

Questions concerning Heidegger: Opening the Debate

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Symposium on Heidegger and Nazism

Edited and Introduced by Arnold I. Davidson

Questions Concerning Heidegger: Opening the Debate

In 1965 a slim volume was published in the United States by the Philosophical Library, its black and green cover containing, set off in white, an emblem, a title, and an author's name. At the bottom, in small letters, is the name "Martin Heidegger"; above the name, in larger letters, is the title, "German Existentialism"; and, above that, still several times larger, is a swastika. Anyone overwhelmed by this front cover, confused by the intent of this book, could turn to the back cover to find the claim that Heidegger attempted to "mold his theories into one pattern with Hitlerism. Heidegger's contribution to the growth and development of National

The essays by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Blanchot, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Emmanuel Levinas that follow this introduction all originally appeared in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 22–28 January 1988. We have translated the essay by Gadamer directly from the German, since it includes some remarks not present in the French version. The contribution by Lacoue-Labarthe was excerpted from *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'art et la politique* (Christian Bourgois, 1987), which is forthcoming in an English translation from Basil Blackwell Press. Jürgen Habermas' essay will appear in German as the foreword to the German edition of Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le nazisme*. Jacques Derrida's "Of Spirit" is an excerpt, edited by me, from the first five chapters of his book *Of Spirit*. The University of Chicago Press will publish an English translation of *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Éditions Galilée, 1987) later this year.

Without the heroic editorial efforts of Ellen Feldman and Jay Williams, the publication of this symposium in our pages would not have been possible.

I am grateful to Dan Brudney, Jim Conant, and Nancy Henry for their comments on an earlier version of this introduction. And I am indebted to a decade of conversations with Stanley Cavell on Heidegger's works.

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Socialism was immense.”¹ The book reproduces mostly newspaper articles and speeches, as well as a confused excerpt from Heidegger’s “Rectorship Address,” all written between May 1933 and February 1934.

Martin Heidegger’s engagement with National Socialism is not news. His involvement was well known in Europe before it did become news here, and so it is not surprising that Hans-Georg Gadamer evinces astonishment at the sensation produced by Victor Farias’ *Heidegger et le nazisme*.² As a historical document, Farias’ book, despite some interesting and important new information, is so full of gaps and mistakes as to require that one check each of its citations. Moreover, the research of Hugo Ott, on which Farias relies, promises to culminate in the definitive historical work concerning Heidegger and Nazism.³ As a philosophical reading of Heidegger’s work, one only has to compare, for example, Farias’ discussion of the “Rectorship Address” with Jacques Derrida’s reading, published here, to see the difference between polemical obtuseness and the desire to think through one of Heidegger’s most problematic texts.⁴ Perhaps the major benefit of Farias’ book has been the intervention, into the debate concerning Heidegger and Nazism, of some of the most significant European philosophers writing today.

1. Martin Heidegger, *German Existentialism*, trans. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1965).

2. Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Lagrasse, 1987). Among the most important critiques of Farias’ book are Hugo Ott, “Wege und Abwege,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 22 Nov. 1987; Jacques Derrida, “Heidegger, l’enfer des philosophes,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6–12 Nov. 1987, pp. 170–74; and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, “Annexe: Sur le livre de Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme*,” *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l’art et la politique* (Paris, 1987), pp. 173–88; quotations from *La Fiction du politique* are hereafter abbreviated *F*. The best introduction in English to the debate about Farias’ book is Thomas Sheehan, “Heidegger and the Nazis,” *New York Review of Books*, 16 June 1988, pp. 38–47. For Hans-Georg Gadamer’s reaction, see “‘Back from Syracuse?’” trans. John McCumber, pp. 427–30 of this issue.

3. See Ott, “Martin Heidegger als Rektor der Universität Freiburg i. Br. 1933/34,” *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins* 102 (1983): 121–36, and 103 (1984): 107–30; “Martin Heidegger als Rektor der Universität Freiburg 1933/34,” *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 132 [n.s. 93] (1984): 343–58; “Martin Heidegger und die Universität Freiburg nach 1945,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 105 (1985): 95–128; and “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 Derrida, “Of Spirit,” trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, pp. 457–74 of this issue; hereafter abbreviated “OS.”

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Through the thickets of recent debates, I take two facts as clear enough starting points. The first is that Heidegger's participation in National Socialism, and especially his remarks and pronouncements after the war, were, and remain, horrifying. The second is that Heidegger remains one of the essential philosophers of our century; Maurice Blanchot testifies for several generations when he refers to the "veritable intellectual shock" that the reading of *Being and Time* produced in him.⁵ And Emmanuel Levinas, not hesitating to express his reservations about Heidegger, can nevertheless bring himself to say that a person "who undertakes to philosophize in the twentieth century cannot not have gone through Heidegger's philosophy, even to escape it."⁶ In this century, perhaps only Ludwig Wittgenstein has had a comparable impact and influence on philosophy. I do not mean to deny that one can reject the over seventy volumes of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* as worthless, that one can, as with Wittgenstein, find that his work is obscure, indulgent, impossible to read, that nothing in it contributes to philosophy. But both Heidegger and Wittgenstein write in anticipation of this reaction, recognizing that their desires, differently articulated, to overcome philosophy will help to determine how their writing is received. Stanley Cavell's characterization of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* describes (not by chance) Heidegger as well:

Philosophical Investigations, like the major modernist works of the past century at least, is, logically speaking, esoteric. That is, such works seek to split their audience into insiders and outsiders (and split each member of it); hence they create the particular unpleasantness of cults (at best as a specific against the particular unpleasantness of indifference or intellectual promiscuousness, combatting partialness by partiality); hence demand for their sincere reception the shock of conversion.⁷

When combined with Heidegger's political engagement, the particular unpleasantnesses of cults and indifference are more than joined. Thus it can seem as though one must either exculpate Heidegger, explain away his relation to Nazism as an aberration from the outside, or reject his thought entirely, declare that his books should no longer be read. In an attempt to begin to confront these issues, *Critical Inquiry* is publishing this symposium.

5. Maurice Blanchot, "Thinking the Apocalypse: A Letter from Maurice Blanchot to Catherine David," trans. Paula Wissing, p. 479 of this issue.

6. Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, 1985), p. 42. See also the last line of Gadamer, "'Back from Syracuse?'" p. 430.

7. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York and Oxford, 1979), p. xvi; hereafter abbreviated CR.

In this introduction, I start such a confrontation with Heidegger's thought by turning, first, directly to his "Rectorship Address." I then approach the topic of Heidegger's critique of humanism, since this topic inevitably surrounds the debate concerning Heidegger and Nazism.

Heidegger was elected Rector of the University of Freiburg in April 1933, and on 27 May 1933 he gave his "Rectorship Address," entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University."⁸ It should be impossible to read this address today without recognizing a double continuity—on the one hand, the continuity between it and Heidegger's earlier writings, specifically *Being and Time*, and, on the other hand, the differently placed, but no less important, continuity between the address and the writings that followed it. Both Jürgen Habermas and Derrida, in very different ways, insist on the legitimate place of the "Rectorship Address" in Heidegger's work, and show clearly that it cannot be interpreted as the result of mere political opportunism (although we must take account of the opportunities that Heidegger perceived in the National Socialist movement).

In "Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," Habermas argues in detail that there is an internal connection between Heidegger's engagement with, and evaluation of, National Socialism and the substance of his philosophical work. Habermas wants to show that the concepts employed in the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* are retained in Heidegger's writings from the early and mid-1930s, but that they are given a nationalistic interpretation, so that the Dasein of the individual becomes the Dasein of the German people. It is at this moment that Heidegger's philosophical concepts allow him to see the prospect of national revolution, offered by National Socialism and its leaders, as a countermovement to nihilism. Only after Heidegger's disillusionment with National Socialism did he come to reevaluate it as a characteristic expression of nihilism and of the essence of technology. This reevaluation was internally connected with certain revisions in Heidegger's philosophy, as exhibited in his new understanding of the history of Being. Habermas summarizes his argument as follows:

As long as Heidegger could imagine that national revolution could, with its projection of a new German Dasein, find an answer to the

8. See Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität. Rede, gehalten bei der feierlichen Übernahme des Rektorats der Universität Freiburg i. Br. am 27. 5. 1933*, 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 Self-Assertion of the German University" are hereafter abbreviated "S-A"; quotations from "The Rectorate 1933/34" are hereafter abbreviated "R."

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.⁹

A central issue of the “Rectorship Address” concerns the interplay between the individual, particularly the teacher and student, and the historical and spiritual mission of the German people. At the beginning of this address the essence of the German university is immediately linked to the fate of the German people, both of which are determined by an unyielding spiritual mission. And as Derrida shows, the reappropriation of the concept of spirit by Heidegger, from out of its Cartesian heritage, “will merge . . . with a re-Germanization” (“OS,” p. 462). Hence the centrality not only of the concepts of “the historical mission of the German people” and “the fate of the German people,” but also of the need to bind the German student to “the community of the people” (through the Labor Service), to “the honor and destiny of the nation in the midst of other peoples” (through the Armed Service), and to “the spiritual mission of the German people” (through the Knowledge Service) (“S-A,” pp. 471, 477, 476).

In contrast to Heidegger’s later writings, Being appears to play virtually no role in this will to essence. So it is easy to overlook the place, arguably decisive, where Being does make a direct appearance, precisely in conjunction with Heidegger’s understanding of spirit: “For ‘spirit’ is neither empty cleverness, nor the noncommittal play of wit, nor the endless drift of rational distinctions, and especially not world reason; spirit is primordially attuned, knowing resoluteness toward the essence of Being” (“S-A,” p. 474).¹⁰ Primordially attuned, knowing resoluteness is a concept straight

9. Jürgen Habermas, “Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective,” trans. McCumber, p. 448 of this issue. Another important attempt to argue for an internal connection between Heidegger’s political perceptions and his philosophical work is Hannah Arendt’s often-overlooked discussion of Heidegger in *Willing*, vol. 2 of *The Life of the Mind*, ed. Mary McCarthy (New York, 1978), esp. pp. 173, 187–89.

10. Derrida discusses this passage in “OS,” p. 470.

out of *Being and Time*, and its direction toward the essence of Being could be taken to show, in accordance with Heidegger's own retrospective interpretations of his work, that he always thought of Being (whether explicitly or not) as the ultimate or final determining power of Dasein. However, despite the centrality of this sentence, it is not possible to overcome the impression that Being is effectively displaced in the "Rectorship Address" by the mission and fate of the German people. In the very next sentence, Heidegger identifies the spiritual world of a people with "the power that most deeply preserves the people's strengths, which can be tied to earth and blood"; and the final sentence of this paragraph culminates in a spiritual world providing the law that presides "over the march that our people has begun into its future history" ("S-A," p. 475). Thus the paragraph moves, as if in progression, first from spirit's resoluteness toward the essence of Being to the spiritual world of a people tied to earth and blood, and then to the march of the German (our) people. This impression of Being's displacement (or is it perhaps only mediation?) by the German people is confirmed further by the end of the "Rectorship Address":

Do we, or do we not, will the essence of the German university? . . .

But no one will even ask us whether we do or do not will, when the spiritual strength of the West fails and the joints of the world no longer hold, when this moribund semblance of a culture caves in and drags all that remains strong into confusion and lets it suffocate in madness.

Whether this will happen or not depends on whether or not we, as a historical-spiritual people, still and once again will ourselves. Every individual *participates* in this decision, even he, and indeed especially he, who evades it. ["S-A," pp. 479–80]

Here nothing less than the fate of the West hangs, not on attunement or responsiveness to Being, but on whether or not the Germans, as a historical-spiritual people, will themselves. No individual, according to Heidegger, can avoid participating in that decision, and so Heidegger's "Rectorship Address" announces his own participation. From the perspective of an audience in April 1933, these remarks *might* still have seemed somewhat abstract, even though from our perspective, knowing how the joints of the world did fail to hold, the all-too-concrete horrors of Nazism remain fixed in memory.

But Heidegger's "Rectorship Address" does advance a determinate conception that the audience of 1933 could not have failed to hear, a conception that, expressing as it does for Heidegger a will to the essence of the German university, should not be philosophically underestimated. A little more than halfway through his address, Heidegger writes:

Out of the resoluteness of the German student body to be equal to the German fate in its most extreme distress, comes a will to the essence of the university. This will is a true will in that the German student body, through the new Student Law, places itself under the law of its own essence and in this way for the first time determines that essence. To give the law to oneself is the highest freedom. The much celebrated "academic freedom" is being banished from the German university; for this freedom was not genuine, since it was only negative. It meant primarily freedom from concern, arbitrariness of intentions and inclinations, lack of restraint in what was done and left undone. The concept of the freedom of the German student is now brought back to its truth. Henceforth the bond and service of the German student will unfold from this truth. ["S-A," pp. 475–76]

This paragraph contains a confrontation with, and critique of, Immanuel Kant, a figure who remains central to Heidegger's lifelong critique of the history of Western reason. Heidegger's claim that "to give the law to oneself is the highest freedom" is an unmistakable reference to the third section of the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, where Kant writes: "freedom is by no means lawless even though it is not a property of the will according to laws of nature. . . . What else, then, can freedom of will be but autonomy, i.e., the property of the will to be a law to itself?"¹¹ Kant's conception of this highest freedom is exemplified not only in his moral philosophy, but also in his discussion of the organization of the university. And Heidegger's understanding of this highest freedom is similarly exhibited in his call for the reorganization of the German university according to the "new Student Law."

In his essay "What Is Enlightenment?," published in 1789, Kant distinguished between the public and private uses of reason. The private use of reason is the use that "one may make of it in a particular civil post or office which is entrusted to him"; Kant argues that the private use of reason may be "very narrowly restricted," but that such restriction need not hinder the progress of enlightenment. When it comes to the private use of reason, "argument is certainly not allowed—one must obey."¹² This use of reason is not autonomous; the will does not here give the law to itself, since the private use of reason speaks "in the name of another" ("WIE," p. 88). Thus the passive conduct of obedience is entirely compatible with, can be required by, this usage of reason. But the public use of reason, "the use which a person makes of it as a scholar

11. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, 1959), p. 65.

12. Kant, "What Is Enlightenment?" *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 87; hereafter abbreviated "WIE."

before the reading public” must, Kant claims, “always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men” (“WIE,” p. 87). With the “unlimited freedom” of the public use of reason, the scholar speaks “in his own person” (“WIE,” p. 88). Here the active argumentation and judgment of reason stands independent of obedience.

When Kant published his great discussion of the structure of the university, of the relationship among the faculties of philosophy, theology, law, and medicine, he in effect identified the philosophical faculty with the public use of reason. Although motivated in part by his own conflict with the government censor over the publication of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) is a systematic vindication of the right of the philosophical faculty to the use of reason against the encroachment of government authority—an authority that invests its legitimate interests in the faculties of theology, law, and medicine. Two brief passages should be enough to demarcate clearly how Kant embodied his idea of reason in the philosophical faculty:

It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain a faculty that is independent of the government’s command with regard to its teachings; one that, having no commands to give, is free to evaluate everything, and concerns itself with the interests of the sciences, that is, with truth: one in which reason is authorized to speak out publicly. For without a faculty of this kind, the truth would not come to light (and this would be to the government’s own detriment); but reason is by its nature free and admits of no command to hold something as true (no imperative “Believe!” but only a free “I believe”).

Now the power to judge autonomously—that is, freely (according to principles of thought in general)—is called reason. So the philosophy faculty, because it must answer for the truth of the teachings it is to adopt or even allow, must be conceived as free and subject only to laws given by reason, not by the government.¹³

For Kant it is reason itself that, in the fundamental sense of the term, operates freely and autonomously; if philosophy and philosophers are to fulfill their vocation, what one could very well call their spiritual mission, then they must place themselves under, and under nothing else than, the power of the autonomy of reason. Heidegger’s conflict with Kant, in his description of the mission of the university, can be taken as an emblem of his critique of the Kantian conception of reason. Although Heidegger does not explicitly structure his idea of thinking around the

13. Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York, 1979), pp. 27–29, 43.

critique of Kantian reason until later in his writings, the "Rectorship Address" foreshadows, and begins to register, these later themes.

Heidegger's banishment of "the much celebrated 'academic freedom'" gives one pause, although it may be too easy to forget that the notion of academic freedom can, in certain historical circumstances, seem shallow, or hollow, and is itself not immune from manipulation for morally indefensible ends.¹⁴ But what should stop us in our tracks, in 1933 as well as now, is the claim that the will to the essence of the university is a "true will in that the German Student body, through the new Student Law, places itself under the law of its own essence and in this way for the first time determines that essence." The new student law that Heidegger invokes was a law that organized the university, both faculty and students, according to the *Führerprinzip*. This principle of leadership effectively abolished the parliamentary democracy of both students and faculty, appointing the rector as *Führer* of the university, responsible only to the Minister of Education. The rector could then make appointments without consultation with the faculty (although a faculty committee sometimes formally retained a politically empty advisory role).¹⁵ Moreover, in German universities during this period, the *Führerprinzip* was often advocated in opposition to freedom of thought.¹⁶ From the very beginning, one of the "highest tasks" of National Socialism was to make this principle determining "for the entire state," for every "organizational form."¹⁷

I do not intend, in making clear Heidegger's invocation of the *Führerprinzip*, simply to associate Heidegger with Hitler, since that association by itself ought to carry no force; rather, I want to dissociate Heidegger from Kant, relating Heidegger's conception of the mission of the university to his critique of the Kantian idea of reason. Since Heidegger firmly maintains that the body of teachers and students that comprise the German university must "expose science [*Wissenschaft*] to its innermost necessity," and since he also tells us that "all science is philosophy, whether it knows and wills it—or not [*Alle Wissenschaft ist Philosophie . . .*]" ("S-A," pp. 471, 472), his "Rectorship Address" should also be read as addressing the role of philosophy in the university. This role is emphatically not that of acting from the autonomy of reason. Heidegger is no less unequivocal in his insistence that the body of teachers and students must be "equal to the German fate in its most extreme distress" ("S-A," p. 471); and, as

14. Some members of the administration of my own university seem to believe that academic freedom requires that the university not divest its holdings from a regime that is committed, institutionally and morally, to racism. I am speaking, of course, of South Africa.

15. See Edward Yarnell Hartshore, Jr., *The German Universities and National Socialism* (London, 1937), esp. pp. 49–53.

16. See Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), pp. 72–73, 294.

17. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1943), pp. 345, 349.

already announced, this resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] is manifested, in the university, through the law that guarantees the *Führerprinzip* and “for the first time” (“S-A,” p. 475) determines the essence of the university. Thus the innermost necessity of philosophy requires that it be led—“led by that unyielding spiritual mission that forces the fate of the German people to bear the stamp of its history” (“S-A,” p. 470). As for Kant, if philosophy is *led* by anything other than reason, it can no longer fulfill its proper role; indeed, it is no longer philosophy. What follows is the abdication of philosophy in favor of something else, whether it be revelation, the state, or some other unyielding spiritual mission. When philosophy thus ceases to be autonomous, this must look to us as if reason is not being rethought, but overthrown, or, say, overcome. It is in this light that, above all else, we must hear Heidegger’s demand that the will to philosophy be bound “by the people, to the destiny of the state, in a spiritual mission” [*die drei Bindungen*] (“S-A,” p. 477).

That the “Rectorship Address,” granted its historical specificity, occupies a moment in Heidegger’s overcoming of philosophy seems to me indisputable. Blanchot, recalling his reading of the speeches that Heidegger made in favor of Hitler while he was rector, writes:

These speeches were frightening in their form as well as in their content, for it is the same writing and very language by which, in a great moment of the history of thought, we had been made present at the loftiest questioning, one that could come to us from *Being and Time*. Heidegger uses the same language to call for voting for Hitler, to justify Nazi Germany’s break from the League of Nations, and to praise Schlageter.¹⁸

These speeches and newspaper articles, published in 1933 and 1934, extend the concepts and themes of the “Rectorship Address” in the most brutally political direction, all but obscuring the philosophical and spiritual background that motivates, and is at the center of, “The Self-Assertion of the German University.”¹⁹ The concept of resoluteness and the theme of following and being led become linked unforgettably to the *Führer*, and the National Socialist state is apparently identified with a return to the question of Being. Perhaps the apogee, at least in one dimension, of Heidegger’s writing during this period occurs at the close of an article published in the *Freiburger Studentenzeitung* in November 1933:

Doctrines and “ideas” shall no longer be the rules of your being. The *Führer*, and he alone, is the present and future of German reality, and its law. Learn always to know more deeply: from now

18. Blanchot, “Thinking the Apocalypse,” p. 479.

19. These speeches and articles can be found in Guido Schneeberger, *Nachlesse zu Heidegger: Dokumente zu seinem Leben und Denken* (Bern, 1962).

on everything requires decision and every action requires responsibility.²⁰

In Heidegger's posthumously published *Der Spiegel* interview of 1966, he disavows these remarks, explaining them by saying, "When I took over the rectorate, it was clear to me that I would not survive without compromises."²¹ But the problem here is not solely the necessity of compromise; it is rather whether Heidegger unfolds his rector's rhetoric and his official vocabulary and structure of concepts so as to secure their derivation from, or display their harmony with, the philosophical writings that preceded and came after the episodes of 1933–34.

Since the concept of resoluteness is central to *Being and Time*, and since it figures fundamentally in the "Rectorship Address," I want to focus, at least briefly, on a basic difference in the way this concept unfolds in these two works. This difference should help to explain why, despite the similarity of their writing and language, *Being and Time* and the "Rectorship Address" cannot be merged. Without my even attempting a detailed reading of part 2, division 2 of *Being and Time*, of the relationships among resoluteness, care, anxiety, conscience, and guilt, it is evident that the concept of resoluteness must be understood against the background of Heidegger's analysis of the "they" [*das Man*]. In section 27 of *Being and Time*, we are told that our everyday being with others consists in a subjection to them, that our possibilities of being are for others to dispose of, and that these others are not anyone in particular, but rather the "they":

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [*man*] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The "they," which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.²²

In our everyday existence, we are dispersed, lost, in the "they." The they-self of everyday Dasein is distinguished from the authentic self, "from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way" (BT, p. 167). But, Heidegger insists, the authentic self does not rest on an exceptional condition of the subject; it is rather a modification of the "they" (BT, pp. 168, 312). Heidegger's name for this modification, through which we are summoned out of our lostness in the "they," is resoluteness. Reso-

20. Heidegger, "Deutsche Studenten," in *ibid.*, pp. 135–36; my translation.

21. Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save Us': The *Spiegel* Interview," trans. William J. Richardson, in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Sheehan (Chicago, 1981), p. 49.

22. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), p. 164; hereafter abbreviated BT.

luteness, by way of anxiety, guilt, and conscience, brings Dasein to the authenticity of Being-one's-Self. (Irresoluteness is the form of being of the inauthentic they-self.) In answer to the question of the "who" of Dasein, its kind of being, Heidegger's response is always the self. But the self that answers to the "who" of Dasein may be either the they-self or "authentic Being-one's-Self"; indeed, "for the most part *I myself* am not the 'who' of Dasein; the they-self is its 'who'" (*BT*, p. 312). Resoluteness reverses the processes of the they-self, and brings the self, for the first time, to its "ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (*BT*, p. 346). This modification, emerging out of the they-self and leading to authenticity, brought about by resoluteness, also harbors a tension, since the authentic being of Dasein always stands in danger of losing ground to the "they." Authenticity is never achieved once and for all but is always to be achieved against our everyday way of being with others, which is with us every day.

The presence of the "they" so pervades *Being and Time* that, in his 1938 lectures at Hebrew University, Martin Buber could argue that the resulting polarity between the they-self and *I myself* left Heidegger no room for genuine relations between human beings, no place between *das Man* and the authentic individual.²³ Without needing to determine whether this interpretation of Heidegger is prejudicial, we must not lose sight of the fact that Heidegger does begin his analysis with "the real dictatorship of the 'they'" (*BT*, p. 164). The force of this dictatorship leads him to structure the irresoluteness of *das Man* and the resoluteness of authentic Being-one's-Self as *counterconcepts* [*gegenbegriff*] (*BT*, p. 345). As central as it is to *Being and Time*, this structure of counterconcepts vanishes from the "Rectorship Address," so that the sense of tension between the "they" and authenticity virtually disappears. I say *virtually disappears* because there is a passing moment during which Heidegger, in the vocabulary of this address, focused as it is on leading and following, grants that "all following . . . bears resistance within itself," even acknowledging an "essential opposition of leading and following" ("S-A," p. 479). But the relevant three sentences, although they may provide a hint of tension, find no structure of concepts to support this tension. Even the most favorable interpretation, however (im)plausible, could do no more than read these sentences as vestigial, in the technical sense of being a degenerate form having little or no utility but having performed a useful function in an earlier stage.²⁴ As the text unfolds, however, these sentences appear positively aberrant, unmotivated by the thought that produces them.

What this text seeks is the "genuine following (*Gefolgschaft*) of those who are of a new mind." Such following requires leaders, and, in order

23. See Martin Buber, "What Is Man?" *Between Man and Man*, trans. Martin Gregor Smith (New York, 1965), esp. pp. 173–77.

24. *The Random House College Dictionary*, s.v. "vestige."

to gain the strength to lead, "a common questioning and communally attuned saying" must arise ("S-A," p. 475). The realization of this task demands in turn knowledge about the people, knowledge about the state, and knowledge about the spiritual mission, a spiritual mission Heidegger continuously identifies as "ours," as German ("S-A," p. 477). People, state, and German spiritual mission occupy the place of genuine self-assertion, indeed become this self-assertion. Recall that Heidegger announces that every individual participates in the decision whether or not to will the German essence [*deutschen Wesen*] as a historical-spiritual people, "even he, and indeed especially he, who evades it." But the next three sentences, as it were, decide the matter, neutralize those who evade or escape this will to essence:

But we do will that our people fulfill its historical mission.
We do will ourselves. For the young and the youngest strength
of the people, which already reaches beyond us, *has* by now *decided*
[*entscheiden*] the matter. ["S-A," p. 480]

The matter has been decided, and out of this resolve to be equal to the German fate the individual asserts himself. The tension and countertension between authenticity and the "they" found in *Being and Time* is replaced by absorption in our (German) historical-spiritual mission. Who speaks in the "Rectorship Address"? No longer a purported authentic Being-one's-Self, but "*unseres geistig-volkichen Dasein*," our spiritual being as part of a people ("S-A," p. 474).²⁵ This is apparently the voice that prepares Heidegger's appeal to follow the *Führer* as the law of German reality. Without a conceptual opposition between *das Man* and authentic *Dasein*, the individual human being, the *I myself*, has no place, finds itself usurped by people, state, and German fate. And the university, and the faculty of philosophy, is molded in this image, no longer governed by the public use of reason, but led by the spirit of Germany.

There is no reason to believe that Heidegger himself would have found this reading of his "Rectorship Address" perverse. In his 1945 retrospective discussion of the address, he writes:

The rectorate was an attempt to see in the "movement" that had come to power, beyond all its failings and crudities, something that reached much farther and that might some day bring about a gathering of what is German unto the historical essence of the West. In no way shall it be denied that at the time I believed in such possibilities and for this reason renounced the thinker's most

25. A fuller discussion of these issues would require an interpretation of section 74 ("The Basic Constitution of Historicity") of *Being and Time*. I can do no more than assert here that I do not believe that this section undermines my reading of the differences between the "Rectorship Address" and *Being and Time*.

proper vocation in order to help realize them in an official capacity.
[“R,” p. 498]

To have renounced the thinker’s most proper vocation is, in his own terms, Heidegger’s harshest possible self-accusation. His work from 1945 on can be read as an attempt to reappropriate this vocation; although he will continue to distance himself from a Kantian conception, people, state, and German fate will never resume their former role but will themselves be displaced through Heidegger’s understanding of the history of Being. National Socialism, according to Heidegger’s later understanding, turned out to be “caught up in the consummation of nihilism” (“R,” p. 498). And nationalism itself had to be subjected to the severest critique. As Derrida notes about the “Rectorship Address,” spirit is not to be interpreted as a psychical quality, but the “massive voluntarism” of this address, a voluntarism of the German masses, can still look entangled in the metaphysics of subjectivity, even if that subjectivity is nationalized (“OS,” p. 465). Heidegger makes this clear in his “Letter on Humanism”:

Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such subjectivism. Nationalism is not overcome through mere internationalism; it is rather expanded and elevated thereby into a system. Nationalism is as little brought and raised to *humanitas* by internationalism as individualism is by an ahistorical collectivism. The latter is the subjectivity of man in totality. It completes subjectivity’s unconditioned self-assertion, which refuses to yield.²⁶

It is now self-assertion itself that must be overcome, whether this self-assertion is expressed through nationalism, internationalism, individualism, or collectivism. The problems around the notion of a historical-spiritual people are rethought in terms of homelessness, and this homelessness is no longer tied to any nation, state, or people. Rather, homelessness, thought through beyond humanism, “consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is the symptom of the oblivion of Being” (“LH,” p. 218). Insofar as re-Germanization reappears, from out of the history of Being, the German language, rather than nation or people, plays the decisive role. Already in his 1945 reevaluation of National Socialism, Heidegger declared that “the surmounting of nihilism . . . announces itself in German poetic thinking and singing” (“R,” p. 498). He maintained this position throughout his later writings, and when reiterating the need for a “conversion of thought” in 1966, he was asked:

SPIEGEL: You attribute to the Germans a special task?

Heidegger: Yes, in the sense explained in the dialogues with Hölderlin.

26. Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” *Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. David Farrell Krell (New York, 1977), p. 221; hereafter abbreviated “LH.”

SPIEGEL: Do you believe that Germans have a special qualification for this conversion?

Heidegger: I am thinking of the special inner kinship between the German language and the language of the Greeks and their thought. This is something that the French confirm for me again and again today. When they begin to think, they speak German. They assure [me] that they do not succeed with their own language.²⁷

Is this nationalism sublated, or sublimated, or overcome?

Heidegger's privileging of the Greek and German languages is, of course, embedded in his understanding of language and of its relation to Being. He writes that "language is the house of Being which comes to pass from Being and is pervaded by Being. And so it is proper to think the essence of language from its correspondence to Being and indeed as this correspondence, that is, as the home of man's essence" ("LH," p. 213). Most Anglo-American philosophers reading these remarks find them, at best, unintelligible. I find that I can put myself in the place of the intuition they express, even if I would formulate that intuition in a radically different way. If pressed to make good on this claim, as I no doubt would be, I would find no need to turn to Greek or German. My intuition would lead me straight to J. L. Austin:

'It was a mistake', 'It was an accident'—how readily these can *appear* indifferent, and even be used together. Yet, a story or two, and everybody will not merely agree that they are completely different, but even discover for himself what the difference is and what each means.

Now the story:

You have a donkey, so have I, and they graze in the same field. The day comes when I conceive a dislike for mine. I go to shoot it, draw a bead on it, fire: the brute falls in its tracks. I inspect the victim, and find to my horror that it is *your* donkey. I appear on your doorstep with the remains and say—what? 'I say, old sport, I'm awfully sorry, &c., I've shot your donkey *by accident*'? Or '*by mistake*'? Then again, I go to shoot my donkey as before, draw a bead on it, fire—but as I do so, the beasts move, and to my horror yours falls. Again the scene on the doorstep—what do I say? 'By mistake'? Or '*by accident*'?²⁸

Language is, after all, pervaded by being.

27. Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save Us,'" p. 62.

28. J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," *Philosophical Papers*, 2d ed., ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford, 1970), pp. 184–85, 185 n.1. See also Cavell, "The Politics of Interpretation (Politics as Opposed to What?)," *Themes Out of School: Effects and Causes* (San Francisco, 1984), pp. 57–58.

This introduction is not the place to attempt a full assessment of Heidegger's thinking concerning humanism. But the topic of humanism cannot be avoided when confronting Heidegger's involvement with Nazism. Heidegger, as is well known, wanted to overcome metaphysical humanism by thinking about the essence of the human in terms of our claim by Being. So that "in the determination of the humanity of man . . . what is essential is not man but Being" ("LH," p. 213). All of the traditional representations of philosophy are to be reoriented, and thus overturned, in thinking them through by reference to Being and its history. Yet however much Heidegger may wish to recover the human by way of Being, one is struck, almost uncannily, by the abstractness of the human voice, the human face and body, in his later thought. We may no longer hope for a nostalgic return to the humanity of earlier times; nevertheless, from the "Rectorship Address" to Heidegger's last writings, the human is always being led, and what leads humanity seems to so envelop or overwhelm it that its disappearance is constantly threatened. Heidegger will never again appeal to a *Führer* to lead. The appeal now comes from Being and requires a response that "is a giving way before the appeal."²⁹ But just as the individual human being disappeared before the arbitrariness of the *Führer*, so the problem of arbitrariness reemerges in the claim of Being: "But precisely here the response may hear wrongly. In this thinking, the choice of going astray is greatest" ("T," p. 184). *Precisely*.

Heidegger's recognition of this issue, and of its depth, is pushed further when he reports, in a letter to a young student, that after giving a lecture he has had the curious experience of being asked "whence my thought gets its directive" ("T," p. 185). He wants to know by what right we may ask this question about his thinking alone, complaining that nobody ever asks from whence Plato had a directive to think of Being as idea, or Kant to think of Being as the transcendental character of objectness. Heidegger wants to turn this question into a question about the directive of thought itself. His response to this question of the directive of thought will consist in his interpretation of the history of Being, in his claim that thinking belongs to Being, inasmuch as it both comes to pass from Being and listens to Being ("LH," p. 196). Does this resolve the issue of arbitrariness?

Heidegger suggests that only a thought such as his is properly placed to deal with these questions, since "maybe someday the answer to these questions can be gained from those ventures of thought which, like mine, look as though they were lawless caprice." And he continues: "I can provide no credentials for what I have said . . . that would permit a convenient check in each case whether what I say agrees with 'reality'" ("T," pp. 185–86). Fair enough perhaps, but suppose that this acknowl-

29. Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1971), pp. 183–84; hereafter abbreviated "T."

edgment is carried further to the conclusion that thought has no credentials, that there are no criteria of evaluation for thought.

Not only do we lack any criterion which would permit us to evaluate the perfection of an epoch of metaphysics as compared with any other epoch. The right to this kind of evaluation does not exist. Plato's thinking is no more perfect than Parmenides'. Hegel's philosophy is no more perfect than Kant's. Each epoch of philosophy has its own necessity. We simply have to acknowledge the fact that a philosophy is the way it is. It is not our business to prefer one to the other, as can be the case with regard to various *Weltanschauungen*.³⁰

Are we then just to be on our way with thought, without ever stopping to evaluate it? Then how are we to understand the status of Heidegger's own self-criticisms? And are we to say that each epoch of politics has its own necessity, that we simply have to acknowledge the fact that politics is the way it is? Or is politics always part of a *Weltanschauung*, so that we are able to evaluate it?

When the realm of arbitrariness joins with the suppression of the human, we can be pushed to the point of no return, facing the brink of an abyss. Here is a philosophical pronouncement from Heidegger (is it also political?) uttered in a 1949 lecture:

"Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry. As for its essence, it is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and the death camps, the same thing as the blockades and reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs."³¹

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, who brought this statement to prominence and discusses it at length in *La Fiction du politique*, admits that insofar as Heidegger intended to refer the gas chambers and death camps to the essence of technology his thought is "absolutely just." But the justice of this condemnation, by way of the relation between technology and nihilism, is by itself "scandalously insufficient" (*F*, p. 58). According to Lacoue-Labarthe, this scandalous insufficiency results from the fact that Heidegger never acknowledged that this mass extermination was essentially [*pour l'essentiel*] the extermination of the Jews, and that this fact makes for an incommensurable difference from the economic and military practice of blockades, or even the production of nuclear weapons, not to mention

30. Heidegger, "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," *On "Time and Being,"* trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, 1972), p. 56.

31. Quoted in *F*, p. 58. Lacoue-Labarthe's source is Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg, 1984).

the mechanization of the food industry (*F*, pp. 58–59).³² For Lacoue-Labarthe, as for Blanchot and Levinas, Heidegger's silence concerning the Final Solution, his failure to pronounce the name of the Jews, is what remains beyond pardon. And I think that behind this silence, when one encounters Heidegger's 1949 pronouncement, one cannot but be staggered by his inability—call it metaphysical inability—to acknowledge the everyday fate of bodies and souls, as if the bureaucratized burning of selected human beings were not all that different from the threat to humanity posed in the organization of the food industry by the forces of technology.³³ The mechanization of agriculture may be a cause for worry; the production of hydrogen bombs is a reason for terror; the economic blockades of countries may be evil; but the production of corpses in the gas chambers and death camps brings us face to face with the experience of horror. Where have these distinctions gone? Humanism aside, what has become of the human? At Auschwitz, says Lacoue-Labarthe, the Jews were treated as industrial waste (*F*, pp. 61–62). Do we have no criteria of evaluation to distinguish between the waste products of technology and the production of human corpses in the gas chambers? Are the advances of Heidegger's thought inseparable from this indifference to the specifically human?

By the advances of Heidegger's thought I mean to refer, among other things, to his interpretation of Nietzsche's phrase, "God is dead."³⁴ As a consequence of the Nietzschean death of God, as Heidegger well understood, the traditional foundations of humanism are thrown into question. As Cavell succinctly puts this thought: "Nietzsche's idea of the death of God can be understood to begin by saying . . . : the idea of God is part of (the idea of) human nature. If that idea dies, the idea of human nature equally dies" (*CR*, p. 483). So there is no question here of a return to the old idea of human nature; the task is to recover the human after the death of God. Heidegger's interpretation of this task leaves him only one path of recovery—the human must be rethought through Being, and it is this subordination of being human to Being that leads to the problems of suppression and indifference, and to the violent return of the repressed, that I have sketched.

I understand Levinas' work to suggest another path to the recovery of the human, one that leads through or toward other human beings:

The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. . . .
Hence metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted—

32. See also Lacoue-Labarthe, "Neither an Accident nor a Mistake," trans. Wissing, pp. 481–84 of this issue.

33. I am indebted here to a conversation with Stanley Cavell that was essential in helping me to formulate these issues.

34. See Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead,'" *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York, 1977), pp. 53–112. See also part 1 of Heidegger's *What Is Called Thinking?* trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York, 1968).

in our relations with men. . . . The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed. It is our relations with men . . . that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of.³⁵

Levinas places ethics before ontology by beginning with our experience of the human face; and, in a clear reference to Heidegger's idolatry of the village life of peasants, he associates himself with Socrates, who preferred the city where he encountered men to the country with its trees.³⁶ In his discussion of skepticism and the problem of others, Cavell also aligns himself with this path of thought, with the recovery of the finite human self through the acknowledgment of others:

As long as God exists, I am not alone. And couldn't the other suffer the fate of God? . . . I wish to understand how the other now bears the weight of God, shows me that I am not alone in the universe. This requires understanding the philosophical problem of the other as the trace or scar of the departure of God. [CR, p. 470]³⁷

The suppression of the other, the human, in Heidegger's thought accounts, I believe, for the absence, in his writing after the war, of the experience of horror. Horror is always directed toward the human; every object of horror bears the imprint of the *human* will.³⁸ So Levinas can see in Heidegger's silence about the gas chambers and death camps "a kind of consent to the horror."³⁹ And Cavell can characterize Nazis as "those who have lost the capacity for being horrified by what they do."⁴⁰ Where was Heidegger's horror? How could he have failed to know what he had consented to?

Hannah Arendt associates Heidegger with Paul Valéry's aphorism, "*Les événements ne sont que l'écume des choses*" ('Events are but the foam of things').⁴¹ I think one understands the source of her intuition. The mass

35. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, 1969), pp. 78–79.

36. Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarine et nous," *Difficile liberté: Essais sur le judaïsme*, 3d ed. rev. (Paris, 1976), p. 325. For Heidegger's idolatry of peasant life, see Heidegger, "Why Do I Stay in the Provinces?" trans. Sheehan, in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, pp. 27–30.

37. For a specifically feminine inflection of this theme, see Cavell, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman," in *The Trial(s) of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Françoise Meltzer (Chicago, 1988), pp. 248–49.

38. I try to explain these claims in "The Horror of Monsters: A Fragment of the History of Horror," forthcoming in the proceedings of the Stanford University centennial conference, "Humans, Animals, and Machines."

39. Levinas, "As If Consenting to Horror," trans. Wissing, p. 487 of this issue.

40. Cavell, "A Cover Letter to Molière's *Misanthrope*," *Themes Out of School*, p. 103.

41. Arendt, *Willing*, p. 181.

extermination of human beings, however, does not produce foam, but dust and ashes; and it is here that questioning must stop.

You onlookers,
You who raised no hand in murder,
But who did not shake the dust
From your longing,
You who halted there, where dust is changed
To light.⁴²

42. Nelly Sachs, "You Onlookers," trans. Ruth and Matthew Mead, *O the Chimneys: Selected Poems and the Verse Play, "Eli"* (New York, 1967), p. 19.