger, apparently under the impact of the events of the war, learned to reevaluate the *position* of Nazism with respect to the history of Being.

In the first instance—in 1935—Heidegger’s talk of the “inner truth and greatness” of the Nazi movement (*IM*, p. 199) betrays a distancing from certain phenomena and practices that are supposed to have nothing to do with the spirit of the thing itself. The philosopher, anyhow, knows better: *he* knows the metaphysical status of the national revolution. All is not yet lost, though the political leaders are allowing themselves to be deceived about their *true* mission by false philosophers such as Ernst Krieck and Alfred Bäumler. Walter Bröcker, who heard that lecture, recalls that Heidegger actually spoke of the inner truth and greatness of “the” movement, and not—as the published text has it—of “this” movement: “With the term ‘the movement’ the Nazis, and *only* they, meant their own party. That is why Heidegger’s ‘the’ was for me unforgettable.”⁴⁰ If that is right, then Heidegger’s identification with the Nazis cannot exactly have been broken by 1935. Pöggeler reports as well on a passage in the Schelling lecture of the summer of 1936, which was struck from the published version of 1971 (supposedly without Heidegger’s knowledge): “the two men who, each in his own way, have begun a countermovement to nihilism, Mussolini and Hitler, have both learned from Nietzsche, in essentially different ways. This does not mean, however, that Nietzsche’s

38. Heidegger, *Heraklit*, ed. Manfred S. Frings, vol. 55 of *Gesamtausgabe*, p. 123. For references to similar passages, see *HPT*, p. 279.

39. Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne “Der Ister,”* ed. Walter Biemel, vol. 53 of *Gesamtausgabe*, p. 106.

40. Pöggeler, “Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis,” p. 59 n.11.

true metaphysical domain has come in this into its own."⁴¹ The same image thus comes again, and is also consonant with Löwith's report of an encounter in Rome at the same time: the leaders of fascism know their own calling; but they must heed the philosopher in order to know its exact meaning. Only he could explain to them what it means, in terms of the history of metaphysics, to overcome nihilism and put truth to work. He at least sees the goal clearly before him: how the fascist leaders, if only they succeed in awakening the heroic will to Dasein of their peoples, could overcome the "bleak frenzy of unleashed technology and the rootless organization of the normal human being."

I do not know exactly when the next stage of working through his disillusionment began: perhaps after the beginning of the war, perhaps only after the depressing knowledge of inevitable defeat. In the notes on "Overcoming Metaphysics" (from the years after 1936, especially from the wartime), Heidegger is increasingly impressed by the totalitarian traits of an age that ruthlessly mobilizes all reserves of strength. Only now does the messianic mood of basic change of 1933 become an *apocalyptic* hope of salvation: now, *only* in the greatest need does the saving force also grow. World-historical tragedy alone sounds the hour for overcoming metaphysics: "Only after this decline does the abrupt dwelling of the Origin [*Anfangs*] take place for a long span of time."⁴² With this change of mood, the evaluation of National Socialism changes again. Heidegger's working through his disillusionment after 1934 had led to a differentiation between the unfortunate superficial forms of Nazi practice and its essential content. Now he undertakes a more radical reevaluation, which has to do with the "inner truth" itself of the Nazi movement. He resolves on a recasting of the roles in the history of Being. Whereas previously national revolutions with their leaders at the head represented a *countermovement* to nihilism, now Heidegger thinks that they are a particularly characteristic *expression* of it, and thus are a mere symptom of that fateful destiny of technology against which they were formerly supposed to be working. Technology, now the signature of the epoch, expresses itself in the totalitarian "circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption," and

"leader natures" are those who allow themselves to be put in the service of this procedure as its directive organs on account of their assured instincts. They are the first employees within the course of business of the unconditional consumption of beings in the service of the guarantee of the vacuum of the abandonment of Being. ["OM," p. 107]

41. Pöggeler, "Den Führer führen? Heidegger und kein Ende," p. 56.

42. Heidegger, "Überwindung der Metaphysik," *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954; Pfullingen, 1978); trans. Joan Stambaugh, under the title "Overcoming Metaphysics," *The End of Philosophy* (New York, 1973), p. 84; hereafter abbreviated "OM."

Untouched by this is the nationalistic privileging of the Germans as that “humanity” that “is suited to bring about unconditional nihilism in a historical manner” (“OM,” p. 103). It is in this that the “uniqueness” of National Socialism consists, while “the Nazi power holders are in a way stylized into chief functionaries of the abandonment of Being” (*E*, p. 99).

For the *internal* connection between Heidegger’s political engagement and his philosophy, it seems to me of the greatest importance that only his hesitant—indeed in comparison with other intellectual fellow travellers of the regime astonishingly *protracted*—detachment from and reevaluation of the Nazi movement leads to a revision, which Heidegger’s postwar concept of the history of Being finally grounds. As long as Heidegger could imagine that national revolution could, with its projection of a new German Dasein, find an answer to the objective challenge of technology, the dialectic of claim [of Being] and correspondence [to that claim] could still be conceived in harmony with the basically activist tendency of *Being and Time*, precisely in terms of national revolution. Only after Heidegger gave up this hope and had to demote fascism and its leaders into symptoms of the disease they were originally supposed to heal—only after this change of attitude did the overcoming of modern subjectivity take on the meaning of an event that is *only* to be undergone. Until then, the decisionism of self-assertive Dasein, not only in the existential version of *Being and Time* but also (with certain changes of accent) in the national/revolutionary version of the writings from the thirties, had retained a role in disclosing Being. Only in the final phase of working through his disillusionment does the concept of the history of Being take on a fatalistic form.⁴³

5

The fatalism of the history of Being already exhibited clear contours in, for example, the 1943 afterword to “What Is Metaphysics?” After the end of the war, Heidegger’s apocalyptically darkened mood changes yet again. An “apocalypse” is conditioned by the expectation of coming catastrophe. That was averted for the moment by the entry of French troops into Freiburg, but this was only a postponement for the time being. The victors were America and Russia, alike in their essence, who now divided up world hegemony. So the Second World War, in Heidegger’s view, had decided nothing *essential*. That is why the philosopher prepared, after the war, to persevere *quietistically* in the shadows of a still-unconquered destiny. In 1945 there remained for him only retreat from the disappointing history of the world. But this only underscores his continuing convic-

43. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 159–60.

tion that the history of Being is articulated in the words of essential thinkers—and that this thinking is eventuated by Being itself. Heidegger had allowed his thought to be engaged for over a decade and a half by political events. The “Letter on Humanism” of 1947 reflects this development, but only in such a way as to obscure its context of origin and—once historically displaced—to detach it from all relation to surface historical reality.

In the “Letter on Humanism,” the traces of nationalism are effaced. The *Daseinsraum* of the people is sublimated into the *Heimat*, the natural home: “the word is thought here in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically but in terms of the history of Being” (“LH,” p. 217). The world-historical mission of the people in the heart of Europe is retained only on a grammatical level: it lives on in the metaphysical privileging of the German language, in which Heidegger (now as before) sees the only legitimate successor to Greek. In his late interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel* it is still clear: one must speak German in order to understand Hölderlin. The middle realm of the “demigods,” of the creative leaders, disappears without a trace. The leaders are sublimated into poets and thinkers; the philosopher achieves an immediate relation to Being. What once held for political adherence is now generalized for all into obedience to the destiny of Being: only such submission “is capable of supporting and obligating” (“LH,” p. 238).

With the help of an operation that we might call “abstraction via essentialization,” the history of Being is thus disconnected from political and historical events. This, again, allows for a remarkable self-stylization by Heidegger of his own philosophical development. From now on he emphasizes the continuity of his problematic and takes care to cleanse his concept of the history of Being from telltale ideological elements by projecting it back onto the never-completed *Being and Time*. Heidegger’s “turn,” supposedly completed by 1930, “is not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*” (“LH,” p. 208).⁴⁴

Heidegger dealt with the theme of humanism at a time when the images of the horror that the arriving Allies encountered in Auschwitz and elsewhere had made their way into the smallest German village. If his talk of an “essential happening” had any meaning at all, the singular event of the attempted annihilation of the Jews would have drawn the philosopher’s attention (if not already that of the concerned contemporary). But Heidegger dwells, as always, in the Universal. His concern is to show that man is the “neighbor of Being”—not the neighbor of man. He directs himself, undisturbed, against “the humanistic interpretations of man as *animal rationale*, as ‘person,’ as spiritual-ensouled-bodily being,” because “the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of man” (“LH,” p. 210). The “Letter

44. On this discussion, which I cannot take up here, see *E*, pp. 152 ff.

on Humanism” also explains why moral judgments in general must remain beneath the level of essential thinking proper. Hölderlin had already left behind “the mere cosmopolitanism of Goethe.” Heidegger’s philosophizing, now become commemorative, strikes right through “ethics” and reaches, instead, the “destined”: “Whenever thinking, in historical recollection, attends to the destiny of Being, it has already bound itself to what is fitting for it, in accord with its destiny.” In writing this sentence, the memory of the “unfittingness” of the National Socialist movement must have struck the philosopher, for he immediately adds: “To risk discord in order to say the Same”—Being is always only itself—“is the danger. Ambiguity threatens, and mere quarreling” (“LH,” p. 241).

Heidegger has nothing more than this to say about his own error. That is hardly inconsistent. For the place of all essential thinking with respect to the eventuating of Being transposes the thinker into error. He is absolved from all personal responsibility, because error itself objectively befalls him. A mistake could be ascribed only to an intellectual, an unessential thinker. In the “case of the rectorate [in] 1933/34,” which “in itself” was “unimportant,” Heidegger sees, even after the war, only “a sign of the metaphysical state of the essence of science” (“R,” p. 497). For him, “it is as unimportant as the barren rooting in past attempts and measures taken, which in the context of the entire movement of the planetary will to power are so insignificant that they may not even be called tiny” (“R,” pp. 498–99).

Some insight into Heidegger’s retrospective assessment of his own conduct is given by the “Facts and Thoughts” that he noted down in 1945, and the interview with *Der Spiegel*, also published only posthumously, in which he essentially repeats the testimony of 1945.⁴⁵ It is precisely under the premises of the objective irresponsibility of essential thinking, and of the moral indifference of personal entanglements, that the palliative character of this self-presentation is so astounding. Instead of giving a sober account of the facts, Heidegger simply whitewashes himself. The “Rektorsrede” he understands as already an “opposition,” his entrance into the Nazi party under spectacular circumstances as a “matter of form” (“R,” pp. 490, 493). For the following years, he claims, “the opposition that had begun in 1933 had continued and grown more vigorous” (“R,” p. 500). Silenced in his own country, he saw himself as sacrificed to a “witch hunt.” True, he mentions a “Clean Up Drive”⁴⁶ during his rectorship, “which often threatened to exceed its goals and limits” (“R,” p. 492). But there is only one mention of guilt—the guilt of others, “who even then

45. See “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,” interview with Heidegger, *Der Spiegel* 23 (1976): 193–219; trans. William J. Richardson, under the title “Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago, 1981), pp. 45–67.

46. “Säuberungsaktion” might also be translated as “purging action”—TRANS.

were so endowed with the gift of prophecy that they foresaw all that came" yet nevertheless waited "almost ten years before opposing the threatening disaster" ("R," p. 486). For the rest, Heidegger resists those who today wrongly understand his words of that time: "'Armed Service,' however, I mentioned neither in a militaristic, nor in an aggressive sense, but understood it as defense in self-defense" ("R," p. 487).⁴⁷ The investigations of Hugo Ott and Victor Farias do not leave many details of these excuses standing. But it was not only in his posthumously published self-justifications that Heidegger resorted to falsification.

In 1953 Heidegger published his lectures from 1935 on the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. I was, as a student, at that time so impressed with *Being and Time* that reading these lectures, fascist right down to their stylistic details, actually shocked me. I discussed this impression in a newspaper article—mentioning especially the sentence about the "inner truth and greatness of the Nazi movement." What shocked me most was that Heidegger had published in 1953, without explanation or comment, what I had to assume was an unchanged lecture from 1935. Even the foreword made no reference to what had happened in between. So I directed to Heidegger the question: "Can even the planned mass murder of millions of people, about which all of us know today, be made understandable in terms of the history of Being, as a fateful error? Is it not the factual crime of those who were responsible for carrying it out—and the bad conscience of an entire people?"⁴⁸ It was not Heidegger, but Christian E. Lewalter who answered.⁴⁹ He read the lecture with eyes completely different from mine. He understood it as documenting that Heidegger had in 1935 seen the Hitler regime, not as an "indication of new well-being" but as a "further symptom of decline" in the whole story of the decline of metaphysics. In this, Lewalter relied on an addition to the text, in parentheses, which characterized the Nazi movement as "the encounter between global technology and modern man" (*IM*, p. 199). Lewalter read this as saying that "the Nazi movement is a symptom for the tragic collision of man and technology, and as such a symptom it has its 'greatness,' because it affects the entirety of the West and threatens to pull it into destruction."⁵⁰ Surprisingly, Heidegger then expressed

47. To capture the wordplay in Heidegger's sentence, one could translate it as follows: "'defense service' I understood neither in a militaristic nor an aggressive sense, but in the sense of self-defense"—TRANS.

48. Habermas, "Zur Veröffentlichung von Vorlesungen aus dem Jahre 1935," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 July 1953; reprinted in Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, pp. 65–72.

49. Christian E. Lewalter, *Die Zeit*, 13 Aug. 1953.

50. Another of Lewalter's sentences deserves to be recorded here:

The extent to which Heidegger's accusers have fallen victim to the passion for persecution is shown by a particularly venomous remark of the present critic. "A Fascist intelligentsia as such," says Habermas, "did not exist only because the mediocrity of the Fascist leadership could not accept the offer of the intellectuals. The forces were indeed there.

himself in a letter to the editor concerning Lewalter's article: "Christian E. Lewalter's interpretation of the sentence taken from my lecture is accurate in every respect. . . . It would have been easy to remove that sentence, along with the others you have mentioned, from the printed version. I have not done this, and will not do it in the future. On the one hand, the sentence historically belongs to the lecture; on the other, I am convinced, that the lecture itself can clarify it to a reader who has learned the craft of thinking."⁵¹

We may well suspect that Heidegger did not keep to this later, but struck politically offensive passages without indicating the omissions. (Or did Heidegger know nothing of this publication procedure?) More notable is the circumstance that Lewalter's interpretation, which falsely projected a later self-understanding back to 1935, was explicitly condoned by Heidegger even though it rested solely on a clause that Heidegger himself had added to the manuscript in 1953. In fact, Heidegger had, in the "Prefatory Note" of the book, explicitly declared that this clause was part of the original lecture, and he maintained this deception even in the interview with *Der Spiegel*; but, little by little, the truth has come to light. In 1975, Franzen, after a careful examination of the text, substantiated doubts that "Heidegger really meant, what in 1953 he claimed he had" (*E*, p. 93). In 1983, Pöggeler reported that the page of the manuscript with the controversial passage was missing from the Heidegger archives. He too considered the parenthetical remark to be a later addition, but did not consider the possibility of an intentional manipulation (*HPT*, pp. 277–78). After publication of the French version of Farias' book, Rainer Marten, a close associate of Heidegger, portrayed the incident as follows: Heidegger, in 1953, had refused the advice of his three collaborators that the insidious sentence be struck out and had added in parentheses the contentious commentary, on which Lewalter's interpretation and Heidegger's chronologically misleading self-presentation were then based.⁵²

Only the inferior stature of the political functionaries pressed those intellectual forces into the opposition." In other words: Heidegger offered himself to Hitler but Hitler, in his "mediocrity," rejected the offer and forced Heidegger into opposition. So Habermas presents it. [*Ibid.*]

Lewalter could have had no idea that Heidegger would eventually confirm my remark, which was rather more clairvoyant than venomous: "National Socialism did, indeed, go in this [correct—J. H.] direction. Those people, however, were far much too poorly equipped for thought to arrive at a really explicit relationship to what is happening today and has been underway for the past 300 years" ("Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," p. 214; "Only a God Can Save Us," p. 61).

51. Heidegger, letter to the editor, *Die Zeit*, 24 Sept. 1953.

52. Rainer Marten, "Ein rassistisches Konzept von Humanität," *Badische Zeitung*, 19–20 Dec. 1987. Upon my inquiry, Marten confirmed the matter in a letter of 28 Jan. 1988: "At that time we were reading corrections for Heidegger, for the preparation of the new edition of *Being and Time* (Tübingen, 1953) and the first publication of the lectures

Interestingly enough, in 1953 the real issue was lost in the conflict of philosophical opinions. On the question of his position with regard to the Nazi mass crimes, Heidegger never, then or later, gave any answer. We may suspect, with solid grounds, that the answer as usual would have been very general. In the shadow of the "universal rule of the will to power within history, now understood to embrace the planet," everything becomes one and the same: "today everything stands in this historical reality, no matter whether it is called communism, or fascism, or world democracy" ("R," p. 485). That is how it was in 1945, and that is how Heidegger always repeated it: abstraction by essentialization. Under the levelling gaze of the philosopher of Being even the extermination of the Jews seems merely an event equivalent to many others. Annihilation of Jews, expulsion of Germans—they amount to the same. On 13 May 1948, Herbert Marcuse answered a letter in which Heidegger had maintained just that:

You write that everything I say about the extermination of the Jews holds equally for the Allies, if instead of "Jew" we write "Eastern German." With this sentence, do you not place yourself outside the realm in which a conversation among humans is possible at all—outside the *logos*? For only from fully beyond this "logical" dimension is it possible to explain, adjust, "comprehend" a crime by saying that others did the same thing too. More: how is it possible to place the torture, mutilation, and annihilation of millions of people on the same level as the forcible resettlement of groups in which none of these misdeeds has occurred (save perhaps in a few exceptional cases)?⁵³

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Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism is one thing, which we can safely leave to the morally sober historical judgment of later generations. Quite another is Heidegger's apologetic conduct after the war, his retouchings and manipulations, his refusal publicly to detach himself from the regime to which he had publicly adhered. That affects us as his contemporaries. Insofar as we share a life-context and a history with others, we have the right to call one another to account. Heidegger's letter to Marcuse, in which he takes up a manner of settling accounts that even today is widespread in academic circles, was his reply to the

from 1935. The passage stood out, to the best of my memory, not because of any explanatory parenthesis, but only through the monstrous nature of its content, which struck all three of us."

53. Herbert Marcuse, *Pflasterstrand* (Jan. 1988): 48–49.

following challenge from Marcuse, a former student: “Many of us have long waited for a word from you, a statement that you would clearly and definitively free yourself from this identification, a statement that expresses your real current attitude to what has happened. You have made no such statement—at least none has escaped the private sphere.”⁵⁴ In this regard, Heidegger remained bound by his generation and his time, the milieu of the Adenauer era of repression and silence. He acted no differently from others, was one of many. The excuses that came from his circle are hardly convincing: that Heidegger had to defend himself against slander, that any new admission would be taken for a further adaptation, that Heidegger was struck dumb by the inadequacy of any possible explanation, and so on. The image of his character that is gradually coming to the fore makes most plausible the report of a friend that Heidegger saw no occasion for a “trip to Canossa” because he had not been a Nazi; and because he feared that such a move would deter young people from reading his books.⁵⁵

A self-critical attitude, an open and scrupulous comportment to his own past, would have demanded from Heidegger something that would surely have been difficult for him: the revision of his self-understanding as a thinker with a privileged access to truth. After 1929, Heidegger veered farther and farther away from the circle of academic philosophy; after the war he actually strayed into the regions of a thinking *beyond* philosophy, *beyond* argumentation itself. This was no longer the elitist self-understanding of an academic corporate guild. It was the consciousness of a mission cut to the form of one’s own person, with which the admission of a few mistakes, to say nothing of guilt, was incompatible.

As a contemporary, Heidegger is thrown into an ambiguous light, overtaken by his own past because when everything was finished and done he could not adequately relate to it. His behavior remained, even according to the standards of *Being and Time*, ahistorical. But what makes Heidegger into a manifestation, typical for his time, of a widely influential postwar mentality concerns his person—not his work. The conditions of reception for an oeuvre are largely independent of the behavior of its author. That holds, at least, for the writings up to 1929. Up to *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger’s philosophical work is faithful enough to the stubborn logic of his problematic that those portions of it explainable in terms of the sociology of knowledge and relating to the context in which it arose do not prejudice the context of justification. One does Heidegger a favor when one emphasizes the autonomy of his thought during this most productive phase—in 1929 he was already forty years old—particularly against Heidegger’s later self-stylizations, against his overemphasis on continuity.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

55. See Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Auf einen Stern zugehen. Begegnungen und Gespräche mit Martin Heidegger, 1926–76* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), p. 101.

Even after the beginning of the process of ideological infiltration—a process that, at first insidious, eventually burst forth so spectacularly—Heidegger remained the productive philosopher he had previously been. Even his critique of reason, which begins with the Plato interpretation of 1931 and is developed between 1935 and 1945, especially in his confrontation with Nietzsche,⁵⁶ is responsible for *lasting* insights. These insights, which reach a high point in the influential Descartes interpretation, became points of departure for interesting developments and inspired extremely productive new approaches. An example of this is the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the most important philosophical innovations of the postwar period. Further visible testimony to the effect of the Heideggerian critique of reason, undistorted by his worldview, are, in France, the phenomenology of the late Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault's analysis of forms of knowledge; in America, Rorty's critique of representational thought and Dreyfus' investigation of life-world practice.⁵⁷

No short circuit can be set up between work and person. Heidegger's philosophical work owes its autonomy, as does every other such work, to the strength of its arguments. But then a productive relation to his thinking can be gained only when one engages those *arguments*—and *takes them out* of their ideological context. The farther the argumentative substance sinks into the unchallengeable morass of ideology, the greater is the demand on the critical force of an alert and perceptive appropriation. This hermeneutical commonplace loses its triviality especially when the later generations appropriating a work stand in the same tradition from which it has drawn its themes. In Germany, therefore, the critical appropriation of a thought that has been supportive of Nazism can only succeed when we learn from Heidegger to take into account the *internal* relations that exist between his political engagement and the changes in his attitude towards fascism, on the one hand, and the arguments of his critique of reason, which was also politically motivated, on the other.

The indignant tabooing of this set of problems is counterproductive. We must divest ourselves of the self-understanding, the postures, and the claims that Heidegger connected with his *role* before we can get to the substance of the matter. Hedging the authority of the great thinker—only he who thinks greatly can err greatly⁵⁸—can only inhibit the critical appropriation of his arguments in favor of merely socializing people into an unclarified language game. The conditions under which

56. See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1961).

57. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (Sept. 1980): 3–23.

58. Ernst Nolte concludes his essay on philosophy and National Socialism with this sentence: "I believe that Heidegger's engagement of 1933 and the insight of 1934 into his errors were both more philosophical than the correctness of the consistently distanced and extremely respectable conduct of Nicolai Hartmann" ("Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus," in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, p. 355).

we can learn from Heidegger are incompatible with the anti-Occidental frame of mind deeply rooted in Germany. Fortunately, we broke with this after 1945. It should not be resurrected with a mimetically assimilated Heidegger. I refer above all to Heidegger's pretension that "there is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual" ("LH," p. 235). This attitude is connected, first, to the claim that a few people have a privileged access to truth, may dispose of an infallible knowledge, and may withdraw from open argument. Further, connected with the same attitude are concepts of morality and truth that detach the validity of knowledge from inter-subjective examination and recognition. The same attitude suggests, finally, detaching philosophical thinking from the egalitarian business of science, severing the emphatically extraordinary from its roots in ordinary, everyday experience and practice, and destroying the principle of equal respect for all.

Response to the French publication of the present book was lively. In Germany, professional philosophers held back from taking positions. With some justification, it was pointed out that the topic of "Heidegger and Nazism" has been treated often in the Federal Republic, from Georg Lukács and Karl Löwith via Paul Hühnerfeld, Christian von Krockow, Theodor Adorno, and Alexander Schwan, to Hugo Ott—while in France Heidegger was instantly denazified and even given the status of a resister.⁵⁹ But in Germany also, the effect of the critique was minor. Neither Franzen's critical presentation of Heidegger's philosophical development nor the newer points established by Ott and Pöggeler on Heidegger's political engagement have become anything more than specialists' affairs.

59. On this see Ott, "Wege und Abwege," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 27 (28–29 Nov. 1987): 67. This essay also includes an expert's critical comments on Farias' book.