

## HEIDEGGER AND THE NAZIS

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### *Heidegger et le nazisme*

by Victor Farías, translated from Spanish and German into French

by Myriam Benarroch and Jean-Baptiste Grasset, preface by Christian Jambet.

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*The spiritual strength of the West fails, its structure crumbles, this moribund semblance of a culture caves in and drags all powers into confusion, suffocating them in madness....*

*Whether or not this will happen depends on one thing: whether we [Germans], as a historical-spiritual people, will ourselves again.*

Martin Heidegger  
May 1933

### I.

Two facts about Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) are as incontestable as they are complicated: first, that he remains one of the century's most influential philosophers and, second, that he was a Nazi.

On the one hand there is Heidegger the philosopher, whose monumental *Sein and Zeit* (*Being and Time*), published in 1927, sought to change the course of philosophy by transforming the age-old question about the meaning of reality. Heidegger thought that with the collapse of theism in the nineteenth century (the "death of God") the West had entered the age of nihilism. His goal was to overcome the metaphysical speculations that he believed had helped bring on that collapse and to awaken the modern world to a new sense of what he called *Öthe* mystery of Being." His philosophy, which fills over seventy volumes in his posthumous *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann), has had a profound effect on French philosophy from Jean-Paul Sartre through Jacques Derrida, on Protestant and Catholic theologians like Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Rahner, and on two decades of literary criticism in Europe and America. His works have been translated into all major languages, including Chinese and Japanese.

Then there is Heidegger the Nazi, that is: the dues-paying member of the NSDAP from 1933 to 1945 (card number 312589, Gau Baden); the outspoken propagandist for Hitler and the Nazi revolution who went on national radio to urge ratification of Hitler's withdrawal of Germany from the League of Nations; the rector of Freiburg University (April 1933 to April 1934), who told his students, "Let not theories and 'ideas' be the rules of your being. The *Führer* himself and he alone is German reality and its law, today and for the future,Ö and who wrote to a colleague: "The individual, wherever

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<sup>1</sup>To be published in the US by Temple University Press in 1989.

he stands, counts for nothing. The fate of our people in their State is everything."<sup>2</sup>

This is the Heidegger who, even after the Nazis allegedly began viewing him with disfavor, continued to defend what he called "the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism." It is the same Heidegger who despised the party system of the Weimar Republic, who liked to cite Homer (*Iliad* 11, 204): "The rule of the many is not good; let there be one ruler, one king, Ó and who apparently got his wish. Years after the Nazi debacle had ended he excoriated the "democratized decay" of Germany's political institutions and said he was not convinced that democracy was the best political system for the modern age. In 1974 he wrote his friend Heinrich Petzet: "Our Europe is being ruined from below with 'democracy'...."<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger's support for the Nazi movement has dogged his philosophy for over fifty years. If the man himself was—to put it minimally—a Nazi sympathizer, is his philosophy also in some way fascist? Does his thought, in whole or part, lend itself to political reaction or at least a nondemocratic view of the world?

Some philosophers answer in the absolute affirmative: Professor Jurgen Habermas of the Goethe University, Frankfurt, for example, and the late Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt school. Many more answer in the absolute negative and either treat Heidegger's philosophy as a pure act of thought that developed in a political vacuum, or explain his political "error" as a misguided but well-intentioned effort to "overcome metaphysics," but in any case as having nothing to do with his philosophy.

Still others (I include myself) would argue that despite the magnitude of Heidegger's intellectual achievement, major elements of his philosophy are deeply flawed by his notions of politics and history—and that this is so quite apart from the fact that he joined the Nazi party and, for whatever period of time, ardently supported Hitler. Heidegger's engagement with Nazism was a public enactment of some of his deepest, and most questionable, philosophical convictions. And those convictions did not change when, in the mid-Thirties, he became disappointed with the direction the party was taking. In fact, Heidegger admitted as much. In 1936, when his former student Karl Lowith suggested to Heidegger that his support for Nazism seemed to come from the very essence of his philosophy, "Heidegger agreed with me without reservations and spelled out for me that his concept of "historicity" was the basis for his political 'engagement.'"<sup>4</sup>

Victor Farías, a Chilean who studied with Heidegger and now teaches at the Free University of Berlin, has dramatically reopened the question with his *Heidegger et le nazisme*. Written in Spanish, rejected by a German publishing house, and finally published in French translation last October, the

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<sup>2</sup>Texts in Guido Schneeberger, *Nachlese zu Heidegger* (Bern: Suhr, 1962), pp. 135ff.; and in Hugo Ott, "Martin Heidegger als Rektor der Universität Freiburg i. Br. 1933/34," *Zeitschrift des Breisgou-Geschichtsvereins*, Vol. 103 (1984), p. 117. Otto Pöggeler takes the first text as meaning: "not the National Socialist Party program and theories of race": "Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis" in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, ed., Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert and Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 32. (Note: In this essay I often make my own translations from the German.)

<sup>3</sup>National Socialism: Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935), *Gesamtausgabe* Part II, Vol. 40 (1983), p. 208 taken with p. 234 (cf. below). Democracy: Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Auf einen Stern zugehen* (Frankfurt: Societät, 1983), pp. 82 and 232; and Heidegger's *Spiegel* interview, "'Only a God Can Save Us,'" trans., William J. Richardson, in Thomas Sheehan, ed., *Heidegger, the Man and the Thinker* (Precedent, 1981), pp. 45-67, here p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>Karl Lowith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), p. 57.

book has been explosive: over the last six months virtually every French philosopher of note has taken a very passionate stand, one way or the other, on *l'affaire Heidegger*. The book is currently being translated into ten languages. Temple University Press will bring it out in English early next year.

Farías says his aim is to study the relation between a thinker and a political system, "and although his historical method and political analysis have come under sharp fire from critics (particularly his association of Heidegger with the SA leader Ernst Roehm), it would be wrong to say that one cannot learn from this book. Farías has assembled much if not all of the available data on Heidegger's relation to the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. Even though some of his information has been public knowledge for a long time, much of it, especially the documents Farías found in East German archives and in the Documentation Center in West Berlin, had not been published before and is of enormous value.

The merit of Farías's book is that it draws our attention anew to an important issue that deserves more careful treatment than Farías has been able to give it. (I say this without having seen the forthcoming German edition of the work, which will add three new chapters and correct the numerous errors that mar the French edition.<sup>5</sup>) The relation of Heidegger and Nazism has been thoroughly [p. 39] investigated by the historian Hugo Ott of Freiburg University—whose book, to be published in Germany in September, will be the definitive study of the topic—and by philosophers like Otto Pöggeler of the Ruhr University, Bochum, and Karsten Harries of Yale. In what follows I use Professor

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<sup>5</sup>In a work that purports to provide definitive documentation of Heidegger's Nazi period, the sloppiness of Farías's notes is appalling. Apart from references to archival material, I have checked virtually every one of his notes, and many of them cannot be traced with any reasonable ease because the usual rules of critical apparatus have not been observed. The reader might try tracking down the following references, a small selection among many that could be cited: p. 310, nn. 67, 68, and 75; p. 313, nn. 147 and 148; p. 316, nn. 42 and 51; p. 319, n. 130; p. 324, nn. 277, 287, and 296; p. 327, n. 66; p. 329, n. 145; p. 332, nn. 255, 256, and 267. The works attributed to Karl Oehling are written by Karl Moehling: p. 166, p. 322, n. 213, and p. 331, n. 203. (I am grateful to Ms. Lorna Newman, Loyola University librarian, for helping me trace many of Farías's references.)

The tendentiousness of the French translations of Heidegger's statements in Farías has been noted by François Fédier, who provides his own translations in *Le débat*, Vol. 48 (January-February, 1988), pp. 176-192. I would add that on p. 78 Heidegger's statement is not "these times were devoted to confronting brutality" but "one could endure these times only with toughness." On the same page, he did not say "combat had been healthy for him" but "he had come back from the [p. 39] war in good health." At p. 75 the French translation adds the prejudicial word "Aryan" and the phrase "of a knowledge that comes from authenticity," neither of which is found in the German. And ridiculous though it might seem, on p. 29 Farías, without notice, makes the word "*Kapaun*" ("capon," or "brat") come out as "Capuchin," so that he can thereby bolster his claim that Heidegger, from his youth, was an anti-Semitic follower of the monk Abraham a Sancta Clara.

Farías's confusion of two places called Sachsenhausen—the seventeenth-century suburb of Frankfurt that Heidegger mentioned in a 1964 lecture, and the concentration camp outside Berlin that Farías *thinks* Heidegger meant—demolishes his absurd conclusion (p. 292ff.) that Heidegger was making an approving reference to the death camps. Farías's association of Heidegger with Roehm (pp. 202-210) is constructed entirely from circumstantial evidence; Hugo Ott's research would seem to discredit the claim: Ott, "Wege und Abwege," *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, No. 275 (November 27, 1987), p. 39.

Farías's claim on page 39 that a one-page article that Heidegger published in 1910 at the age of twenty "articulates all the determining elements" of "Martin Heidegger's later ideological and spiritual development" is not demonstrated in the book, and his ruminations (pp. 33ff.) on the psychological conflicts underlying Heidegger's early heart condition are, to put it kindly, highly speculative.

Ott's work to supplement, and sometimes to correct, Farías's account.<sup>6</sup>

In outline, the story of Heidegger and the Nazis concerns (1) a provincial, ultra conservative German nationalist and, at least from 1932 on, a Nazi sympathizer (2) who, three months after Hitler took power, became rector of Freiburg University, joined the NSDAP, and tried unsuccessfully to become the philosophical *Führer* of the Nazi movement, (3) who quit the rectorate in 1934 and quietly disassociated himself from some aspects of the Nazi party while remaining an enthusiastic supporter of its ideals, (4) who was dismissed from teaching in 1945, only to be reintegrated into the university in 1951, and who even after his death in 1976 continues to have an immense following in Europe and America.

Whatever the value of his philosophy, the picture we now have of Heidegger's activities during the Third Reich is deeply disturbing and frequently disgusting. For example:

Heidegger's inaugural address as Rector Magnificus of Freiburg University (May 27, 1933) purported to assert the autonomy of the university against Nazi attempts at politicizing the sciences. However, it ominously celebrated the banishing of academic freedom and ended up as a dithyramb to "the greatness and glory" of the Hitler revolution ("the march our people has begun into its future history"), which Heidegger tried to combine with the goals of his own philosophy. The essence of the university, he says, is the "will to knowledge," which requires returning to the pre-Socratic origins of thought. But concretely that means unifying *Ö*science and German fate<sup>Ö</sup> and willing "the historical mission of the German *Volk*, a *Volk* that knows itself in its State"—all this within a spirituality "that is the power to preserve, in the deepest way, the strengths [of the *Volk*] which are rooted in soil and blood."<sup>7</sup>

Three months later, as if to fulfill the promise of his inaugural address, Heidegger rushed to establish the *Führer*-principle at Freiburg University (August 21, 1933)Ñhis first big step toward

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<sup>6</sup>Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt: Campus, forthcoming, September, 1988). Ott's articles include: "Martin Heidegger als Rektor der Universität Freiburg i. Br. 1933/34," *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins*, Vol. 102 (1983), pp. 121-136, and Vol. 103 (1984), pp. 107-130; "Martin Heidegger als Rektor der Universität Freiburg 1933/34," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, Vol. 132 (new series, Vol. 93, 1984), pp. 343-358; "Martin Heidegger und die Universität Freiburg nach 1945," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (1985), pp. 95-128; and "Martin Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus" in *Heidegger und die praktische Philosophie*, pp. 64-77.

Otto Pöggeler, *Philosophie und Politik bei Heidegger* (Freiburg: Alber, 1972); "Den Führer führen? Heidegger und kein Ende," *Philosophische Rundschau*, Vol. 32 (1985), pp. 26-67; *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (Humanities Press, 1987), pp. 274-280; "Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis," pp. 17-63.

Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 29 (1975-76), pp. 642-669. Karl Moehling, *Martin Heidegger and the Nazi Party*, Ph.D. dissertation, Northern Illinois University, 1972, and "Heidegger and the Nazis" in Sheehan, *Heidegger, the Man and the Thinker*, pp. 31-44. Many of Heidegger's statements from 1933 to 1937 are documented in Schneeberger, *Nachlese*.

<sup>7</sup>Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," trans. Karsten Harries, *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 38 (March, 1985), pp. 470-480, pp. 475, 480, and 471. Six months later Heidegger linked science with "self-responsible *völkisch* existence": text in Schneeberger, *Nachlese*, p. 149. On Heidegger's attempt to transform Nazi language, see Graeme Nicholson, "The Politics of Heidegger's Rectoral Address," *Man and World*, Vol. 20 (1987), pp. 171-187.

becoming the intellectual high priest of Nazism. According to the *Führerprinzip* the rector would no longer be elected by the academic senate but would be appointed by the Nazi minister of education and made the virtual dictator of the university, with authority to impose his own deans on the departments. (On August 22, the vice rector, Joseph Sauer, wrote in his diary: "*Finis Universitatum!* And that idiot Heidegger has gotten us into this mess, after we elected him rector to bring us a new spiritual vision for the universities. What irony!") Heidegger prepared the ground with a public telegram to Hitler on May 20, 1933, and on October 1, 1933, got himself officially appointed *Führer* of Freiburg University, thereby ending its autonomy. On December 20 he wrote a colleague that "from the very first day of my assumption of the office" his goal had been "the fundamental change of scientific education in accordance with the strengths and the demands of the National Socialist State" (his emphasis).<sup>8</sup>

On September 4, 1933, in response to an offer to take the chair at the University of Munich, Heidegger said: "For me it is clear that, putting aside all personal motives, I must decide to accomplish the task that will allow me to best serve the work of Adolf Hitler."<sup>9</sup>

[p. 39] On November 3, 1933, *Führer*-rector Heidegger issued a decree applying the Nazi "cleansing" laws to the student body of Freiburg University. He announced that economic aid would henceforth be awarded to students who belonged to the SS, the SA, or other military groups but would be denied to Jewish or Marxist students or anyone who fit the description of a "non-Aryan" in Nazi law.<sup>10</sup>

On December 13, 1933, Heidegger sent a letter to a group of German academics, requesting financial support for a book of pro-Hitler speeches by professors that was to be circulated to intellectuals around the world. At the bottom of his letter he added the editor's assurance that "Needless to say, non-Aryans shall not appear on the signature page."<sup>11</sup>

On December 22, 1933, Heidegger suggested to Baden's minister of education that, in choosing among applicants for professorships, one should ask "which of the candidates (granted his academic and personal appropriateness for the job) offers the greatest assurance of carrying out the National Socialist will for education."<sup>12</sup>

Equally disgusting are Heidegger's secret denunciations of his colleagues and students, actions long the subject of rumor and now conclusively documented.

(1) Hermann Staudinger had been professor of chemistry at Freiburg University since 1926 and would later (1953) be awarded a Nobel prize. On September 29, 1933—knowing full well that this could cost Staudinger his job—Heidegger leaked information to the local minister of education that

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<sup>8</sup>Sauer's remark and Heidegger's letter of December 20 are cited in Ott, *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins* (1984), pp. 112 and 116.

<sup>9</sup>Farías, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, p. 180. [p. 40]

<sup>10</sup>[p. 40] Schneeberger, *Nachlese*, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup>Farías, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, p. 176. The book was published as *Bekenntnis der Professoren an den deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat* (Dresden, 1933) and on pp. 36-37 contains the first translation of Heidegger's work into English: his speech in support of Hitler, November 11, 1933. The names appear on pp. 129-135.

<sup>12</sup>Ott, *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins* (1984), p. 117.

Staudinger had been a pacifist during World War I. The Gestapo investigated the matter and confirmed Heidegger's tip. Asked for his recommendation as *Führer*-rector, Heidegger on February 10, 1934, secretly urged the ministry to fire Staudinger without a pension.

Three weeks later Heidegger recommended a milder punishment, but only because he feared adverse international reaction to the dismissal of such a famous scholar. On March 5, 1934, he wrote: "I hardly need to remark that *as regards the issue* nothing of course can change. It's simply a question of avoiding, as much as possible, any new strain on foreign policy" (Heidegger's emphasis). The ministry humiliated Staudinger. It forced him to submit his resignation, then dangled it in front of him for six months before tearing it up and giving him back his job.<sup>13</sup>

(2) A bit closer to home was the case of Dr. Eduard Baumgarten, a student of American philosophy. After lecturing at the University of Wisconsin in the Twenties, Baumgarten returned to his native Germany to do advanced research under Heidegger. They struck up a close friendship; Heidegger and his wife even became the godparents of Baumgarten's son. But in 1931 they had a falling out over philosophy. Heidegger refused to support Baumgarten's work on American pragmatism, and soon thereafter Baumgarten left Freiburg to teach American philosophy and culture at the University of Göttingen.

On December 16, 1933, Heidegger, unbeknownst to Baumgarten, wrote a damning letter to Dr. Vogel, head of the organization of Nazi professors at Göttingen:

By family background and intellectual orientation Dr. Baumgarten comes from the Heidelberg circle of liberal-democratic intellectuals around Max Weber. During his stay here [at Freiburg] he was anything but a National Socialist. I am surprised to hear he is lecturing at Göttingen: I cannot imagine on the basis of what scientific works he got the license to teach.

After failing with me, he frequented, very actively, the Jew Fränkel, who used to teach at Göttingen and just recently was fired from here [under Nazi racial laws]....

Have there been any changes in his political attitude since then? I know of none. Unquestionably his stay in the United States—during which he became very Americanized—allowed him to acquire a solid understanding of that country and its inhabitants. But I have excellent reasons for doubting the sureness of his political instincts and the capacity of his judgment.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Vogel, to his credit, found Heidegger's letter so "charged with hatred" as to be unusable, and he filed it. But fourteen months later Vogel's successor dug out the letter and sent it to the minister of education in Berlin, who thereupon suspended Baumgarten from teaching and recommended he leave Germany. Through a friendly secretary at Göttingen University Baumgarten got to see and copy out Heidegger's letter; and on appeal he managed to keep his job.

In 1946, after a de-Nazification committee had confronted him with the letter, Heidegger sent Baumgarten a brief note. The present time, he wrote, "is a peril before which the past slips away. Sophocles has a saying about time that may help us think of the future: 'It leaves tasks unopenable and

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<sup>13</sup>The information on Heidegger and Staudinger is from Ott, *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins* (1984), pp. 124-126 and "'Es dürfte eher Entlassung in Frage kommen...," *Badische Zeitung* (December 6, 1984), p. 10.

<sup>14</sup>Fariás, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, p. 235. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Notizien zu Martin Heidegger*, ed. Hans Saner (Munich: Piper, 1978), p. 14f.

takes appearances back into itself." Perhaps Heidegger thought this explained matters, or constituted an apology.<sup>15</sup>

In his 1933 letter on Baumgarten Heidegger mentions "the Jew Fränkel"—that is, Eduard Fränkel, the noted professor of classics at Freiburg. It is interesting that five months earlier Heidegger as rector had come to the defense of three Jewish professors, Siegfried Thannhauser, Georg von Hevesy (Nobel laureate in chemistry in 1943), and Fränkel, all of whom were about to be fired for racial reasons. In a letter of July 12, 1933, Heidegger appealed the dismissal of Von [p. 41] Hevesy and Fränkel, but again, as with Staudinger, his real reasons were pragmatic. He assured the local Ministry of Education of his own "full awareness of the necessity of implementing unconditionally the law on reconstructing the Civil Service" (the decree "cleansing" the civil service of Jews); nonetheless, he thought that firing two Jews of such international renown might prove embarrassing to Germany's foreign policy interests "in intellectually prominent and politically important non-Jewish circles abroad."<sup>16</sup>

The question of whether—or to what degree—Heidegger was an anti-Semite is much debated. On the one hand, Heidegger claimed after the war that his defense of certain Jewish professors and his support for certain of his Jewish students during the Thirties proved that he was not anti-Semitic; this was before the Baumgarten letter became known publicly. On the other hand, as we have seen, Fariás and Ott have documented despicable conduct concerning Jews. And from other sources we now know that after 1933 Heidegger declined to direct the doctoral dissertations of Jewish students: he sent all those students to his Catholic colleague Professor Martin Honecker. Toni Cassirer, the widow of Ernst Cassirer, claimed that she had heard of Heidegger's "inclination to anti-Semitism" by 1929.

Nonetheless, for all his opposition to Heidegger from 1936 on, Karl Jaspers, whose wife was Jewish, never took Heidegger for an anti-Semite, even though in June of 1933, when Jaspers ridiculed the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Heidegger replied, "But there is a dangerous international alliance of Jews." In 1983 Heidegger's close friend Heinrich Petzet wrote, as if no explanations were needed, that Heidegger felt ill at ease with big-city life, "and this was especially true of that mundane spirit of Jewish circles, which is at home in the metropolitan centers of the West. But this attitude of his should not be misunderstood as anti-Semitism, although it has often been interpreted that way."<sup>17</sup>

(3) Finally there is the case of Max Müller, who was to become one of Germany's best-known Catholic intellectuals after the war.<sup>18</sup> From 1928 to 1933 Müller was a member of the inner circle of Heidegger's most gifted students. But he was also an active anti-Nazi, and when Heidegger

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<sup>15</sup>Heidegger's 1946 letter is cited in Wilhelm Schoeppe, Heidegger und Baumgarten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, (May 28, 1983), p. 7. Schoeppe also refutes the attack on the authenticity of Heidegger's 1933 letter made by Jargen Busche, "Der Standpunkt Martin Heideggers," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 30, 1983), p. 7. [p. 41]

<sup>16</sup>[p. 41] The text of Heidegger's letter appears in Ott, *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichtsvereins* (1984), p. 121f. The word "non-Jewish" ("nicht jüdischen") is omitted in Ott's "Es dürfte...", p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>On Heidegger's defense of Jewish scholars see "Only a God Can Save Us," pp. 50-52. On dissertations: Bernd Martin and Gottfried Schramm, "Ein Gespräch mit Max Müller," *Freiburger Universitätsblätter*, Vol. 92 (June, 1986), p. 24. Toni Cassirer, *Mein Leben mit Ernst Cassirer* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), p. 182. On the "dangerous international alliance of Jews," see Jaspers, *Notizen zu Martin Heidegger*, pp. 15, 257, and 274, and also *Philosophische Autobiographie*, expanded edition (Munich: Piper, 1977), p. 101. And Petzet, *Auf einen Stern zugehen*, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>Martin and Schramm, "Ein Gespräch mit Max Müller," p. 25ff.

entered the NSDAP on May 1, 1933, Müller stopped attending his lectures. Seven months later Heidegger, as *Führer*-rector, fired Müller from his position as a student leader because he was "not politically appropriate."

Then in 1938 Müller discovered that Heidegger had blocked him from getting a teaching position at Freiburg by informing the university administration that whereas Müller was an excellent scholar, he was "unfavorably disposed" toward the regime.

With his career in jeopardy Müller went to Heidegger's office and asked him to strike that one sentence from the letter. As Müller recalls, Heidegger calmly explained that he had been asked about Müller's politics and "I gave the answer that simply corresponded to the truth." He added: "As a Catholic you must know that everyone has to tell the truth." With that, Müller's career was in shreds. As he was leaving, Heidegger asked him not to take things badly. Müller replied, "It's not a question of taking things badly. It's a question of my existence." In November of 1938 the Education Ministry in Berlin informed Müller that he had been denied a lectureship "for reasons of world-view and politics."

Finally, there is Heidegger's stunning silence about the Holocaust. For the hundreds of pages that he published on the dehumanizing powers of modern civilization, for all the ink he spilled decrying the triumph of a spiritless technology, Heidegger never saw fit, as far as I know, to publish a single word on the death camps. Instead, he pleaded ignorance of the fate of the Jews during the war—even though the Jewish population of Baden, where Heidegger lived, dropped dramatically from 20,600 in 1933 to 6400 in 1940, and even though virtually all of the 6400 who remained were deported to France on October 22, 1940, and thence to Izbica, the death camp near Lublin. As Heidegger was lecturing on Nietzsche in the Forties, there were only 820 Jews left in all of Baden. We have his statements about the six million unemployed at the beginning of the Nazi regime, but not a word about the six million who were dead at the end of it.<sup>19</sup>

Heidegger used to enjoy telling a humorous story about the rarified philosophy of his teacher Husserl, who, when asked why he had omitted the topic of history from a series of lectures he was preparing for London, told Heidegger, "I forgot it!" Did Heidegger, who had so much to say about the "recollection of Being," suffer from a far deeper forgetfulness?

But even though he did not publish anything on the Holocaust, he did mention it in two unpublished lectures and in at least one letter. All three texts are characterized by a rhetoric, a cadence, a point of view that are damning beyond commentary.

On December 1, 1949, in a lecture entitled "Das Ge-Stell" (The Con-Figuration") Heidegger listed some of the things technology had done to the world:

Agriculture is now a motorized food-industry—in essence, the same as the manufacturing of corpses in [p. 42] gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of nations [it was the year of the Berlin blockade] the

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<sup>19</sup>On the fate of Jews in Baden see John-peter Horst Grill, *The Nazi Movement in Baden, 1920-1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 354f.; there Grill also notes that on May 23, 1943, and July 1, 1944, the Baden weekly *Der Führer* (which "was distributed mostly to party members who used it to obtain party information," p. 130) published threats about the extermination of the Jews: "At the end of this war, [Kreisleiter Hans] Rothacker was quoted as saying, the Jews will have been destroyed just as Hitler had predicted in 1939."



same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.<sup>20</sup>Heidegger in

That same day, in another lecture, "Die Gefahr" ("The Danger"), Heidegger remarked:

Hundreds of thousands die en masse. Do they *die*? They succumb. They are done in. Do they die? They become mere quanta, items in an inventory in the business of manufacturing corpses. Do they die? They are liquidated inconspicuously in extermination camps. And even apart from that, right now millions of impoverished people are perishing from hunger in China.

But to die is to endure death in its essence. To be able to die means to be capable of this endurance. We are capable of this only if the essence of death makes our own essence possible.<sup>21</sup>

Two years earlier, on January 20, 1948, Heidegger answered the letter of his former student, Herbert Marcuse, who had inquired why he had not yet spoken out about the Nazi terror and the murder of six million Jews. Heidegger responded by comparing the Holocaust to the Soviet Union's treatment of Germans in Eastern Europe:

I can only add that instead of the word "Jews" [in your letter] there should be the word "East Germans," and then exactly the same [terror] holds true of one of the Allies, with the difference that everything that has happened since 1945 is public knowledge world-wide, whereas the bloody terror of the Nazis was in fact kept a secret from the German people.<sup>22</sup>

## II.

It is not as if, after the war, Heidegger made no attempt to explain or justify his actions under the Nazi regime. In fact, he did a lot of explaining. In 1946 he produced three texts (one for a de-Nazification

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<sup>20</sup>[p. 42] "Ackerbau ist jetzt motorisierte Ernährungsindustrie, im Wesen das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Leichen in Gaskammern und Vernichtungslagern, das Selbe wie die Blockade und Aushungerung von Ländern, das Selbe wie die Fabrikation von Wasserstoffbomben." Cited in Wolfgang Schirmacher, *Technik und Gelassenheit* (Freiburg: Alber, 1983), p. 25, from p. 25 of a typescript of the lecture. All but the first five words of the sentence is omitted from the published version of the lecture, "Die Frage nach der Technik," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Neske: Pfullingen, 1967), Vol. I, p. 14, ad fin.; "The Question Concerning Technology," trans., William Lovitt, in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Harper and Row, 1977), p. 296.

<sup>21</sup>"Hunderttausende sterben in Massen. Sterben sie? Sie kommen um. Sie werden umgelegt. Sterben sie? Sie werden Bestandstücke eines Bestandes der Fabrikation von Leichen. Sterben sie? Sie werden in Vernichtungslagern unauffällig liquidiert. Und auch ohne Solches—Millionen verelenden jetzt in China durch den Hunger in ein Verenden.

Sterben aber heisst, den Tod in sein Wesen austragen. Sterben können heisst, diesen Austrag vermögen. Wir vermögen es nur, wenn das Wesen des Todes unser Wesen mag." From a typescript of "Die Gefahr," p. 47. My emphasis in the English.

<sup>22</sup>"...kann ich nur hinzufügen, dass statt 'Juden' 'Ostdeutsche' zu stehen hat, und dann genau so gilt für einen der Alliierten, mit dem Unterschied, dass alles, was seit 1945 geschieht, der Weltöffentlichkeit bekannt ist, während der blutige Terror der Nazis vor dem deutschen Volk tatsächlich geheimgehalten worden ist." I am grateful to Professor Theodore Kisiel for this text from the Marcuse archives in Frankfurt. Marcuse's letters to Heidegger on this matter are published in *Pflasterstrand* (Frankfurt), Vol. 209, No. 4 (May 17, 1985), pp. 42-44.

committee, one for the rector of Freiburg University, and one for his own files), and in 1966 he gave a long interview to *Der Spiegel*, which at his request was published posthumously.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, a certain rationale for his support of Nazism does emerge from these *apologias pro vita sua*. However, so riddled are they with omissions, historical errors, and self-serving interpretations that these texts can be used only with the greatest caution and a constant cross check of the facts.

One of the most glaring examples of how, after the war, Heidegger tampered with his earlier statements about Nazism is found in the published version (1953) of a lecture course he gave in 1935, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. In the book, which was issued eight years after the fall of the Third Reich, Heidegger attacks certain hack Nazi philosophers and, in the process, makes a daring affirmation:

The stuff which is now being bandied about as the philosophy of National Socialism—but which has not the least to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely, the encounter between global technology and modern man)—is casting its net in these troubled waters of "values" and "totalities."<sup>24</sup>

The publication of this passage in 1953 caused a great stir in Germany. Was it, as many argued, an attempt by Heidegger to defend a philosophically "good Nazism" as distinct from the "bad Nazism" of the NSDAP? And even if Heidegger did make this statement in 1935, shouldn't he have struck it out of the published version in 1953?

Heidegger responded to such questions in a letter to the editors of *Die Zeit* (September 24, 1953):

It would have been easy to drop the aforementioned sentence, along with other ones you cite, from the printed manuscript. But I did not, and I will keep it there in the future because, for one thing, the sentences belong historically to the lecture course....<sup>25</sup>

And again, in the *Spiegel* interview of 1966, Heidegger reiterated that the sentence as printed in 1953 corresponded exactly to the text of the handwritten manuscript from which he had lectured in 1935—no changes. However, he said he had not read the comment in parentheses during the actual course because even without it "I was sure my listeners understood correctly."<sup>26</sup>

But now we know that Heidegger [p. 43] intentionally misrepresented the facts. First: in 1935 he actually spoke of the inner truth and greatness not of "this movement" (a more generalized political reference) but rather of National Socialism. Second: in 1953, when Professor Hartmut Buchner was

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<sup>23</sup>Appendixes B and C in Karl Moehling, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 264-272; Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," trans. Karsten Harries, *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 29 (1975-1976), pp. 481-502; and "'Only a God Can Save Us.'" See also Heidegger's untitled letter in *Der Spiegel*, (February 7, 1966), p. 12.

<sup>24</sup>Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Yale University Press, 1959), p. 199; in German (cf. n. 3, above), p. 208.

<sup>25</sup>Heidegger, "Heidegger über Heidegger," *Die Zeit* (September 24, 1953), p. 18, to be taken with Christian E. Lewalter, "Wie liest man 1953 Sätze von 1935?" *Die Zeit* (August 13, 1953), p. 6; and Jürgen Habermas, "Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger denken," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (July 25, 1953).

<sup>26</sup>"'Only a God Can Save Us,'" p. 55.

helping Heidegger correct the galley proofs of the forthcoming book, Buchner saw in them the original 1935 phrase—"the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism," with no explanatory phrase following<sup>27</sup> and he warned Heidegger to change the sentence lest his intentions be misunderstood. But Heidegger responded: "That I cannot do: it would be a falsification of history. I said it that way then, and if today's readers do not want to understand what was really meant by it in the context of the whole lecture course, then I cannot help them."<sup>27</sup>

Nonetheless, a few weeks later, with out Buchner's knowledge, Heidegger did alter the printed text. He changed "National Socialism" to the more general political term "this movement," and he added the explanatory comment about technology that now appears in parentheses—thereby reading back into 1935 his much later, and in fact revised, understanding of the historical role of Nazism. And yet, to the day he died, he continued to maintain that his 1935 lecture notes read exactly that way and that he had never tampered with them.

The matter could be easily settled, of course, by checking Heidegger's hand written manuscript of the 1935 lecture course. But in the Heidegger archives in Marbach, West Germany, that page of the original manuscript is missing.<sup>28</sup>

All this is to say that caution is in order when one reads Heidegger's postwar interpretations of his actions and motives between 1933 and 1945. Some matters are trivial. For example, during his 1945 de-Nazification proceedings Heidegger wrote: "I neither attended the Party assemblies, nor wore the Party pin, nor began my lectures and addresses after 1934 with the so-called German salute [*Heil Hitler*]." But in fact there is a picture of Heidegger with a Nazi emblem, and Karl Lowith saw him wearing a swastika pin in Rome in 1936. Moreover, Professor James Luther Adams reports that Heidegger gave the "*Heil Hitler*" salute before and after his lectures as late as 1936.<sup>29</sup>

Other matters are not so trivial. For example, Heidegger's claim that the Nazi minister of education and some university professors "conspired" against him as rector, and that he dramatically resigned under protest in February of 1934, has now been demolished by Professor Ott's research. Against Heidegger's account Ott finds that in April of 1934 the Ministry of Education still expected that Heidegger would be continuing in office and that Heidegger resigned because he had made too many academic enemies in his role as *Führer*-rector, in part by forcing deans of his own choosing on departments that did not want them and by trying, as he himself put it, to "tear down departmental barriers." (In a more grandiose reading of the faculty's opposition to him, Heidegger claimed in 1945 that "the case of the rectorate 1933/34 would seem to be a sign of the metaphysical state of the essence of science: attempts at renewing it no longer have any effect, and no one can stop the transformation of

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<sup>27</sup>[p. 43] Hartmut Buchner, "Fragmentarisches," in Günther Neske, ed. *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1977), p. 49.

<sup>28</sup>Petra Jaeger, "Nachwort der Herausgeberin," in *Gesamtausgabe*, Part II, Vol. 40, p. 234. In a further twist that comes down to the same thing, Prof. Walter Bröcker, who followed the course in 1935, remembers distinctly that Heidegger did not say either "National Socialism" or "this movement" but "*the movement*." He writes: "And by the phrase 'the movement' the Nazis themselves, and they *alone*, meant 'National Socialism.' That is why I could never forget Heidegger's word 'the.'" Cited in Pöggeler, "Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis," p. 59, n. 11.

<sup>29</sup>Adams, letter to me, October 21, 1974, and letter in *The New York Times*, February 23, 1988. Heidegger also mentioned that the Nazis watched him closely after 1934; but Grill (p. 317) points out that even the new deans that the Nazis themselves appointed were closely watched.

its essence into pure technology.")<sup>30</sup>

Equally suspect are his claims that he broke with the regime and its projects in 1934. Karl Lowith reports a conversation he had with Heidegger in Rome in April of 1936.

He also left no doubt about his faith in Hitler; only two things had he underestimated: the vitality of the Christian Churches and the obstacles to the Anschluss of Austria. Now, as before, he was convinced that National Socialism was the prescribed path for Germany; one simply had to "hold on" long enough. The only thing that seemed questionable to him was the endless organizing, at the expense of vital energies.<sup>31</sup>

And later that summer, in his course on Schelling, Heidegger had some good things to say about the leaders of European fascism, even if he thought they had not gone far enough:

The two men who, each in his own way, have introduced a counter movement to nihilism—Mussolini and Hitler—have learned from Nietzsche, each in an essentially different way. But even with that, Nietzsche's authentic metaphysical domain has not yet come into its own.<sup>32</sup>

In any case, regardless of when he took some distance from Hitler and the party, Heidegger's often repeated explanation of his involvement in the Nazi regime contains few surprises and goes something like this:

Like many German intellectuals after the Great War, Heidegger thought Western civilization was on the verge of total collapse. (His Bosch-like vision of the impending apocalypse is cited at the beginning of this essay.) For Heidegger, Europe had entered upon the climactic—in fact, the "eschatological"—phase of a "forgottenness of Being" that had plagued the [p. 44] West since Plato. Having experienced the exhaustion of the Platonic-Christian tradition of meaning, the West was stumbling like a drunken Dmitri Karamazov into the dark night of a global technology that Nietzsche had long predicted and that Heidegger thought Ernst Junger had accurately described in his essay "Die totale Mobilmachung" and his book *Der Arbeiter*.<sup>33</sup>

However, hiding *behind* or *within* this dreary age of technology was its potentially redemptive

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<sup>30</sup>Ott, *Zeitschrift des Breisgau-Geschichts vereins* (1984), p. 118, and *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* (1984), pp. 355-357. Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion," p. 478, and "The Rectorate," p. 497.

<sup>31</sup>Lowith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933*, p. 57.

<sup>32</sup>The text has been omitted from the published version of the course, *Schellings Abhandlung "Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit" (1809)* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971). It is cited by Carl Ulmer in *Der Spiegel* (May 2, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>33</sup>[p. 44] Ernst Jünger, *Werke* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1960ff.), respectively Vol. V, pp. 123-147 and Vol. VI, pp. 9-329; also *ÔLe travailleur planétaire: Entretien avec Ernst Jünger*, ed. Frédéric de Towarnicki, in *Martin Heidegger*, ed. Michel Haar, *Cahiers de l'Herne* (1983), pp. 145-150. Cf. Julius Evola, *L' "Operaio" nel pensiero di Ernst Jünger* (Rome: Volpe, 1974). On the collapse of the West: texts in Moehling, *Martin Heidegger*, pp. 264 and 31; and Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion," p. 479ff. Eschatology of Being: Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell (Harper and Row, 1975), p. 18.

"essence": the self concealing (and therefore long overlooked) "mystery of Being" which, like a cosmic power, apportioned to each epoch of Western history its finite world of meaning. The process whereby Being dispensed meaning to each new age, while keeping itself concealed, Heidegger called "the history of Being." And in this fateful drama, which stretched from 600 BC to today, the pre-Socratic philosophers held a privileged position. They had been granted a brief, penumbral vision of the mystery of Being just before it slipped into oblivion with Plato and left behind in its place the cheap substitute called "metaphysics."

For Heidegger, who stood at the other end of the history of Being, metaphysics was a nightmare from which he was trying to awake. Western philosophy had culminated in nihilism, and Heidegger thought his mission was to help European culture recover the long-forgotten mystery of Being and thereby find its way through the tortured night of nihilism and on to a better dawn.

And as fate would have it, the Germans, as a unique "Western-historical people of poets and thinkers," were destined to play a special role in this mission of saving the West. At the beginning of the history of Being—the First Origin (*der erste Anfang*)—the Greeks alone had had the privilege of glimpsing Being before it sunk into oblivion. And today, in what Heidegger called the Second Origin (*der andere Anfang*), the Germans were destined to lead the way in "recollecting Being" in a new age beyond technology.

Why was the German *Volk* fated to play such a special role in the coming of the Second Origin? One reason was that (as Stanislaus Breton used to put it) "Being speaks Greek"—and Heidegger thought that German, unlike other languages had a unique relation to that ancient language of the First Origin. Therefore, German poetry (especially Hölderlin's) and German thought (especially Heidegger's) were particularly qualified to reflect on and celebrate the long-forgotten mystery of Being. In 1966 Heidegger discussed the return to Being in the Second Origin:

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

HEIDEGGER: I think of the special inner kinship between the German language and the language and thought of the Greeks. This is something that the French confirm for me again and again today. When they begin to think [about the mystery of Being], they speak German. They assure me that they do not succeed with their own language.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, a year later, when discussing a possible translation of *Sein und Zeit* into Spanish, Heidegger told Victor Farías that he did not think Romance languages were capable of getting to the essence of Being.

Although these notions were fully developed only after the mid-Thirties, nonetheless even in their inchoate form they were the presuppositions that Heidegger brought to his encounter with the Nazi movement in the early Thirties, and without them we cannot understand his political engagement. Heidegger wanted nothing less than, in his words, "the complete overturning of our German existence"—beginning with the university system—so as to bring about the spiritual rebirth of the West. And with a blindness and naiveté that only a philosopher could muster, he chose to ride the tiger of Nazism to what he thought would be the greatest cultural revolution since Plato.

For Heidegger, saving the West entailed, of necessity, saving Germany from the degradation to which the Treaty of Versailles had reduced her. To that end Heidegger began to support Hitler and the

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<sup>34</sup> "Only a God Can Save Us," p. 62. By "the French" perhaps Heidegger had in mind his disciple, the late Professor Jean Beaufret.

Nazis, at the latest by the spring of 1932.<sup>35</sup> He saw in the NSDAP much more than just a political program that might pull Germany out of the Depression. Although he never accepted the party ideology in its entirety, particularly its racism and biologism, he did see Nazism as a movement that could halt the spread of Marxism and realize the ultraconservative vision of one of his favorite political theorists, Friedrich Naumann (1860-1919): the vision of a strong nationalism and a militantly anticommunist socialism, combined under a charismatic leader who would fashion a middle-European empire that preserved the spirit and traditions of pre-industrial Germany even as it appropriated, in moderation, the gains of modern technology.<sup>36</sup>

The immediate concern governing Heidegger's bizarre "Greek-German Axis"—his weird mixture of metaphysical ethnocentrism and ultra-conservative nationalism—was the political and cultural imperative of saving Germany from the two great dangers of the century: Bolshevism and "Americanism."

This Europe, which in its ruinous blindness is forever on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in a great pincers, squeezed between Russia on one side and America on the other. From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same: the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man.... We [Germans] are caught in a pincers. Situated in the center, our nation incurs the severest pressure. It is the nation with the most neighbors and hence is the most endangered. With all this, it is the most metaphysical of nations. We are certain of this vocation....<sup>37</sup>

Whatever hesitations Heidegger might have had about Nazism in the later years of the Reich, he never wavered in his hatred of both communism and "Americanism." Soon after the United States entered the war, Heidegger told his students (as if Pearl Harbor had not been bombed, as if Germany had not first declared war on the United States):

The entry of America into this planetary war is not an entry into history. No, it is already the last American act of America's history-lessness and self-destruction. This act is the renunciation of the Origin. It is a decision for lack-of-Origin.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Pöggeler, "Den Führer führen?", p. 62 and n. 18. Heidegger's correspondence with Bultmann between 1927 and 1933 shows that he placed great hopes in National Socialism: Antje Bultmann Lemke, "Der unveröffentlichte Nachlass von Rudolf Bultmann," in Bernd Jaspert, ed., *Rudolf Bultmanns Werk und Wirkung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), p. 203.

<sup>36</sup>Friedrich Naumann, *Central Europe*, trans. Christabel M. Meredith (Knopf, 1917) and *Werke* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1964), esp. *Demokratie und Kaisertum* (1900) and "Der Kaiser im Volksstaat" (1917), respectively Vol. II, pp. 1-351 and pp. 461-521. Cf. "'Only a God Can Save Us,'" p. 48. Heidegger's enthusiasm for Hitler extended even to the *Führer's* delicate hands ("sehen Sie nur seine wunderbaren Hände an!" cited in Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, p. 101); so too Toynbee ("He had beautiful hands"), Arnold J. Toynbee, *Acquaintances* (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 281.

<sup>37</sup>*Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 37f.; (in German, cf. n. 3, p. 40ff.). In 1932 Jaspers held a similar position: cf. Eduard Baumgarten in Klaus Piper and Hans Saner, eds., *Erinnerungen an Karl Jaspers* (Munich: Piper, 1974), p. 127.

<sup>38</sup>Hölderlin's Hymn "Der Ister" (1942), *Gesamtausgabe* Part II, Vol. 53 (1984), p.68; cf. p. 179.

In fact, Heidegger read all of World War II through the lens of this surcharged metaphysical vision of history. When the panzers of the Third Reich rolled into Paris on June 14, 1940, Heidegger suggested to his students that the defeat of France was a fated event, a moment in the collapse of Western metaphysics and specifically of Cartesian subjectivity.

These days we are witnesses to a mysterious law of history which states that at a certain point a people no longer measures up to the metaphysics that has sprung from its own history; and this happens precisely when that metaphysics has been transformed into the absolute.<sup>39</sup>

[p. 45] And he touted the Germans' moral superiority during the war, especially after the British destroyed Vichy France's fleet on July 3, 1940:

When the British recently blew to smithereens the French fleet docked at Oran, it was from their point of view "justified"; for "justified" merely means what serves the enhancement of power. At the same time, what this suggests is that we [Germans] dare not and cannot ever justify that action....<sup>40</sup>

But soon enough, in pursuit of their mission to save the West, the "Western-historical people of poets and thinkers" fell on hard times. In the winter of 1942-1943, as Hitler's Sixth Army was crumbling at Stalingrad, Heidegger told his students that victory had a deeper meaning for the "most metaphysical of nations."

It is important to realize that, when it comes to "victory," this historical people has already won and is unconquerable so long as it remains the people of poets and thinkers that it is in its essence, so long as it does not fall victim to the ever-pressing and thus fearful threat of straying from, and thereby misunderstanding, its essence.<sup>41</sup>

There was a good deal of talk in those days about "saving the West," and much of it had to do with saving Europe from Bolshevism. For example, at the end of January 1943, Hitler telegraphed General Friedrich von Paulus at Stalingrad: "Forbid surrender. The army will hold its position to the last soldier and the last cartridge, and by its heroic endurance will make an unforgettable contribution to the building of the defensive front and the salvation of Western civilization."<sup>42</sup> That summer, as the Red Army was rolling the *Wehrmacht* back toward Central Europe, Heidegger, for his part, proclaimed to his students that "the Germans and they alone [*nur sie*] can save the West for its history." (No doubt as a philosopher he meant something very profound by that.) Indeed:

The planet is in flames. The essence of man is out of joint. Only from the Germans can there come a world historical reflection—if, that is, they find and preserve "the German essence" ["das Deutsche"]

that is,

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<sup>39</sup>Nietzsche, trans. David Farrell Krell, Vol. IV (Harper and Row, 1982), p. 116.

<sup>40</sup>[p. 45] Nietzsche, p. 144f.

<sup>41</sup>Parmenides (1942-43), *Gesamtausgabe* Part II, Vol. 54 (1982), p. 114.

<sup>42</sup>Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 665.

[if] they prove strong enough, in readiness for death, to rescue the Origin from the small-mindedness of the modern world, and to preserve it in its simple beauty.<sup>43</sup>

After the war, when he was forced to account for his actions, Heidegger laid the blame for everything—without differentiation—not on Versailles or Hitler or the Depression or imperialism, but on an impersonal planetary force that lay beyond anyone's responsibility or control: the Will to Power. Everything wrong with the modern world was a manifestation of that. (This is why Heidegger could not even see, much less understand, the Holocaust for itself.) In a memorandum written during his de-Nazification hearings he spoke of "the universal rule of the Will to Power within global history":

Today everything stands within this reality, whether it is called communism or fascism or world democracy.

From the standpoint of the reality of the Will to Power I saw even then [1939-1940] what *is*. This reality of the Will to Power can be expressed, with Nietzsche, in the proposition: "God is dead." . . . This means: The supersensible world, more specifically the world of the Christian God, has lost its effective force in history.... If that were not the case, would World War I have been possible? Even more: If that were not the case, would World War II have become possible?<sup>44</sup>

That statement has about as much explanatory power, and displays as much historical and political wisdom, as the claim that the world is in the grip of Original Sin. Surely if Adam and Eve had not fallen from grace, neither World War I nor World War II would have happened.

### III.

It seems that the Nazis tired of Heidegger before he tired of them. Already at the beginning of his rectorate (May 1933) Baden's minister of education, Otto Wacker, criticized Heidegger for his "private Nazism," his advocacy of a spiritual revolution that did not promote the NSDAP's program of racism, biologism, and the politicization of the sciences. Indeed, Heidegger's politics (if they can be called that) were inspired, more by Hölderlin than by Hitler, more by his idiosyncratic vision of Western history than by Nazi mythologies. After the war he frequently insisted that he had tried to save Nazism from its worst instincts: he wanted to help Hitler rise above Party interests and become the leader of *all* Germans. But Heidegger's ultraconservative Wilhelmian view of the state, combined with the fervent anti-Communism of the Catholic peasant in him, played right into the hands of the regime. He was their "useful idiot."

Heidegger is on record as saying that his eyes were opened to the real intentions of the Nazi regime only on June 30, 1934, the Night of the Long Knives, when Hitler began the three-day bloodbath that left Ernst Röhm and well over a hundred members of the SA dead. After that date, Heidegger said in 1945, "one could know beyond the shadow of a doubt with whom one was dealing."<sup>45</sup>

Is it possible that it took Heidegger a year and a half—from Hitler's seizure of power in January of 1933 to the murder of Röhm in mid-1934—before he managed to see what was going on in Germany? How could he not have known earlier? In 1945 he railed against those Germans who he

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<sup>43</sup>Heraklit (1943), *Gesamtausgabe*, Part II, Vol. 55 (1979), pp. 108, 123, and 181.

<sup>44</sup>"The Rectorate," p. 485.

<sup>45</sup>"The Rectorate." p. 499.



claimed did nothing to correct the regime and yet later declared him guilty for at least trying:

And when it comes to looking for guilty people and judging them for their guilt: Isn't essential neglect also a form of guilt? The people who even then [1933] were so endowed with prophesy that they saw everything [p. 46] that was coming as it came (I was not so wise)—why did they wait almost ten years before opposing the disaster? Why not in 1933? If they thought they knew what was going on, why didn't they stand up right then and start radically turning everything towards the good?<sup>46</sup>

He may have been right about all those *vates ex eventu* with their postwar wisdom and self-interested finger-pointing. However, he neglects to mention those who voted with their feet or resisted very early in 1933. In any case the silence of the "good Germans" during the Third Reich in no way absolves Heidegger from his own blindness to the Nazi terror, which was at work from the very beginning of the regime. Surely the Nazi program was clear to everyone, long before Heidegger joined the party. On February 1, 1933, Hitler called for the extermination of Marxism and three days later he assumed the right to ban the meetings and publications of rival parties. On February 28, the day after the Reichstag fire, constitutional government was suspended and replaced with a permanent state of emergency. All important civil liberties were also suspended: the rights of personal freedom, free expression, free assembly, and the privacy of the telephone, telegraph, and mails.

On March 7, Hitler arrested all eighty-one of the Communist deputies who had been duly elected to the Reichstag the day before, and on March 8, Wilhelm Frick, minister of the interior, announced the opening of the first concentration camps, one of them at Heuberg, close by Heidegger's home town of Messkirch.

On March 23, the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act, giving Hitler absolute powers to make laws and change the constitution. This decree marked the definitive end of parliamentary government in Germany. To support Hitler after that date was to support dictatorship.

On April 5, two weeks before Heidegger became rector of Freiburg University, the Nazi regime issued its first anti-Semitic laws for the purpose of "cleansing" the civil service of Jews. (In 1945 Heidegger admitted that this *Säuberungs aktion* "often threatened to exceed its goals and limits"—which implies that he thought it did have some legitimate goals and limits.<sup>47</sup> Six months after the "cleansing" laws were promulgated, Heidegger applied them to Jewish students at Freiburg University.) On May 1, Heidegger, now rector for ten days, very publicly joined the Nazi party on the newly proclaimed National Day of Honor for Labor. On May 2, the SA and the SS occupied labor union offices throughout Germany, arrested hundreds of labor leaders, and sent them to concentration camps.

On May 10, twenty thousand books were burned in German cities. By the end of the year one thousand titles would be banned. On May 20, Heidegger publicly sent Hitler a telegram stating his willingness to cooperate in the "alignment" ("*Gleichschaltung*") of the universities with the NSDAP's programs.

What did Heidegger know and when, did he know it? The point is: what he knew, he generally liked. It corresponded, in his words, to "what mattered." After the war he described his convictions in

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<sup>46</sup>[p. 46] "The Rectorate," p. 486. It is possible that one of the people Heidegger had in mind was Jaspers, whose *Die geistige Situation unserer Zeit* appeared in 1931 and who on December 22, 1945, wrote a letter critical of Heidegger to the de-Nazification committee; for the contents see Ott, *Historisches Jahrbuch* (1985), p. 105f., n. 28.

<sup>47</sup>"The Rectorate," p. 492.

1933:

The positive possibilities I then saw in the movement had to be under scored and affirmed in order to prepare a gathering of all the capable forces, a gathering grounded not just in facts, but in what mattered. Immediate and mere opposition would not have been in keeping with my conviction at the time (which was never blind faith in the Party). Nor would it have been prudent.<sup>48</sup>

During his de-Nazification hearings Heidegger claimed, in his own defense, that in 1934 he began to speak out in his lecture courses against the philosophical bases of Nazism, especially biologism and the Will to Power.

After resigning the rectorate it was clear to me that the continuance of my teaching had to lead to an increasing resistance to the bases of the National Socialist worldview. This did not require any special attacks on my part; it would be enough to articulate my basic philosophical position in contrast to the dogmatic obduracy and primitiveness of the biologism proclaimed by [Alfred] Rosenberg.<sup>49</sup>

Heidegger maintained that his opposition to the regime was not lost on his students, and some of those who heard his lectures confirm this. Nonetheless, it seems Heidegger eventually saw that this "intellectual resistance" did not amount to much. In 1945 he wrote:

But in the following years, teaching was more a monologue of essential thinking with itself. Perhaps here and there it struck people and woke them up, but it did not shape itself into a dynamic structure of specific conduct, from which, in turn, there might have come something Original.<sup>50</sup>

Heidegger's rude awakening came not with the Night of the Long Knives but with the end of the war. As the Free French army approached Freiburg in the spring of 1945, he and his colleagues in the philosophy department took to the hills of the Black Forest east of the city. In the idyllic village of Wildenstein they taught their courses to the remaining students and awaited the inevitable.

While most of the other professors lived down the mountain in Leibertingen, Heidegger was lodged comfortably enough in "Werenwag," the forest house of Prince Bernhard von Sachsen-Meiningen, whose wife was in Heidegger's lecture [p. 47] course. There, on the evening of June 27, 1945, the prince threw a farewell party for the professors, complete with a piano concert and a lecture by Heidegger, who took as his theme a verse attributed to Hölderlin: "We must become poor to be rich."

Indeed, Heidegger was on the edge of poverty. He returned to Freiburg to find that the French

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<sup>48</sup>"The Rectorate," p. 486. In "'Only a God Can Save Us,'" p. 48, Heidegger says that in 1933 he was "convinced" of the "greatness and glory of this new era [*Aufbruch*]." ."

<sup>49</sup>In Moehling, *Martin Heidegger*, Appendix, B, p. 266. Cf. "'Only a God Can Save Us,'" p. 53. But Pöggeler writes that "a minimum of intellectual honesty" demands that such sentiments of resistance (which virtually all Germans had) be distinguished from cases where people sought alternatives and in many cases gave their lives: "Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis," p. 61, n. 17.

<sup>50</sup>"The Rectorate," p. 497. Re Heidegger's students: François Fédier, "Trois attaques contre Heidegger," *Critique*, Vol. 12, No. 234 (1966), pp. 903f. Walter Biemel, "Le professeur, le penseur, l'ami," in *Cahiers de l'Herne*, p. 131, and his statement cited in Moehling, "Heidegger and the Nazis," p. 38.

occupying forces were threatening to confiscate his house and give away his library, and that the university, at the insistence of the French, had set up an internal de-Nazification committee to investigate his conduct during the Third Reich. In September of 1945 the committee issued its report, which charged Heidegger with four things: having an important position in the Nazi regime; changing the structure of the university by introducing the *Führer*-principle; engaging in Nazi propaganda; and inciting students against allegedly "reactionary" professors. The debate over the report stretched well into 1946 and finally broke Heidegger's health. He suffered a nervous breakdown and in March of 1946 was admitted to a sanatorium, the Schloss Haus Baden in Badenweiler, where he remained for three weeks under the care of Dr. Viktor Baron von Gebattel.

The long and complicated de-Nazification hearings ended in March of 1949 when the State Commission for Political Purification declared Heidegger a Nazi "fellow traveler" ("*Mitläufer*") and prohibited him from any future teaching. (He had not been in the classroom since the end of the war.) But the mood of the times was changing. The university, and especially the philosophy department, came to Heidegger's defense, and in 1951 he was given emeritus status and was allowed to teach and lecture again at the university. He did so on and off into the Sixties.

4.

The point of revisiting Heidegger's involvement with Nazism is not primarily to pass judgment on the past. Nor is it born of a desire, as Heidegger once suggested, to attack the man because one cannot attack his works. Quite the contrary. The point is precisely to sift the works for what might still be of value, and what not. To do that, one must re-read his works—particularly but not exclusively those from 1933 on—with strict attention to the political movement with which Heidegger himself chose to link his ideas. To do less than that is, I believe, finally not to understand him at all.<sup>51</sup>

To be sure, an enormous amount of Heidegger's work during the Third Reich—for example, his commentaries on texts from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, and other major figures—would seem to be no more affected by his political involvement than Gottlob Frege's work on logic was vitiated by his anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, one would do well to read nothing of Heidegger's anymore without raising political questions.

To take only one example from his early philosophy: some might want to argue that much of what he says about human existence in *Being and Time* (1927) suggests a new way to understand ourselves philosophically. But then what do we do with Heidegger's remarks in that same book about "fate," "destiny," "resolve," "the historical process of a Volk," and even "truth," especially when, six years later, as we have seen, he used those very same ideas in the service of the Nazi revolution?<sup>52</sup> Similar questions must be raised about his interpretations of Hölderlin, or his reflections on the "essence of technology." Above all I believe that we can ill afford to swallow, as so many Heideggerians do, his grandiose and finally dangerous narrative about the "history of Being," with its privileged epochs and peoples, its somber insistence on the fecklessness of rational thought, its apocalyptic dirge about the present age, its conclusion that "only a god can save us."

After the war, holed up in his cabin in the Black Forest, Heidegger wrote: He who thinks greatly

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<sup>51</sup>[p. 47] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 53-73; and "Heidegger, l'enfer des philosophes," *Le Nouvel Observateur* (November 6-12, 1987), pp. 170-174, esp. p. 173: "I believe in the necessity of showing—without limit, if possible—the profound attachment of Heidegger's texts (writings and deeds) to the possibility and reality of *all* nazisms" (my emphasis).

<sup>52</sup>For example, in the text from November 11, 1933, in Schneeberger, *Nachlese* pp. 148-150. Heidegger has never clarified, or retracted, his use of these concepts in the 1933 text.

must err greatly.<sup>53</sup> Not exactly a modest statement, and apparently one more attempt to give a highblown, philosophical excuse for his political blindness, his astonishing blunders, his despicable actions during the Third Reich. We now know how greatly he "erred." The question remains about how greatly he thought. The way to answer that question is not to stop reading Heidegger but to start demythologizing him.

**End**

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<sup>53</sup>Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper and Row, 1971), p. 9.