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THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE JEWS: THE CASE OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER

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Martin Heidegger was one of the most important Western philosophers since Hegel. At least for a time, he was also a confirmed Nazi and, perhaps, a convinced anti-Semite who, unlike so many of his fellow Germans, never expressed a word of regret for the horrors perpetrated by the Third Reich. Moreover, even after ceasing to be visibly active as a Nazi, he retained his membership in the Nazi party (#312589 Gau Baden) until the very end of the war, faithfully paying his dues and assessments.

Debate concerning Heidegger's alleged anti-Semitism and his commitment to National Socialism has been carried on since the end of the war. Recently, the debate has been renewed with the publication of Victor Farias' book, Heidegger et le nazisme. Were Heidegger a lesser figure, his involvement in National Socialism would be of little concern save to historians with a special interest in twentieth-century German philosophy. Unfortunately, such is not the case. If, as some students of Heidegger contend, Heidegger was an unrepentant follower of a political movement whose most distinctive institution was the death camp, with its factory-like capacity for the extermination and incineration of as many as 25,000 human beings a day, one must either come to understand philosophy in a radically new light or one must seriously question the value of Heidegger's contribution.

Some of Heidegger's defenders insist that there is no intrinsic connection between his thought and his politics. This is a position Heidegger himself rejected. Whatever his political commitments after resigning as Rector of the University of Freiburg, he did maintain contact with a few of his former Jewish students including the philosopher Karl Löwith. Löwith has written of a conversation during a reunion of the Heidegger and Löwith families in Rome in 1936 in which Heidegger "left... no doubt concerning his faith in Hitler." Heidegger also acknowledged that his commitment to National Socialism was an intrinsic expression of his philosophy. Löwith also reported that Heidegger saw nothing "out of place" in wearing a swastika lapel pin during the entire Rome visit.

Moreover, as early as 1927 in his major work, Sein und Zeit, Heidegger implied that there is an intrinsic connection between authentic existence, thought and politics. In that work Heidegger's readers are called to "authenticity," which is characterized as honest acceptance of man's own being and which Heidegger further identifies as "resoluteness" (Entschlossenheit), that is, the authentic response to the call of conscience. In that call man, who is referred to by Heidegger as Dasein, is summoned out of his accepted, routine ways toward openness to the uncertainty and groundlessness of human existence.

As understood by Heidegger, in our era authentic existence presupposes Nietzsche's "death of God" and the total absence of any higher authority that could serve as a guide or source of behavioral norms. Heidegger would regard those who seek such guidance, such as Heidegger's contemporary, theologian Karl Barth, as leading an essentially inauthentic existence. Nevertheless, Barth, who was as important to Christian theology as Heidegger was to philosophy, was never in doubt concerning the evil of National Socialism. Barth later wrote about his experiences during the turbulent period of the Nazi seizure of power: "[I] knew where I stood and what I could not do. In the last resort, this was because I saw my dear German people beginning to worship a false God." In 1934 Barth refused to take the oath of allegiance to Hitler that was required of all German professors knowing that refusal would cost him his job. By contrast, during his tenure as rector of the University of Freiburg, Heidegger compelled his faculty colleagues to take the oath. Barth's rejection of National Socialism is all the more notable because it was by no means motivated by any kind of philosemitism, personal or theological. In a letter to Dr. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt of Berlin dated 5 September 1967, Barth wrote

I am decidedly not a philosemite, in that in personal encounters with living Jews [even Jewish Christians] I have always, so long as I can remember, had to suppress a totally irrational aversion, naturally suppressing it at once on the basis of all my presuppositions, and concealing it totally in my statements, yet still having to suppress and conceal it. Pfui! is all I can say to this in some sense allergic reaction of mine. But this is how it was and is. A good thing that this reprehensible instinct is totally alien to my sons and other better people than myself (including you). But it could have had a retrogressive effective on my doctrine of Israel.

The aversion may very well have influenced his doctrine of Israel. Barth discerned the hand of God in the Holocaust. In 1942 he wrote, "And there is no doubt that Israel hears; now less than ever can it shelter itself behind the pretext of ignorance and inability to understand. But Israel hears-and does not believe." Barth reiterated the same message in 1949, asserting that "the evil that had come to the Jewish people was the result of its unfaithfulness." For Barth Israel's alleged "unfaithfulness" was, of course, its failure to accept Christ as Israel's messiah. Nevertheless, in spite of Barth's identification of the Holocaust as God's punishment of the Jews for their unbelief, he steadfastly opposed National Socialist racism on Christian grounds. We return to the contrast between the philosopher and the theologian below.

Absent any transcendent authority, Heidegger's categories of resoluteness and authenticity appear to have an abstract, formal quality which can easily lead to sheer arbitrariness and nihilism in which anything, including the most radical National Socialist programs, is permissible. Nevertheless, Dasein cannot exist in the world without constantly being confronted with the necessity of responsible choice and decision. In Sein und Zeit Heidegger sought to escape from nihilism by seeking authority in "repeatable possibilities of existence," that is in the past. Unfortunately, Heidegger offered no criteria by which those aspects of the past deemed worthy are to be recognized. Instead, he identified "authentic repetition" with "the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero." Who that hero might be or how he might be identified was not specified.

Nevertheless, Heidegger did suggest criteria by which heroes are to be recognized. Having rejected all possibility of transcendence, Heidegger also rejected modern subjective individualism, characterizing Dasein as being-in-the-world-with-others. Such being-in-the-world has, of necessity, an historical dimension which Dasein shares with his fellows of the same Volk:

Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities...Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full authentic historicizing of Dasein.

For Heidegger, authenticity thus entails the individual's historical involvement in the destiny of his community and his generation. With the advent of National Socialism, Heidegger's choice of a hero and his involvement in the destiny of his community were to take on a sinister dimension. By his own admission, Heidegger found his hero in Hitler at least or a time. Unfortunately, as Karsten Harries has pointed out, "Due to its formal character, Being and Time invites a ...readiness to commit ourselves without prior assurance that there is a cause worthy of our commitment." Unlike Heidegger, Karl Barth was capable of discerning which causes are worthy of our commitment.

The question of the relation between Heidegger's thought and his politics, including the issue of anti-Semitism, can thus be seen as consistent with Heidegger's own views. Victor Farias, a researcher who has explored this question, has concluded that Heidegger's anti-Semitism and his Nazi commitments were neither a sport nor an

aberration. On the contrary, according to Farias, they were intrinsic to his development as a thinker. Farias argues that these attitudes were preceded by a long period of gestation going back to the anti-Semitic Christian Social movement of Austria and the region in which Heidegger began his studies, Messkirch and Constance.

Farias points to the fact that the subject of Heidegger's earliest published writing was Abraham à Santa Clara (1644-1709), a court preacher of the baroque era who had attended the same Latin school as did Heidegger at a later time. The occasion for Heidegger's initial writing was the dedicatory ceremonies for a monument to Abraham á Santa Clara at Kreenheinstetten, a village close to Messkirch, on August 15, 1910. The monument itself proved beyond the resources of the village and could only be completed with a contribution from the office of the overtly anti-Semitic Mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, concerning whom Hitler expressed his indebtedness in Mein Kampf.

Santa Clara was violently anti-Jewish and ultra-nationalist. He wrote, "Outside of the Devil, humanity has no greater enemy than the Jews...For their beliefs, they deserve not only the gallows but the funeral pyre." In Heidegger's time that pyre was finally lit. The young Heidegger saw the preacher as offering a counter-model to the relativistic culture of urban, modernity with its rapidly changing mores and its absence of fixed values. At the time Heidegger was preparing to enter the Jesuit order and become a priest.

The inauthenticity and corruption of urban, secular life, a theme effectively used by the Nazis, was to be an abiding idea in Heidegger’s thought. A persistent theme in Heidegger's thought from start to finish was the idea of authentic existence as rooted in one's local Heimat.xxx This theme was linked to a profound distrust of the world of technology. Like so many other Germans and Austrians whose roots were outside of burgeoning, multi-ethnic cities like pre-Hitler Vienna and Berlin, Heidegger had a profound distaste for the modern world of asphalt and concrete and the alienating, relativising culture it engendered. Heidegger twice turned down an invitation to become Professor of Philosophy in Berlin. On the second occasion (1934), he expressed disdain for the "world of the city" and explained that his philosophical work "belongs right in the midst of the peasant's work." <> Heidegger's friend, Heinrich Petzet, has commented on Heidegger's distaste for urban life:

If a certain type of urban life was repugnant to him, and all that pertained to the big city appeared strange to him, this was especially true of that mundane spirit of Jewish circles that dominate the great capitals of the West. But this attitude must not be understood as anti-Semitism, although it has often been interpreted that way. <>

In spite of Petzet's claim that Heidegger's repugnance of urban life and the "mundane spirit of Jewish circles that dominate" was not the view of an anti-Semite, this same repugnance was characteristic of virtually every German anti-Semite in the twenties and thirties. In the Weimar era, right-wing Germans tended to regard the Volk as "diseased" by the "polluting" presence of Jews in their midst. As Robert J. Lifton has demonstrated, this was a "disease" which an important segment of the German medical

profession came to believe could only be "cured" by the "surgical" removal of the polluting social elements. Lifton has shown that such ideas became the basis for the interpretation of extermination of "undesirables" as a therapeutic tool in the service of racial hygiene. <> Moreover, as we shall see, Heidegger's life-long friend, Eugen Fischer, was an intellectual leader of Nazi "racial science."

Heidegger's distaste for the pluralistic, modern world-epitomized by the Weimar Republic in the eyes of a decisively influential group of German intellectuals and academics-was also shared by such prominent German Protestant theologians as Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch. <> Like Heidegger, these men lent their wholehearted support to National Socialism when it came to power. One is struck, for example, by the similarity between Petzet's description of Heidegger's attitude toward urban life and the Jews and a 1937 statement by Paul Althaus, the mildest anti-Semite of the three theologians, on the Jewish problem:

It does not have to do with Jewish hatred-one can reach an agreement directly with serious Jews on this point-it does not have to do with blood, also not with the religious beliefs of Judaism. But it does involve the threat of a quite specific disintegrated and demoralizing urban spirituality, whose representative is now the Jewish Volk. (Italics added) <>

Heidegger returned to writing about Abraham a Santa Clara toward the end of his career. On May 2, 1964 Heidegger gave a lecture entitled "Concerning Abraham a Santa Clara" on the occasion of a reunion of alumni of the Messkirch Latin School. On that occasion, Heidegger praised Santa Clara as a master of language and a man of destiny. However, in spite of the Holocaust and Santa Clara's prescription of the "funeral pyre" as the "solution" of the Jewish problem, Heidegger passed over Santa Clara's virulent anti-Semitism in silence. <> As we shall see, this was typical of Heidegger's post-war indifference toward the Shoah. Heidegger held that "Dasein is historical," but had almost nothing to say concerning the bloodiest and most destructive action ever perpetrated in the name of the German Volk.

After the war, Heidegger claimed that he had ceased to participate in Nazi party activities in 1934. This claim can no longer be supported by the available evidence. <> Before turning to that evidence, however, we must take note of Heidegger's most overtly Nazi period, his term as rector of the University of Freiburg. Undoubtedly, the best source of information concerning Heidegger's political activities as rector is to be found in the university's archives. Unfortunately, the archives have been declared unavailable to the public and are likely to remain so for a long time. <>. The refusal of the university to open its archives more than fifty years after Heidegger's tenure as rector inevitably raises the question of why a research institution sees fit to hamper rather than foster historical research on this question. Nor is Freiburg the only institution that has withheld relevant historical material. Farias reports that he encountered considerable difficulty in getting material on Heidegger from a number of German archives.

Because of Heidegger's international reputation and his widely-known, pro-Nazi views, Heidegger was elected rector three months after the Nazi seizure of power. The appointment was considered an event of international importance. The faculty had hoped that Heidegger would be able to serve as an effective mediator between the university and the new National Socialist state, preserving as much of the university's autonomy as was possible under the circumstances. Heidegger disappointed these expectations.

Heidegger's inauguration on May 27, 1933 was a ceremonial event with all of the customary Nazi trappings, including an abundance of swastikas, the presence of members of the Nazi student movement in their SA uniforms and the singing of the Nazi anthem, the "Horst Wessel Lied." Heidegger's inaugural lecture, the notorious Rektoratsrede, was entitled "The Self-Affirmation of the German University." <> The address is usually taken to be one of the most explicitly pro-Nazi addresses he ever gave. For example, he expressed satisfaction in the end of academic freedom in the German university, declaring:

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 is now brought back to its truth. <>

Heidegger concluded with words of praise for "the splendor and greatness" of the current "setting out" of the German people to "fulfill its historic mission," a matter decided by "the young and the youngest strength of the people." In the context of the upheavals taking place in Germany in the spring of 1933, it is difficult to understand these words as other than an enthusiastic public endorsement of the National Socialist Machtergreifung.

Nevertheless, a word of caution is in order. It is important to note that the body of the lecture is devoted less to Nazi politics than to the question, "what is science?" and the role of the German university in fostering it. In attempting to answer that question Heidegger goes back to the beginnings of science in Greek philosophy and shows how that beginning is related to the destiny of the university and the German people. The interpretation of the Rektoratsrede as an overtly pro-Nazi document cannot be dismissed. Heidegger was a committed Nazi at the time. However, this interpretation should be read together with that of scholars such as Karsten Harries and Graeme Nicholson. <> Harries points out that "Heidegger's concern in the address is directed not so much towards the individual as towards the threatened autonomy of the German university." <>. Still, Harries observes that Heidegger "was willing to fuse his own philosophical terminology with Nazi jargon." He cites as one example the "three bonds" of the German student which are to replace the now banished "academic freedom," namely, Arbeitdienst, Wehrdienst and Wissensdienst, Labor Service, Military Service and Science Service. <> Nicholson sees the Rektoratsrede as an expression of Heidegger's attempt to put "the mark of his philosophy" on National Socialism. <> This

is keeping with Heidegger's later explanation in which he acknowledged that in 1933 he saw "in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical vocation in the Western world." <> Heidegger thus discerned at least a partial coincidence of aim and aspiration between his thought and that of the Nazi movement at the time. Later in the year, Heidegger made matters worse in an address to the students of Freiburg in his capacity as rector in which he told them, "Let not theories and 'ideas' be the rules of your being. The Fuhrer himself and he alone is German reality, today and henceforth." <> The philosopher-theologian Emil Fackenheim has commented that when Heidegger endorsed the Fuhrer's actions, he was impelled neither by fear nor by opportunism, "but rather deliberately and with the full weight of his philosophy behind it" (italics author's). <>

On October 1, 1933 Heidegger was appointed Fuhrer of the university. Unlike his appointment as rector, this appointment was made by the Nazi Minister of Education rather than the faculty senate in accordance with the Nazi Fuhrerprinzip. In a letter dated December 20, 1933, Heidegger declared that his goal had been, "the fundamental change of scientific education in accordance with the strengths and the demands of the National Socialist State" (italics author's). <> Heidegger's efforts towards the transformation of the university into a Nazi institution were especially evident in his dismissal of "non-aryan" professors and the application of Nazi discriminatory laws to Jewish students. Heidegger himself refused to accept Jewish students even during the period in which, though discriminated against, they were still permitted to attend German universities. Among the other changes was the institution of the compulsory Nazi salute at the beginning and conclusion of each class session, and the organization of a Department of Race in the university managed by the SS and offering courses taught by a specialist from the Institute of Racial Hygiene in Berlin. Heidegger himself remained a life-long friend of Eugen Fischer, Director of the Institute of Racial Hygiene since 1927 and an officer in the SS. Fischer's published works include volume seven of Forschungen zur Judenfrage, the annual journal of Walter Frank's Reichsinstitut fur Geschichte des neuen Deutschlands, co-authored with Gerhardt Kittel, Professor of New Testament Theology at Tubingen from 1926 to 1945 and Nazi party member as of May 1945. Fischer and Kittel observe:

Always, at all times, whether in the first or the twentieth century, the dream of world Jewry is sole domination of the world, now and in the future. <>

Apparently, Fischer's career as a leader in the movement to endow biological anti-Semitism with an aura of "scientific" legitimation constituted no impediment to Heidegger's continuing friendship. In 1960 Heidegger sent Fischer an inscribed copy one of his books as a Christmas gift. <>

It should, however, be noted that Heidegger claimed that he was never whole-heartedly a Nazi. He has written that his first act as rector was a refusal to permit the posting of the anti-Semitic Judenplakat, the "Jew Notice," of the Nazi Deutsche Studentenbund in any of the university rooms. He incurred further party displeasure by

failing to appoint party members as deans and by seeking the retention of Jewish professors, Georg von Hevesy and Siegfried Thannhauser. von Hevesy emigrated to Sweden and won the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1943. <> Heidegger further claimed that he resigned as rector when "it became clear that a rift separated the National Socialist conception of university and science from my own, which could not be bridged." <>

In reality, Heidegger was less than forthcoming in his publicly available explanations of his activities as rector. A particularly nasty aspect of Heidegger's attempts to reform the university along National Socialist lines was his secret denunciations of academic colleagues to Nazi authorities. On September 29, 1933 Heidegger informed the office of the Ministry of Education at Karlsruhe that Hermann Staudinger, Professor of Chemistry at Freiburg, had been a pacifist during World War I. Heidegger recommended that Staudinger be fired without pension.<> Heidegger later moderated his position because of fear of international repercussions. In 1953 Staudinger received the Nobel Prize in his field.

On December 16, 1933 Heidegger wrote to Dr. Vogel of Gottingen concerning Dr. Eduard Baumgarten, a specialist in American philosophy at Gottingen who had formerly been Heidegger's close friend and student at Freiburg. <> Baumgarten had also taught for several years in the United States. Heidegger complained that Baumgarten was "anything but a National Socialist," that he came from a "circle of liberal-democratic intellectuals around Max Weber," that he had studied with "the Jew Fraenkel who had been active at Gottingen before being expelled from here <Freiburg>," and that he had become "very Americanized" as a result of his sojourn in the United States. Although a convinced Nazi, Vogel refused to act on Heidegger's denunciation. He filed the letter with the notation, "Unusable, charged with hatred."<>

As is well known, after the war Heidegger was denied the right to teach and forbidden to take part in the public activities of the university. However, by 1951 he was accorded the status of a Professor Emeritus and once again permitted to teach.

Heidegger's claim to have become disenchanted with National Socialism did not in any way mitigate his hatred of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Heidegger was convinced that Americanism and Bolshevism were the two greatest dangers of the twentieth century. By contrast, he saw the Germans as the only people capable of bringing about the renewal of the West. In 1935 he depicted the German Volk as the "metaphysical Volk" par excellence. He enlarged upon that claim in the interview he gave to Der Spiegel on September 25, 1966 for posthumous publication. In the interview Heidegger asserted that there is a "special inner kinship between the German language and the language and thought of the Greeks." "Being speaks German," Heidegger insisted, arguing that when the French begin to reflect on the mystery of Being, "they speak German." <> Given his exaggerated opinion of the importance of the German Volk and their language, it is hardly surprising that in 1943 he told his students that only Germany's victory in the war "can save the West for its history."<> However, for Heidegger the West could only be saved if Nazi Germany was

triumphant over both the United States and the Soviet Union. This was at a time when knowledge of the death camps was widespread within Germany. Heidegger saw the Germans before, during and after the war as caught "in the pincers between Russia and America." He described both countries as exhibiting "the same desolate frenzy of a rootless and groundless organization of mediocre humanity." <> Both countries were in the minds of Nazi ideologues unduly influenced by Jews and Judaism, each in its own distinctive way. Convinced of Germany's spiritual and moral superiority in spite of the death camps, he could see no real difference between the United States and Stalinist Russia. Incidentally, such ideas are once again becoming popular in the Federal Republic.

Moreover, in 1953 Heidegger made the claim that Germany's defeat had settled nothing:

What has World War II decided? (Let us be silent about its terrible consequences for our Vaterland, and in particular its split through its middle.) This world war has decided nothing. If we take the term "decision" in so high and wide a sense as to concern solely the essential destiny (Wesengeschick) of man on this earth. <>

In spite of Heidegger's oracular pronouncement, there were millions of people for whom World War II settled a great deal. These included millions of Eastern Europeans who were treated by the Germans as Untermenschen to be enslaved and/or annihilated. Above all, the Allied victory decided a great deal about the Nazi death camps, a matter of more than a little consequence both to the survivors and to the moral health of the German nation. Apparently, Heidegger was incapable of understanding that the division of the Vaterland, which he lamented, was a direct consequence of the Third Reich having launched and lost a war of aggression, enslavement and annihilation.

While Heidegger had no difficulty in expressing pain and sorrow for the sufferings endured by his fellow Germans, he was incapable of even a remote suggestion of compassion for their victims. In one of the few instances in which he commented on the Holocaust, he trivialized it. On January 20, 1948, Heidegger responded to an inquiry from Herbert Marcuse concerning his silence on the subject by stating:

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. (italics added)<>

Heidegger's silence concerning the Shoah, the supreme example of technological and bureaucratic dehumanization, is especially ironic in view of the philosopher's preoccupation with the negative aspects of technical civilization and the dimension of the historical.

Nevertheless, there is another side to the story. Although Heidegger's attitudes and behavior during the Nazi era were well known to the philosopher Karl Jaspers, the latter asserted in a letter to his former student, Hannah Arendt, that Heidegger "selber nie AntiSemit." <> In the nineteen-twenties and early thirties, Jaspers and Heidegger had been very close friends. However, Jaspers' wife Gertrud was Jewish and Jaspers broke with Heidegger over National Socialism in 1933. Moreover, even in his Rektoratsrede Heidegger took issue with the Nazi assertion of the supremacy of race and biology by asserting that while the people's strengths "are tied to earth and blood....Only a spiritual world gives the people the assurance of greatness." <>

Jaspers and Arendt had a special reason for a keen and abiding interest in Heidegger. Hannah Arendt first met Heidegger as an eighteen-year-old entering student at the University of Marburg in 1924. <> She was Jewish; he was of Roman Catholic background, married and the father of two sons. His father had been the sexton of the village church in Messkirch. Heidegger and Arendt became and remained secret lovers until 1930 when Heidegger's growing commitment to National Socialism precluded a continuation of the relationship.

In the first years of their relationship, Heidegger was her most important academic mentor. In some respects he remained so until the end of her life. However, both recognized that he could not serve as her Doktorvater because of their relationship. Heidegger suggested to Arendt that she complete her work at Heidelberg, doing her thesis under Heidegger's then good friend, Karl Jaspers. Following Heidegger's advice, Arendt proceeded to Heidelberg where she completed her thesis, Augustine's Concept of Love, in 1929.

Arendt had no contact with Heidegger from 1930 to 1948 when she visited Freiburg and sent him an unsigned note summoning him to her hotel. Heidegger came immediately. Arendt later wrote to her husband, Heinrich Blucher, concerning the encounter that "we really spoke to each other, it seemed to me, for the first time in our lives."<> It is difficult to believe that they avoided the issue of Heidegger's Nazi involvements or that Arendt could have been deceived by him. She was, after all, the author of The Origins of Totalitarianism and Eichmann in Jerusalem. <> The next day Heidegger told his wife Elfriede, who remained a convinced Nazi, that Arendt had been "the passion of his life" and the inspiration for his work. Frau Heidegger's anger was understandable. Nevertheless, Heidegger saw Arendt again, giving her copies of his manuscripts and letters. Later that year Arendt visited Freiburg and Heidegger for a second time and wrote that her experience, which does not appear to have compromised her marital relationship, offered confirmation of her decision to remain loyal to their friendship in spite of everything that had happened. By contrast, Jaspers was never able to be reconciled with Heidegger in spite of Arendt's attempts to bring about a reconciliation between the two men who were Germany's greatest philosophers in their time.

Arendt's renewed relationship with Heidegger was not without its ups and downs. <> She consented to contribute to the Festschrift published on the occasion of his

eightieth birthday in which she gave a moving appreciation of the thinker and offered what many have regarded as a questionable defense of Heidegger's involvement with Nazism. <> Arendt represented Heidegger as politically naive and characterized his involvement with Nazism as an episode which lasted "ten short hectic months." <> In the light of what is now known about Heidegger, it is obvious that Arendt was mistaken about the duration of Heidegger's Nazi commitment. Nevertheless, Arendt's life-long relationship with Heidegger was not that of a woman whose judgment had been distorted by a youthful love affair. Arendt was an internationally famous political philosopher and, as noted, an authority on both Nazism and the Holocaust. Conceivably her judgment about Heidegger could have been distorted. However, before we conclude that Heidegger was an unregenerate anti-Semite, we would do well to keep in mind the Heidegger-Arendt relationship and Arendt's life-long loyalty to the man.

Arendt has called Heidegger, "the last romantic." He was certainly a provincial. Because of their lack of rootedness in the traditional German world, Jews were far more likely to feel at home, insofar as they could feeling at home anywhere in Germany and Austria, only in the very cities romantics like Heidegger so deeply distrusted. At the very least, the circles in which Heidegger was born and educated regarded the Jews as a politically, religiously, and culturally disruptive alien presence. Preferring the culture of the peasant to that of the city-dweller, Heidegger made it amply clear that he had little use for cultural pluralism, which was the only basis on which a Jewish demographic presence encompassing modern political rights could have been possible in Germany. Incidentally, this was clearly understood by Gerhardt Kittel. Even after 1945 Kittel remained committed to undoing the political legacy of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution with its program of Jewish emancipation. In the 42 page document he wrote to defend himself after his incarceration by French authorities as a leading Nazi ideologue in May 1945, Kittel wrote that the Jewish question was for him a crucial element in the Weltanschaungskampf between his Christian, Germanic and volkisch world view and the secular legacy of the Enlightenment. <> In the case of Heidegger, a thinker who placed so much stress on identification with and spiritual appropriation of one's origins, the feeling that Jews were both alien and even threatening could easily have been pre-theoretical, as it was for Karl Barth. It would therefore not be surprising if Heidegger regarded Jews with the suspicion and hostility that so often confronts an alien presence. His behavior towards Jews during the Nazi years was fully consistent with Nazi norms.

Even Heidegger's affair with Arendt may not have been inconsistent with strong anti-Semitic attitudes. He was, after all, not her husband committed to a shared family life with her but her married lover. The very alien character of so brilliant and, at eighteen, attractive a Jewish woman could have been an unsettling attraction. This is, of course, only speculation, but, if this line of thought has any merit, Heidegger would not be the first anti-Semite to be drawn to a Jewish woman.

Moreover, while there is little direct evidence that he approved of or advocated extermination, he actively supported and lent his prestige to a movement which committed mass extermination, a deed for which he never publicly expressed regret.

We do, however, have a report that on at least one occasion Heidegger did express regret that some of the Jewish professors who had escaped the Holocaust were not exterminated. Maurice Friedman has written that Abraham Joshua Heschel imparted this information to him in 1965. <> Admittedly, this is not hard documentary evidence. Nevertheless, as Friedman observes, Heschel was not the sort of person to indulge in gratuitous defamation, a judgement with which this writer, a former student of Heschel, concurs. One could cite yet other witnesses, such as Karl Jaspers, but that is hardly necessary. <> It is difficult to believe that a man of Heidegger's epoch-making importance in the history of philosophy was incapable of grasping the real meaning of National Socialism, the most radically anti-Semitic movement in human history. Incidentally, Emil Fackenheim holds that Heidegger became a problematic anti-Nazi at some point after 1935. That judgment may have been correct given the evidence available to the theologian when he wrote. It now seems difficult to maintain. In any event, even today Fackenheim can be judged correct in asserting that Heidegger's thinking, "while not responsible for his surrender to Nazism, had been unable to prevent it." <> Still, we are left with the puzzling question of his relationship with Hannah Arendt.

I came away from my inquiry into Heidegger's politics with a heightened appreciation for Karl Barth and a renewed awareness of the difference between philosophy and religion. Barth came from the same world that saw the Jews as alien and threatening as did Heidegger. In spite of Heidegger's reflections on authenticity, it was Barth, not Heidegger, who had no difficulty in identifying National Socialism as worship of false gods. At the risk of his academic career Barth refused to go along with National Socialism. When the Nazi nightmare was over, Barth had nothing to regret and nothing to explain after the fact. Moreover, Barth left no doubt where he stood on the issue of racism and anti-Semitism. Nor was Barth the only major Christian theologian to refuse to compromise with Nazism. Although the vast majority of the clergy and theologians in Germany and Austria approved of or made their peace with National Socialism, Paul Tillich refused to give the movement his allegiance and voluntarily left his homeland for the United States. There is no doubt that Christian anti-Semitism was a precondition for the Holocaust. Nevertheless, the Christian Church never sanctioned an unremitting program of extermination against the Jews. There were moral barriers that the Church as an institution refused to transgress.

Unfortunately, there are no comparable moral barriers for much of secular philosophy. Every time I read Hegel's calm reflections on the course of human history, I wonder how that great philosopher would have regarded the Holocaust. For example:

When we see the evil, the wickedness, and the downfall of the most flourishing empires the human spirit has created...we can only end with a feeling of sadness at the transience of everything...We can only harden ourselves against it or escape by telling ourselves it was ordained by fate and could not have been otherwise...But even as we look upon history as an altar on which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals are slaughtered, our thoughts impel us to ask: to whom, or to what end have these monstrous sacrifices been made? From the beginning we

proceeded to define those same events...as no more than the means whereby...the substantial destiny, the absolute and final end, or in other words, the true result of world history, is realized. <>

For Hegel, the Holocaust could easily be seen as one more example of "the happiness of nations" being offered up on the "altar of history." For Heidegger, history is ultimately the story of the self-concealment and the self-unveiling of Being, a self-unveiling which begins to manifest itself in our times in Heidegger's own philosophy. It would thus not be inconsistent with Heidegger's thought to interpret the Holocaust as a necessary stage in the self-unveiling of Being. As late as 1966 Heidegger insisted that because of "the special inner kinship between the German language and the language of the Greeks and their thought," Germans have "a special task" in the overcoming (aufgehoben) of an exhausted metaphysical tradition, which had culminated in nihilism and the modern technical world. <> Implicit in Heidegger's thought is the idea that Being once spoke Greek and now speaks its kindred Aryan language, German. National Socialism was for Heidegger no mere political movement but, at least in its early years in power, a world-historical movement restoring the German Volk to its true vocation. Heidegger's identification with the movement was so complete that a 1934 photograph shows him actually looking like Hitler with his Hitler-type mustache and a swastika lapel pin. <> Under the circumstances, Heidegger may index