DANGER AND THE SAVING POWER:

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF MARTIN HEIDEGGER

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Abstract of "Danger and the Saving Power: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger"

This thesis considers the place of Martin Heidegger within contemporary political theory. Despite Heidegger's importance as a philosopher, Heidegger is considered highly problematic within political theory because of his association with Nazism. This thesis argues that Heidegger has been an important, if covert, influence on political thought, and that his work deserves more overt discussion.

The first chapter outlines Heidegger's overall project of opposition to traditional Western metaphysics, and the role of Dasein as the locus of the experience of Being. It concludes that while Heidegger's primary goal was one of "fundamental ontology," not practical politics, that Heidegger's ontology has both ethical and political implications.

The second chapter looks at Heidegger's idea of historicity, and argues that it is essential for understanding Heidegger's concept of "authenticity" which became so important for later existentialists. Heideggerian historicity is discussed in light of the Weimar "Conservative Revolution," and as a justification for his Nazism

The third chapter examines the political implications two late Heideggerain concepts: technology and language. Heidegger's concept of technology as not only mere means, but as a totalizing, dehumanizing metaphysical destiny was indebted to the Conservative Revolutionary writer Ernst Junger. Heidegger's increasing conviction that political resistance to technology was futile helped cause his later turn towards poetry and mysticism. The rest of the chapter looks Heidegger's ideas of language and poetry, and notes that the nationalism in his idea that Greek and German were inherently closer to the primordial experience of Being were connected to his embrace of Nazism.

The final chapter looks at the influence of these Heideggerian ideas on recent Anglo-American political theory. Through thinkers like Hannah Arendt and Charles Taylor, Heideggerian themes such as authenticity, the importance of the ancient Greek experience, and the critique of technology, have already had an influence on Anglo-American thought. The thesis concludes that Heidegger must be given greater consideration, not just in polemical debate over Heidegger's Nazism, but in theoretical discussion of the origins of many contemporary political ideas. Understanding the Heideggerian background of these ideas will raise awareness of both their positive and negative potential for future political thought and practice.

Contents

Chapter 1 - Martin Heidegger: Political, Not Metaphysical?

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the philosophical stature of Martin Heidegger continues to grow. By general consensus, he is the major figure of Continental philosophy in this century, and in the Anglo-American world his influence is rivaled only by Ludwig Wittgenstein's. While the influence of other Continental figures contemporary with Heidegger who were once considered to be giants of philosophy (Cassirer, Scheler, Jaspers, and Sartre, for instance) has diminished considerably, Heidegger's thought is unavoidable today in fields as diverse as theology, literary theory, and cognitive science.

The audacious claim made by Heidegger and his many followers is that the entire history of Western metaphysics from Plato to Nietzsche has been one of "forgetfulness of Being," and that Heidegger's ontological thinking has reopened the question of Being in an authentic way for the first time since the pre-Socratics.

As one of the century's greatest philosophers, and one who has brought the entire metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy into question, it is natural for political theorists to ask whether any of his insights have bearing on political questions. After all, if Heidegger's thinking is alleged to have overcome the metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant, and Hegel (to name only those philosophers in the Western tradition who attempted to develop ethical and political theory consistent with their metaphysics), it would be valuable to know whether his own thinking provides any alternate basis to ground ethical and political practice.

Yet on this matter, especially, Heidegger's thought comes under a great shadow. The unavoidable fact is that Heidegger, probably this century's greatest philosopher, was nonetheless a supporter of what was probably this century's greatest political evil, the

Nazi regime in Germany. Heidegger was an active Nazi for at least one year from 1933 to 1934 while rector of the University of Freiburg. From his resignation in 1934 and throughout his long post-War career he never unambiguously apologized for his involvement with the Nazis nor clearly denounced the atrocities of the Nazi regime, including the Holocaust.

For some, these damning facts are enough in themselves to vitiate everything in the entire corpus of Heidegger's philosophy, from his reflections of the poetry of Hölderlin and Trakl to his ancient Greek etymologies. And even if one acknowledges that he has some valuable insights into fundamental ontological questions, or the history of philosophy, many would insist that his political ideas must be considered independently of his philosophical contributions in other areas. Richard Rorty holds that while Heidegger was an "egomaniacal, anti-Semitic redneck," there is "no way to correlate moral virtue with philosophical importance or philosophical doctrine." He points out that nobody dismisses Gottlob Frege's contributions in semantics and mathematical logic because he was a "vicious anti-Semite and proto-Nazi."[1]

But things stand differently with Heidegger. One cannot so easily separate the question of Being from the practices of human beings. His "analytic of *Dasein,*" that is human existence considered as being-in-the-world, with its talk of authentic versus inauthentic existence, has long been interpreted as having ethical implications. Many influential thinkers (Sartre, Arendt, Marcuse, Derrida, Foucault) have indeed found Heidegger to be an important source of reflection for political questions. Many of the insights of his later years concerning technology have been important for the

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously," in *The New Republic*, April 11, 1988, pp. 31-34.

environmental movement, and the critique of the modern notion of progress. In many ways, Heidegger can be seen as the forefather of recent postmodern thought. If Heidegger has already shaped modern political thought to some extent, and is still regarded as a major source for political reflection, then one must confront the connection between Heideggerian thinking and Heidegger's own Nazism.

For many years this question was dealt with by a strategy of avoidance, and Heidegger was treated as an essentially apolitical thinker, with his own political involvement limited to a brief, unfortunate mistake that merely interrupted his philosophical quest for Being. As Hannah Arendt, one of those who came to forgive Heidegger's Nazi connections as a temporary lapse of judgment, explained it: "He was still young enough to learn from the shock of that collision, which after ten short hectic months... drove him back to his residence and to settle in his thinking what he had experienced."[2]

But after the publication of Victor Farias' *Heidegger et la Nazisme*[3] in 1987 and the controversy which ensued from it, to take such an approach would appear to be either naive or willingly blind. Farias' work, while challenged for its polemicism and lack of philosophical rigor, brought to light undeniable facts about Heidegger's Nazi involvement. Farias' work has been supplemented by less vitriolic, but no less damning, scholarship by Freiburg historian Hugo Ott[4] and Heidegger's close philosophical associate Otto Pöggeler.[5] From this new research it has become obvious that Heidegger

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[2] Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," *New York Review of Books*, October 21, 1971, p. 54.
[3] Published in English as Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* , P. Burrell and G. Ricci, trans., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)
[4] Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, Allan Blunden, trans., (New York: Basic Books, 1993)
[5] Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking* trans. D. Magurshak and S. Barber (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1987), especially pp. 271-288.

was a committed Nazi (albeit an idiosyncratic one) until the very end of the war, that he was involved in informing on anti-Nazi academic colleagues and other abuses of power, and that he continued to try to have a political influence in the regime, especially with regards to academic life in Germany, until the late 1930s. One noteworthy example confirming Heidegger's continuing Nazi attachments came in the recently published memoirs of Karl Löwith, the philosopher and former student of Heidegger, who as a Jew left Germany for the comparative tolerance of Rome. While in Rome in 1936 (two years after resigning the rectorate), Heidegger visited Löwith. Heidegger wore a swastika lapel pin, even in Löwith's private company, and continued to express his personal faith in Hitler (while allowing that some of his Nazi subordinates like Julius Streicher had gone too far.)[6]

The revelations of the extent of Heidegger's Nazism have made him an even more controversial figure than previously, but they have not limited his influence in philosophy, or political theory in particular. Indeed, *l'affaire Heidegger* seems to have resulted paradoxically in a far greater attention to the importance of Heidegger as a political thinker. More has been published analyzing Heidegger's political thought, favorably or unfavorably, in the past ten years than during the rest of the post-War period combined.

The question that imposes itself is this: was Heidegger's morally reprehensible political commitment related necessarily or contingently to his broader philosophical thought? Is it possible to use Heidegger as a source of political reflection on

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[6] Karl Löwith, "My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936," *New German Critique* 45 (Fall, 1988), p. 115, trans. By Richard Wolin, excerpted from Karl Löwith, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1986)

technological late modernity, or does that mean drinking from a poisoned chalice that cannot be dissociated from the political irrationalism of Nazism?

This thesis is primarily an examination of how Heidegger's philosophical thought contributes to political ideas. First, one must consider whether, and if so how, Heidegger's overall project, a rather abstract and remote ontological effort to renew "the question of Being" contributed to his support for particular political positions. To do so, I will focus on the way in which Heidegger's ideas regarding history, technology, and language, from the publication of *Being and Time* through his later works, shaped his specifically political thought. I will argue that these themes were indeed related to Heidegger's embrace of Nazism, but that they are also separable from it, and can be used as a legitimate part of the critique of liberalism as the leading ideology of technological modernity. I am concerned to show that Heidegger's thought cannot be examined solely at a timeless philosophical level (although there is no doubt that Heidegger is an interlocutor of Plato, Descartes, Hegel, and Nietzsche at the highest level of philosophical discussion), but is also a product of its time and place. A prime example of this is found in the relationship of Heidegger's political thinking on these subjects to the thought of the Conservative Revolution movement in Weimar Germany.

Finally, I will examine the influence of or parallels with Heidegger's thought and the ideas of contemporary Anglo-American political theory, including the communitarian critics of liberalism. This is not done in an attempt to taint any other thinkers with guilt by association. Although the ideas of certain thinkers, knowingly or unknowingly may derive from a potentially dangerous source, Heidegger's influence should be appreciated for providing the impetus to a critical examination of modernity.

The Connection Between Ontology and Politics

Before pursuing the specifically political elements of Heidegger's thinking, or attempting to trace his influence on subsequent writers, one must place the political career and thinking of Heidegger against the background of his overarching philosophical project. The abstract nature of much of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger can seem remote from practical questions of ethics and politics. Heidegger's project was one of "fundamental ontology," of posing anew the question of the meaning of Being, which he felt had been evaded by the entire tradition of Western metaphysics starting with Plato. While much has been made of analyzing the various stages of Heidegger's thinking, in many ways it is better regarded as a continuous whole. Undoubtedly, Heidegger's thought evolved and changed over the years, but all the changes were steps on a single journey with a single destination. Heidegger himself described his life long philosophical effort in terms of a single journey: "I was brought to the path of the question of being... But the path of questioning became longer than I suspected. It demanded many stops, detours, and wrong paths."[7] Heidegger's political ideas are part of this journey, sometimes leading down detours and disastrously wrong paths, but always in the pursuit of Being.

Heidegger began his questioning of Being while still a school boy when a local priest, Fr. Conrad Grober, gave the seventeen year old Heidegger a copy of Franz Brentano's *On the Manifold Meaning of Being According to Aristotle*. Heidegger would refer to this throughout his life as the incident which launched his philosophical journey.

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[7] Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 80.

This book, which described the several apparently contradictory senses in which the participle *on* was used in the Greek language, became for the young Heidegger the source of "the question it awoke in him but could not answer: if that-which-is-in-Being (*das Seiende*) has several meanings, what does "Being itself" (*das Sein*) mean in its unity?"[8] Heidegger wrestled with this question continuously for the rest of his life, not least of all in the work which is still regarded as his chief work, *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), published in 1927.

The young Heidegger had studied classical, Scholastic, neo-Kantian, and Hegelian philosophy, becoming convinced that all of the schools of Western metaphysics had lost sight of the centrality of Being, and treated the nature of Being as simply something self-evident, not a key question for investigation. For his own inquiries, Heidegger decided that rather than approaching Being in terms of the forms, universals, categories, or monads of the metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy, he would adopt Edmund Husserl's method of phenomenology, which asserted that one should put aside all previous concepts from earlier philosophical doctrines and focus one's analysis on phenomena themselves as they manifest themselves to the observer. Husserl's motto, "To the things themselves," became a kind of mantra for many young German philosophers of the 1920s.

But to examine Being as a concrete phenomenon, as a thing in itself, one needed a secure reference point for the examination of Being, which was not a thing in itself but a quality instantiated in all beings. Heidegger became convinced that to answer the question of Being, one had to begin by analyzing the being of the questioner. Heidegger

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[8] Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger's Early Years: Fragments for a Philosophical Biography," in Thomas Sheehan, ed., *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (Chicago: Precedent, 1981), p. 4.

gave to the human questioner the name of *Dasein*, "being there," as the concrete existent

within the world that is aware of its own being. *Dasein* is taken to be the privileged

referent for the study of being, as:

> Dasein is an entity that does not just occur among other entities. Rather it
> is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is
> an issue for it... It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its
> Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a*
> *definite characteristic of Dasein's Being.*[9]

Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* in place of more familiar terms like

consciousness, ego, individual, subject, or self to describe the being that questions its

Being, and the change reflects not simply a change of terminology, but a basic difference

in meaning. For Heidegger, there can be no split between a conscious subject and its

objects. As Husserl had stated: "'consciousness' was always 'consciousness of'

something."[10] Heidegger wrote:

> When Dasein directs itself towards something and grasps it, it does not
> somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally
> encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always
> 'outside' alongside entities which it encounters and which belong to a
> world already discovered.[11]

It is because of the phenomenological reference point of *Dasein* as the gateway to

understanding Being that Heidegger's thought can be taken as having political

implications. For *Dasein* defined as "Being-in-the-world" is not an abstract or isolated

Cartesian ego or Kantian autonomous self, but a concrete being which is temporal,

historical, physical, affective, and social. An analysis of Being had to take all of these

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[9] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 32.

[10] Catherine Zuckert, "Heidegger's Philosophy and Politics," *Political Theory* 18(1) (February, 1990), note 20 at p. 75.

[11] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 89.

dimensions of *Dasein*'s being into account, including the political dimensions.

For the purposes of political understanding, the social nature of *Dasein* is of particular importance. While every human being is a *Dasein*, the concept of *Dasein* need not be restricted to the individual understanding alone. Being-with others, or *Mitsein*, is also a form of *Dasein* for Heidegger. In this respect, Heidegger goes beyond Husserl and some of Heidegger's own existentialist interpreters, like Sartre - it is not simply that our consciousness is intimately bound up with the external world, but our existence has an intrinsically communal nature.[12] This is made explicit in Heidegger's discussion of the encounter of *Dasein* with Others:

> By 'Others' we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the 'I' stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does *not* distinguish oneself - those among whom one is too... By reason of this *with-like* Being-in-the world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of the Dasein is a *with-world.* Being-in is *Being-with* Others.[13]

One can see a parallel in the distinction between a worldly and social *Dasein* and the isolated individual subject with the recent debates in political theory between Kantian-inspired liberals and communitarians. Communitarians like Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre have accused liberal theorists of considering the political self to be "unencumbered" rather than as constituent parts of a social world in which all selves find themselves. This allegedly faulty understanding of human nature is held responsible for liberal policies that lead to an alienated, legalistic, and morally incoherent society and polity. Thus, our ontological understanding of ourselves can be taken to have political consequences.

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[12] Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 141-151.
[13] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 154-155.

While Heidegger's ontological inquiry may well be seen to have a political or ethical side, Heidegger denied that his ontology led to any normative conclusions. His description of "average everyday" *Dasein* living in "falling" into the "inauthenticity" and "idle talk" of the "They," thus hiding itself from Being, is said not to be derogatory: "our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of Dasein, and from the aspirations of a 'philosophy of culture.'"[14] Yet later in Division Two of *Being in Time* Heidegger does refer to "authentic existence" as a "factical ideal,"[15] and in Heidegger's own later writings, authenticity comes to serve as a basis for ethics and politics, despite its allegedly descriptive and scientific origins. The attempt to separate ontological inquiry from ethical or political conclusions proves difficult.

Heidegger's methodological approach in *Being and Time*, the consideration of Being from the concrete perspective of the human *Dasein*, accounts for both the richness of its insight into political and social questions, but also its limitations as a purely ontological inquiry. Heidegger does not intend in *Being and Time* to be an anthropology, still less an ethics. His intention is to use the analytic of *Dasein* as a medium to the understanding of Being itself. As Robert Dostal puts it: "*Dasein* is not simply equivalent to the human but rather is the human only insofar as Being (*Sein*) is 'there' (*Da*) disclosed. No full and complete account of human being is attempted or required."[16] At several points Heidegger disavows the task of completing his analysis of the human condition. At the conclusion of his discussion of care (*Sorge*) he comments, "What we

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 211.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 358.
[16] Robert Dostal, "Friendship and Politics: Heidegger's Failing," *Political Theory* 20 (August, 1992), p 402.

have hitherto set forth needs to be rounded out in many ways by working out fully the existential *a priori* of philosophical anthropology and taking a look at it. But this is not the aim of our investigation."[17]

Heidegger's dismissal of ethics in *Being and Time* is even more brusque. The references to ethics as a science are few and derogatory, as he sees ethics as based on the false ideal of subjectivity that he rejects. "The object we have taken as our theme is *artificially and dogmatically curtailed* if 'in the first instance' we restrict ourselves to a 'theoretical subject,' in order that we may round it out 'on the practical side' by tacking on an 'ethic.'"[18] In the 1947 "Letter on Humanism" Heidegger explains that he never complemented *Being and Time* by writing an ethics since ethics was a derivative of Platonic philosophy, and that after that time "science waxed and thinking waned."[19]

So while Heidegger does not use the analytic of *Dasein* as the basis for an anthropology or an ethics, by regarding human existence from a radically new perspective, new insights are derived into the nature of human existence with strong social and political implications. These insights are richly suggestive for political or ethical practices, but these practices are never fully developed by Heidegger as they are seen as diversions from thinking about Being. In many ways, Heidegger's own gross political failures can be seen to be the result of applying the half thought out socio-political residues of his ontological project immediately to the political sphere. As Charles Taylor has argued, "Taking an ontological position does not amount to advocating something; but at the same time, the ontological does help to define the

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[17] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 170.
[18] *Ibid.*, pp.363-364.
[19] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" Frank Capuzzi, trans., in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., D.F. Krell, ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 256.

options that it is meaningful to support by advocacy."[20] Sadly, Heidegger attempted to

move directly from ontology to advocacy, but a lack of reflection or practical wisdom led

him to reprehensible political actions. Nonetheless, it is possible that his ontological

insights may help to define political options within technological late modernity in a

more meaningful way.

History, Language, and Technology in Heidegger's Political Thought

The following chapters are an analysis of how three of Heidegger's key concepts,

his notions of history, language, and technology -- which were all developed as part of

his ongoing questioning of the nature of Being from *Being and Time* through his later

works – contributed directly to his political involvement of the 1930s and continued to

inform Heidegger's later political consciousness. I will attempt to show that despite the

ends towards which Heidegger used them, and some of the dangers inherent in

Heidegger's ontologizing approach, these ideas still contain valuable insights for further

political thought.

Heidegger's consideration of history and historicity, which is crucial to a proper

understanding of what Heidegger meant by authenticity is a crucial part of *Being and*

Time. It is also explicitly referred to in Heidegger's political speeches and writings of the

1930s, and was credited by Heidegger himself as providing the philosophical basis for his

political activity. His notions of language and technology are not extensively developed

in *Being and Time*, but these two issues which emerge as crucial for the later Heidegger

are present in germinal forms in *Being and Time* and play an increasingly greater role in

his writings of the 1930s, including some of the work of his National Socialist period.

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[20] Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate" in Nancy Rosenblum, ed.,
Liberalism and the Moral Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 161.

His considerations of language and technology remained essential for Heidegger's post-War thought and the critique of technology, especially, has proved a valuable source of political inspiration for other thinkers.

While Heidegger considered his major task to be a rethinking of fundamental ontology against the entire Western philosophical tradition, it is also important to consider Heidegger's thought as a product of its times. Heidegger's reshaping of the phenomenological method and analysis of *Dasein* as the key to an understanding of Being is part of a purely philosophical dialogue with the major figures of Western philosophy from Plato to Descartes to Husserl, it is also a product of Weimar German intellectual life. I will argue that at a political and ideological level Heidegger's work can be seen to bear a close relationship to the so-called Conservative Revolution, an intellectual movement that rejected both bourgeois liberalism and communism, and called for an authoritarian nationalism and a spiritual renewal of Germany.

Chapter 2 - Heidegger and Historicity

Probably the most important contribution that *Being and Time* made to

subsequent ethical discussion is its concept of authenticity versus inauthenticity.

Authenticity was taken up as an explicitly ethical norm by many of Heidegger's

existentialist followers, especially Jean-Paul Sartre. But while the concept of authenticity

has been adopted by many as an ethical ideal, it has often been understood in an

individualist, relativist, or decisionist fashion that was far from Heidegger's own

understanding. For Heidegger, the concept of authenticity was inextricably connected to

the concept of historicity, which has a communal aspect and makes concrete ethical

demands. It is Heidegger's notion of historicity which most directly links his thought

with the movement of Conservative Revolution in Weimar Germany, and which Farias,

Rockmore, and others suggest link Heidegger as a thinker, not just as a careerist, to

Nazism.

Before turning to Heidegger's discussion of history and historicity and the role it

had in Heidegger's political thought, it is important to clarify more generally what

Heidegger means by authentic existence, a concept which has been so influential yet also

the source of so much confusion. One of the starting points of Heidegger's analysis of

Dasein is the observation that *Dasein* is temporal and finite: it is thrown into a world that

it does not create, and is fated to the nothingness of death. To Heidegger, authentic

Dasein is the acceptance of the finitude of one's own existence as thrownness into the

world, and resoluteness towards the ultimate horizon of death. Authentic *Dasein* is

being-towards-death. Attempts to hide from this reality, to retreat into an "average

everyday" existence, and to derive one's values and habits of living from the mass

existence of the "They" is inauthenticity. "Death is Dasein's *ownmost* possibility.

Being towards this possibility discloses to Dasein its *ownmost* potentiality for Being.
Here it can become manifest to Dasein that in this distinctive possibility of its own self, it
has been wrenched away from the 'they'."[21]

This becomes the starting point for Sartre's analysis of human existence as well,
and it has led many critics to group Heidegger together with Sartre as an existentialist.
Yet there are crucial differences between Heidegger's version of authentic versus
inauthentic existence and a Sartrean existentialist reading. Sartre stresses the disjunction
between the ownness of one's death - it must be faced alone and in solitude - and the
inauthenticity of the collective "they" to set up a radical dichotomy between the
individual and society. It is the isolated individual, in light of his mortality, who must
choose his own values. To allow society to do one's choosing is inauthentic. There is a
similarity here to the Kantian account of autonomous versus heteronomous moral
decisions, although without the guide of a transcendent reason to ground those decisions.
In his famous lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism," Sartre expressed his concept of
ethical choosing, and attributed its inspiration to Heidegger:

> When we speak of "forlornness," a term Heidegger was fond of, we mean
> only that God does not exist and that we have to face all the consequences
> of this...
> The Existentialist... thinks it very distressing that God does not exist,
> because all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears
> along with Him... Dostoevski said, "If God didn't exist, everything
> would be possible." That is the very starting point of Existentialism.
> Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result
> man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find
> anything to cling to. He can't start making excuses for himself.[22]

Many interpreters have held that Heidegger's own position is similar to that of

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[21] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 307.
[22] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in *Existentialism versus Marxism*, ed. George Novack
(New York: Delta, 1966), pp. 77-78.

Sartre's, and is morally solipsistic. The prominent Heidegger scholar Frederic Olafson,

for instance, holds that: "Both Heidegger and Sartre emphatically deny that human

beings can properly be said to *know* what is morally required of them in a way that is

genuinely independent of their own individual choices."[23] This common interpretation of

Heidegger is partially explained by the opacity of Heidegger's own writing in *Being and*

Time. As Hubert Dreyfus explains:

> In many ways Heidegger's chapter on what the translation calls *the*
> *They*... is not only one of the most basic in the book, it is also the most
> confused. Heidegger is influenced by both Dilthey and Kierkegaard, both
> of whom had a great deal to say about the importance of the social
> world... Heidegger takes up and extends the Diltheyan insight that
> intelligibility and truth arise only in the context of public, historical
> practices, but he is also deeply influenced by the Kierkegaardian view that
> "the truth is never in the crowd."...[B]ut unfortunately, in *Being and Time*
> Heidegger does not distinguish these two issues but jumps back and forth
> between them, sometimes even in the same paragraph.[24]

Despite these confusions, Heidegger should not be interpreted as simply

appealing for an individualistic choosing of one's own values. Death is stressed as the

ultimate horizon of *Dasein* not simply because death is something that one faces alone,

but because death is the ultimate horizon of all *Dasein*. Our knowledge of Being itself is

only as something which has been wrested from nothingness - *Dasein* does not know

experientially of any eternal Being. Death reveals the ultimate nature of *Dasein* not

because it is something faced alone, but because it reveals the ultimate temporality and

historicity of all Being. In Heidegger's words, "as the non-relational possibility, death

individualizes but only in such a manner that, as the possibility which cannot be

outstripped, it makes Dasein as Being-with have some understanding of the potentiality-

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[23] Frederic Olafson, *Principles and Persons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), p. 107.
[24] Dreyfus, pp. 143-144.

for-Being of others."[25]

Furthermore, while Heidegger does speak of the inauthenticity of the average everyday existence of the "They", he does not thereby dismiss the possibility of authentic *Mitsein*. "Resoluteness, as *authentic Being-one's-Self*, does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it isolate it so it becomes a free floating "I". And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness, is *authentically* nothing else than *Being-in-the-world?*"[26] The "They" is inauthentic because it loses itself in the present, in the superficial world of things which are immediately available for use, or ready-to-hand. But *Mitsein* can also be a form of authentic existence if collective *Dasein* resolutely faces its own historicity - accepting the thrownness and fatedness not just as an individual self, but as part of a community or a people.

For the key to understanding what Heidegger meant by authentic existence we must look to the chapter where he brings together his concerns for the temporality and communality of *Dasein*. This is found in the discussion of history in Section II, Chapter 5 of *Being and Time*, which as Thomas Langan, one of Heidegger's earliest English-language commentators, called "truly the summit of the fundamental work, the closest Heidegger comes to explaining in what sense *Sein* itself is *zeitlich*."[27] As Karsten Harries points out, it is this section that releases Heideggerian authenticity from the charge of solipsism or decisionism. "Heidegger recognizes the need for an authority which will allow man to escape from arbitrariness and thus make authentic action possible. In *Being and Time* he seeks such an authority in the past which has helped constitute the present

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[25] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 308.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 298.

[27] Thomas Langan, *The Meaning of Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 56.

and illuminates the future."[28]

In Section 74 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger reviews what he has said about resoluteness as a condition for authentic existence. Resoluteness implies projecting oneself against one's ownmost possibility for Being. He points out that *Dasein*, as Being-in-the-World exists essentially with others, and that the different possibilities of existence are absorbed from one's encounter with others. Therefore, "The resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factical possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, takes over."[29] While there are many possibilities of existence offered by various social traditions, authentic *Dasein* will embrace that version of existence which expresses itself as resoluteness towards the fate of death. "This is how we designate Dasein's primordial historizing, which lies in authentic resoluteness and in which Dasein *hands* itself *down* to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen."[30] True authenticity is always rooted in historicity.

Furthermore, the choosing of a possibility of being resolved towards death from past tradition is not simply an individual act, a choosing of authentic examples from the past for one's own edification, for:

> if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with-
> Others, its historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as
> *destiny*. This is how we designate the historizing of the community
> (*Gemeinschaft*), of a people (*Volk*). Destiny is not something that puts
> itself together out of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-
> another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects.
> 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.

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[28] Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (June, 1976), p. 649.

[29] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 435.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 435.

> Only in communicating and in struggling (*Kampf*) does the power of
> destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its "generation"
> goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein.[31]

The significance of this paragraph, in which terms as politically charged (especially in late Weimar Germany) as politically charged as *Gemeinschaft, Volk*, and *Kampf* are introduced, almost the only times they are mentioned in the entire text, has long been disputed. Some critics have seen in this the essence of Heidegger's entire political philosophy, and the justification for his later turn to Nazism. Others have suggested that the paragraph is aberrant, and the understanding of authenticity in Section 74 has to be balanced against the more individualistic and autonomist language of earlier chapters of *Being and Time*.

Another statement in the same section that has been singled out as politically significant follows shortly afterwards, where Heidegger states that resoluteness has the character of repetition of the possibilities of *Dasein* that have been handed down to us, and that "Dasein may choose its hero...; for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated."[32] Again, we find the language of individual choice in uneasy tension with the language of a blind following of the path of history, and it is unclear whether Heidegger escapes the charge of nihilism and solipsism towards values if the choice of one's hero is arbitrary. There has been considerable debate as to whether Heidegger here has any particular hero or type of hero in mind. Thomas Langan asks, "is the problem of a guide for choice, a direction for our resolute projections, any the more solved by the realization that Dasein must choose its heroes? Possibilities conflict and

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 436.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 437.

heroes differ, as St. Francis differs from Caesar."[33] Heidegger, as we know, opted for the Caesar of his day.

How then should this section be interpreted as bearing on Heidegger's political beliefs? On balance, acknowledging the many interpretations of Section 74 of *Being and Time*, one must take it as a significant statement of Heidegger's political ideals. We now have benefit of Karl Löwith's testimony in his 1986 memoir of his 1936 meeting with Heidegger. In conversation with Heidegger, Löwith stated that: "I was of the opinion that his partisanship for National Socialism lay in the essence of his philosophy. Heidegger agreed with me without reservation, and added that his concept of 'historicity' was the basis of his political 'engagement.'"[34] In light of this, it is impossible not to take the resemblances between these passages of *Being and Time* to Heidegger's political speeches and writings while rector of the University of Freiburg seriously.

The best known speech of Heidegger's political period, his *Rektoratsrede* (Rector's address) on his assumption of the Freiburg rectorate entitled "The Self-Assertion of the German University" can be read most clearly in the light of Section 74 of *Being and Time*. Some have chosen to see this speech as simply a work of Nazi propaganda, unworthy of the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. But while it does contain fevered rhetoric of "earth and blood,"[35] and condemns the "much celebrated 'academic freedom'" of the German university as simply a negative, arbitrary, and unconcerned freedom,[36] it also touches on some of Heidegger's most important philosophical themes,

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[33] Langan, p. 67.

[34] Löwith, p. 115.

[35] Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," Karsten Harries, trans., *Review of Metaphysics*, p. 475.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 475-476.

from the returns to the origins of Western knowledge in the wisdom of the pre-Socratic

Greeks to the idea of authenticity as taking up the historic fate of the people.

Several passages stand out as evoking themes of the historical discussions of

Being and Time. The speech opens with Heidegger commenting on his assumption of a

leadership role, remarking that leadership only gains its true potential when "the leaders

are themselves led - led by that unyielding spiritual mission that forces the fate of the

German people to bear the stamp of its history."[37] In commenting on the duty of students

and teachers with regards to science, he holds out the pre-Socratic Greeks as the

repeatable possibility which the academic must seek as its true historic example, as

opposed to the "inauthenticity" of modern technological science: "Only if we resolutely

submit to this distant command to recapture the greatness of the beginning, will science

become the innermost necessity of our being (*Dasein*). Otherwise, it remains an accident

we fall into or the settled comfort of a safe occupation, serving to further a mere progress

of information."[38] Finally, the speech concludes with a stirring call to authenticating

historical resolve:

> Whether this will happen or not depends alone on whether or not we, as a
> historical-spiritual people, still and once again will ourselves. Every
> individual *participates* in this decision, even he, and indeed especially he,
> who evades it.
> But we do indeed will that our people fulfill its historical mission.[39]

The language of this speech is *sui generis*. It is not simply a simplified version of

Heidegger's formal philosophy, like some of his other public lectures. Indeed, there are

aspects of it, such as his repeated invocation of the "spiritual" mission of Germany which

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[37] *Ibid.*, p 470.
[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 473-474.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 480.

seem at odds with the Heidegger of *Being and Time* who introduced the concept of *Dasein* to avoid "reification" of the "*Being* of the subject, the soul, the consciousness, the spirit, the person."[40] On the other hand, it cannot be reduced to a political bromide written to fit the times and rhetoric of the Nazi party. Heidegger is consciously using some of the most central parts of his philosophical thinking about the nature of authenticity to invest the new political situation of the Third Reich with deeper meaning than a merely political revolution. Heidegger is trying to ontologize politics, to encourage his fellow citizens, especially students and professors, to take hold of the historic situation that has been created to reappropriate the deepest streams of their past - both the poetic German tradition, and the philosophical Greek tradition to which they are heirs as Westerners - to become more authentic and therefore more open to the disclosure of Being.

Heidegger's referral in the speech to the role of leaders, and his eager implementation of the *Führerprinzip* (Leader principle) as the new constitution of the university (with himself as Leader) evokes *Dasein*'s choosing of its hero in *Being and Time*. The Rectoral Address, along with some of Heidegger's later writings on heroism and leaders, can help us evaluate to what extent Heidegger's choice of a hero is simply an arbitrary one. In *Being and Time* there is no suggestion that the hero is a political leader, although, as Robert Dostal says, "Retrospectively we can see how the hero of *Being and Time* becomes the *Führer* of the Rectoral Address."[41] Dostal suggests that the hero of *Being and Time* "suggests, rather, someone like a fallen soldier. Perhaps Heidegger was

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[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 72. For a discussion of Heidegger's shift in use of the language of spirit, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, trans., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

[41] Robert Dostal, "The Public and the People: Heidegger's Illiberal Politics," pp. 543-544.

thinking of Albert Schlageter...”[42]

Schlageter is in many ways Heidegger's archetypal hero. Schlageter was a demobilized *Freikorps* member from the Freiburg area who became an anti-French terrorist in the Rhineland area occupied under the Versailles treaty. In 1923, he was executed by the French for terrorism, and was embraced as a martyr by German nationalists, Catholic conservatives, and Communists alike. Hans-Georg Gadamer reports that the academically diligent and apolitical Heidegger canceled a lecture to meet his funeral train,[43] one of the few political acts of Heidegger's we know of during the 1920s. Later, Schlageter was adopted as a hero of National Socialism, and Heidegger gave a speech in his honour in 1933. In it, he invokes the rhetoric of embracing the destiny of a previously lived possibility, and of resoluteness towards death, but combines with a more explicitly martial nationalism:

> Student of Freiburg, let the strength of this hero's native mountains flow
> into your will...
> Schlageter walked these grounds as a student. But Freiburg could not
> hold him for long. He *was compelled* to go to the Baltic, he *was
> compelled* to go to Upper Silesia; he *was compelled* to go to the Ruhr.
> He was not permitted to escape his destiny so that he could die the most
> difficult and greatest of all deaths with a hard will and a clear heart.[44]

But Schlageter, the empty vessel whose life is filled by his willing acceptance of a *Volkisch* destiny, does not exhaust Heidegger's conception of the hero. There is also a more creative aspect to the hero that becomes clear in Heidegger's later discussions of the artist and the statesman. In the Rectoral Address, Heidegger says that the German students seek "those leaders through whom it wills to so elevate its own vocation that it

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 543.

[43] Otto Pöggeler, "Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Politics," in T. Rockmore and J. Margolis ed., *The Heidegger Case* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 137-138.

[44] Heidegger, "Political Texts: 1933-1934," Richard Wolin, trans., *New German Critique* 45 (Fall, 1988), p. 97.

becomes a grounded, knowing truth, and to place into the clarity of interpretive and effective word and work." Here, as in *Being and Time* we have a choice of a hero, but in this case the relationship of the hero to the past is not seen as simply repetitive, but *interpretive*. The true hero is not simply somebody who embraces the past, but somebody who is able of reinterpreting the possibilities of the past for the future. In his writings of the mid 1930s, such as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, "On the Origin of the Work of Art," and his lectures on Hölderlin's poetry, Heidegger develops "the conception of the creative leader whose work lets others discover their own essence and place."[45] In "On the Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger expresses his view that art reveals truth, not in the sense of showing to man some pre-existent eternal truth, but in the unconcealing of what was previously concealed, in a violent, conflictual act of will. At the same time, the truth revealing of art is not seen as simply an act of individual genius, but as an historical act, an act already pointing towards historic preservation and retrieval by a community. The work of art is compared to the work of the lawgiver: "One essential way in which the truth establishes itself in the beings it has opened up is truth setting itself into work. Another way in which truth occurs is the act that founds a political state."[46] This comparison between the creative and truth revealing aspect of art and statesmanship is extended in the 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Commenting on the conflictual nature of the unconcealment of truth, Heidegger states:

> It is this conflict that first projects and develops what had hitherto been
> unheard of, unsaid, and unthought. The battle is then sustained by the
> creators, poets, thinkers, and statesmen. Against the overwhelming chaos
> they set the barrier of their work, and in their work they capture the world
> thus opened up... This world-building is history in the authentic sense.

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[45] Harries, pp. 655-656.
[46] Heidegger, "The Origins of the Work of Art," A. Hofstadter, trans., in *Basic Writings*, p. 186.

Not only does such conflict give rise to the essent, it also preserves the essent in its permanence.[47]

Heidegger condemns the process of creative degeneration, in which the truth unconcealed by the artist or founder is simply taken for granted and not reappropriated and given new meaning. The true Heideggerian hero, then, is the creative founder who extracts meaning and Being from the void of nothingness, but also the creative interpreter who returns to the creator/founder for inspiration and makes the past speak anew. In the political sphere, as Dana Villa puts it, "The interpretation of the 'leader' itself repeats the moment of vision in which the world of the community 'sprang into being.'"[48]

To choose one's hero, then, is to find the leader who speaks with the authentic voice of tradition, one who makes the founding spirit speak anew. There is no transhistorical, rational basis on which to identify this leader, but it would be unfair to say that Heidegger's conception of the leader or the hero is entirely without guidance: only those leaders who claim to be speaking in the authoritative voice of tradition would even be eligible for consideration. Leaders lost entirely in the world of the present and the "they" (a category which would likely include most modern liberal democratic politicians of whatever stripe) would not seem to be relevant. On the other hand, since even the true leader is always engaged in an interpretive act, there is no basis for judgment between conflicting interpretations. The traditionalist conservative, the environmentalist, the utopian socialist, and the Nazi -- the followers of Caesar or St. Francis -- can all speak in the name of a return to what has been lost, and Heidegger

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[47] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Ralph Manheim, trans., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 62.

[48] Dana R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 218.

would seem to have no basis to choose between them. "Unwilling or unable to subject such hermeneutic authority to the kind of judgment exercised in the public realm and oblivious to the minimal conditions necessary to preserve such judgment, Heidegger falls prey to a kind of intuitionism all too capable of seeing in National Socialism the disclosure of the 'spiritual world' of the German people."[49]

The Political Implications of Heidegger's Historicism: the Conservative Revolution

Heidegger's conception of authenticity, understood as the appropriation of a tradition, is not an empty, arbitrary decisionism, but it still remains politically problematic. It does not provide an ethical system, nor does it provide clear guidance for political action. Nor does Heidegger ever suggest that it is an ethical or political theory. It is rather a suggestive account that can point to the kind of tradition or leader which is based on an authentic original experience of Being. While Heidegger's conception of history certainly has political and social implications, its purpose is to lead *Dasein* to an authentic experience of Being, an experience which is pre-metaphysical, and therefore pre-ethical and pre-political.

What are the implications of such an account at a practical political level? Heidegger, as we have seen, sought to apply his theorizing about history to the concrete situation of the National Socialist revolution in 1933-34. After 1933, Heidegger never again attempted to directly apply his concept of historical authenticity to any particular political moment or movement, or identified any leader as a hero worthy of emulation,

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[49] *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

but his basic conception of history as containing a normative destiny never changed. In 1936, after the resignation of the Rectorate and as his disillusion with Nazism was growing, he wrote that history is not "a sequence in time of events of whatever sort, however important. History is a transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people's endowment."[50] So the use of his concept to endorse allegiance to a regime that even he came to acknowledge was a misadventure did not cause Heidegger to rethink the validity of this point of his thinking.

But does Heidegger's conception of history have validity aside from his later use of it to rationalize his Nazism? If this thought led directly to his Nazism, and was never later retracted, then Heidegger's thought stands guilty of being a thoroughly Nazified doctrine. This seems to be the position of Farias, who asserts that: "With the introduction of a (so-called) community of people, with its own tradition and heritage, Heidegger comes close to the interpretations that circulated widely under National Socialism," and that "the philosophical project... in 1927 anticipates Heidegger's later positions."[51] This seems to overstate matters somewhat. There were many thoroughly anti-Nazi admirers of Heidegger before and after 1933 who have read *Being and Time*, including its sections on history, and have not found Heidegger's Nazism implicit therein. Surely merely invoking "community," "tradition," and "heritage" is not sufficient in itself to make one a Nazi.

However, the use of such plainly political and resonant terms in the midst of a philosophical text by an author who does not hesitate to use obscure or neologized

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[50] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, A. Hofstadter, trans., (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 77.
[51] Farias, p. 64, 65.

terminology elsewhere does seem to indicate that Heidegger is trying to make a direct contribution in *Being and Time* to the contemporary Weimar political debate. The French Marxist sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has argued that one cannot reduce Heidegger to a political tract writer, but nor can one approach him as a pure philosopher, unaffected by his political milieu. Bourdieu holds that one must "undertake a simultaneously political and philosophical *dual reading* of writings which are defined by their fundamental *ambiguity*, that is by their reference to two social spaces."[52] Bourdieu argues that Heidegger's thought should be seen as part of the orbit (politically, at least) of the Conservative Revolution movement that was widespread in middle-class Weimar intellectual circles. The leading figures of this group included Oswald Spengler, Ernst Jünger, and Moeller van den Bruck.

There is profit in considering Heidegger's concept of historicity (and indeed his other political ideas, such as his concept of technology) in comparison with the intellectuals of the Weimar Conservative Revolution. This is clearly the tendency in German political thought with which Heidegger has the greatest affinity, even if Heidegger always expressed himself in the language and within the debates of pure philosophy. Heidegger freely acknowledged his debt to Ernst Jünger (an influence that will be discussed in considering Heidegger's views on technology). The Denazification Commission, basing itself on Heidegger's own testimony and that of his academic friends and foes, wrote that:

> Prior to the revolution of 1933 the philosopher Martin Heidegger lived in
> a totally unpolitical intellectual world, but maintained friendly contacts (in
> part through his sons) with the youth movement of the day and with

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[52] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, Peter Collier, trans., (Cambridge, UK: Polity press, 1991), p. 3.

certain literary spokesmen for Germany's youth – such as Ernst Jünger –
who were heralding the end of the bourgeois-capitalist age and the
dawning of a new German socialism.[53]

The "youth movement" referred to was a significant part of the Conservative
Revolution, active in the universities in the late 1920s, which advocated a return to
nature, rejection of capitalism and Bolshevism, and a *Volkisch* nationalism. While we
know that Heidegger was familiar with the youth movement and influenced by the
writings of Jünger, there are may other parallels between Heidegger's thought and the
Conservative Revolution more generally.

The Conservative Revolution was defined by its first historian, Armin Mohler, as
"that spiritual movement that tried to clear away the ruins of the nineteenth century and
to create a new order of life."[54] The Conservative Revolutionaries opposed the entire
liberal, democratic, and egalitarian worldview that emerged with the French Revolution.
But unlike traditional or reactionary conservatives who generally either supported the
Wilhelmine Empire or the Bavarian monarchy, the conservative revolutionaries saw the
old regimes as rife with bourgeois liberalism and bureaucratism, and welcomed World
War I and even the Soviet Revolution as transforming events that would allow for a
fundamental restructuring of society. The revolution they called for was seen as
primarily a spiritual revolution, which drew inspiration from Nietzsche and the
Lebensphilosophie of Dilthey, Scheler, and Husserl (all key influences on Heidegger).
Through this inward, spiritual revolution, people would "become ourselves" and "return

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[53] "Report of the Denazification Commission, September, 1945," quoted in Ott, p. 324.
[54] Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918-1932*, quoted in Keith Bullivant, "The
Conservative Revolution," in Anthony Phelan, ed., *The Weimar Dilemma: Intellectuals in the Weimar
Republic* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 47.

to the true fount of humanity."[55] The source of this spiritual renewal was to be found in a

contemplation of the true meaning of history, the view that:

> history is a bequest, a majestic handing-on of, but also the sum of, all
> things people bear into the future from the past. But this bequest has to be
> earned again and again, and towards it is guided the unity of the great
> trinity, of which we already know the past and the present, whilst we, each
> in our turn, have to fulfill and to enrich the future with our dream of it.[56]

The thought of the Conservative Revolution has been linked both with Nazism

and with the philosophy of Heidegger. In both cases, there is some truth in the linkage,

but also a need for caution. The conservative revolutionaries, like the Nazis, opposed

liberalism and democracy, and called for an authoritarian and nationalistic revolution.

But there are also important differences. The Conservative Revolutionaries were

aristocratic cultural elitists. They hoped to have an indirect influence on the spiritual

renewal of Germany, not lead a political party and thus get involved (even to overthrow)

the corrupt Weimar regime. The Nazis were crude populists who fed on mass

resentments, not a sophisticated aristocratic view of culture. While there was anti-

Semitism among the Conservative Revolutionaries (as among most sectors of German, or

indeed European, middle class society), there was none of the biological racism of the

Nazis. The spiritual revolution the Conservative Revolutionaries foresaw was a renewal

of Christian faith. The Nazis looked to the "Aryan" spirituality of Germanic myth for

spiritual guidance. These differences led most of the Conservative Revolutionaries to

keep a wide distance from the Nazis, who they saw as popularizing and bastardizing their

ideas to achieve intellectual respectability. Many Conservative Revolutionaries actively

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[55] Bullivant, p. 50.

[56] Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, quoted in Bullivant, p. 54. (The use of the term "Third Reich" in conservative revolutionary circles of the 1920s refers to a spiritual order, and does not necessarily have Nazi connotations - even liberal figures like Thomas Mann used the term Third Reich.)

opposed the Nazis, some ending up in concentration camps or executed as anti-Hitler conspirators.

As to Heidegger, while there are definite resemblances between his ideas and those of the Conservative Revolutionaries, there are also important differences. Heidegger was familiar with the Conservative Revolutionaries, and his view of technology was directly influenced by one of their major figures, Ernst Jünger (an influence we will examine in discussing Heidegger's critique of technology). The resemblance between Heidegger's concept of history and that of Moeller van den Bruck, for example, is undeniable. Yet Heidegger remained aloof from the political and cultural debates among the Weimar intelligentsia and restricted himself to the sphere of formal philosophical debate. The history he is most concerned with is the history of philosophy, not social or political history, and he does not want to sweep away simply the detritus of nineteenth century politics to return to undo the legacy of the French Revolution, but to deconstruct the entire history of Western philosophy since Plato. As Bourdieu states:

> Whereas he is a contemporary of Spengler and Jünger in the public time of politics, Heidegger is the contemporary of Cassirer and Husserl in the autonomous history of the philosophical field. If... he *is situated* in a given moment in the political history of Germany, he *situates himself* at a stage in the internal history of philosophy.[57]

Ironically, by acting as a Conservative Revolutionary in the more rarified discipline of philosophy, while assimilating only superficially the works of Conservative Revolutionary thinkers in politics and culture, Heidegger may not have developed the practical wisdom to be able to distinguish between the aristocratic and spiritual vision of the genuine Conservative Revolutionaries and the crude populism of the Nazis when the

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[57] Bourdieu, pp. 40-41.

latter emerged as a potent political force. Heidegger may have agreed in general with the Conservative Revolution in its call for a spiritual renewal of the nation and resistance to Bolshevism and bourgeois capitalism, without making the fine internecine distinctions of the German cultural and political conservatives between various formulations of the "third way." But in the end it would seem that Heidegger's political thought is far closer aligned to that of the 1920s Conservative Revolutionaries than to the later Nazi ideologues.

If Heidegger's political thought is understood as similar to that of the Conservative Revolutionaries of Weimar Germany, it may help us to understand how Heidegger's thought is applicable to political theory more generally. Heidegger cannot be assimilated with Nazism, although Heidegger's thought, like the thought of the Conservative Revolution more generally, was part of the intellectual worldview that made Nazism thinkable. Reflection on Heidegger's thought may prove useful, both for analysis and criticism, for reflection on other schools of thought that combine conservative and revolutionary opposition to modern liberalism. While the term "Conservative Revolution" refers to a specific political tendency in Weimar Germany, conservative revolutionary ideas are something of a *Gestalt*, and conservative revolutionary "types" can be seen in other movements. Movements such as radical environmentalism (especially the deep ecology or "Earth First!" movement that desires to sweep away industrial progress to return to a primeval natural state), religious political movements (the Christian right, liberation theology, Islamic fundamentalism), and various forms of ethnic nationalism may be considered as variants of conservative revolutionary thinking. All of these movements look to the past for guidance, but not in order to perpetuate the status quo, but to reappropriate and emulate a heroic or mythic

historic origin that has somehow been lost in a present seen as characterized by subjective individualism that has uprooted communities from their historic roles and spiritual identities. In the striking image of Benjamin Barber, these movements share a commitment to, or at least a passive preference for, the forces of Jihad in its ongoing struggle with McWorld.[58] Even the communitarian critique of liberalism in contemporary Anglo-American political theory, a critique to which Barber is a sometime contributor, has aspects which combine a romantic conservative appeal to the past to find the context for meaningful social identities, with a call for a (non-violent) revolution in contemporary political practices to give communities more influence. There is a family resemblance among all of these movements and between them and the Weimar Conservative Revolution, and Heidegger's thought can be profitably compared these other movements just as it can to the specifically Weimar German formulation of conservative revolution.

If Heidegger's political ideas, and his vision of history, has applicability to political thought more generally than simply in its relationship to Nazism, it is because Heidegger, while staying within the realm of pure philosophy captures what all of these disparate conservative revolutionary movements have in common: the appeal to historic traditions out of a desire to rediscover a more primordial and authentic experience of Being. Both the potentialities and dangers of these movements can be found in Heidegger, who as a Conservative Revolutionary in the field of pure philosophy has articulated a foundational or archetypal form of Conservative Revolution that can be usefully compared to other movements that have applied conservative revolutionary

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[58] Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine, 1995)

methodology to very different historically particular political and social traditions.

In *Being and Time* only the question of history is cast in terms which are recognizably political. In later writings, several other issues emerge which have direct political implications, particularly technology and language. Having examined Heidegger's exploration of the question of Being, the importance of history to *Dasein*'s recovery of Being, and the relationship of Heidegger's concept of history to the contemporary movement of Conservative Revolution, it remains to be seen whether his discussion of other political questions also fits this conservative revolutionary pattern.

Chapter 3 - The Political Thinking of the Later Hedegger: Technology and Language

    In Heidegger's earlier life and thought, his concept of historicity led directly to his disastrous political involvement, as he himself told Karl Löwith. For the later Heidegger, disillusioned after 1936 and disgraced, at least politically, after the war, references to politics tended to be more oblique, and history was replaced as the focus of Heidegger's political thinking by several other concepts, the most important of which were technology and language. This chapter will examine the the role of technology and language in Heidegger's thinking, and the implications of the Heideggerian notions of technology and language for his later political thinking.

Part I - Heidegger and Technology

    Technology did not emerge as a major concern for Heidegger's philosophical writing until the 1930s, eventually becoming one of his central themes after the war. But Heidegger, true to his Black Forest peasant ancestry, had long been skeptical of the technological progress of modernity. In his personal life, Heidegger lived very simply, spending much of his time in his ski hut at Todtnauberg, and almost affectedly maintaining the vestiges of rusticity including peasant dress and a rural accent. As early as 1919 in private correspondence, Heidegger expressed concern about the technological rationalization of the world, voicing his contempt for the: "unbridled, basically Enlightenment directive to nail life and everything living onto a board, like things, orderly and flat, so that everything becomes overseeable, controllable, definable,

connectable, and explicable, where only many pure and unrestrained... 'ables' exist..."[59]

Michael Zimmerman notes that in his belatedly published Freiburg lectures of the mid-

1920s, Heidegger spoke of his concern about "modern technology," a term he used to

describe "what he regarded as the twin evils of industrialism."[60]

While technology is not explicitly developed as a theme of *Being and Time*,

evidence of his skeptical attitude towards it abounds. In his discussion of entities

discovered in the environment, Heidegger talks of the nature revealing aspect of work:

we discover nature itself through our appropriation of "ready-to-hand" objects which we

use practically. Heidegger notes that one can also discount that practical "ready-to-hand"

uses of entities found in nature, and can study them scientifically as "pure presence-at-

hand," but in doing so, "the Nature which 'stirs and strives,' which assails us and

enthralls us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist's plants are not the flowers of the

hedgerow, the 'source' which the geographer establishes for the river is not the

'springhead in the dale.'"[61] Science, rather than revealing and enlightening nature, hides

its presence from *Dasein*. As Otto Pöggeler notes, Heidegger "had grave reservations

about the traditional preponderance of theory" which "begins only in an emancipation of

this life-world."[62]

From these statements, it might seem that Heidegger sees nature in a simply

instrumental way, as something to be used by people, not studied and appreciated for its

own sake. But from the following paragraphs, it becomes clear that what Heidegger is

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[59] Heidegger, "Heidegger's Letter to the Boss' Daughter," *Telos* (Fall, 1988), p. 126.
[60] Michael Zimmerman, "Ontological Aestheticism: Heidegger, Jünger, and National Socialism," in Rockmore and Margolis, p. 52.
[61] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 100.
[62] Pöggeler, "Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Politics," in Rockmore and Margolis, ed., p. 125.

not simply proposing an instrumentalist approach to the natural world, but opposing a relational, intuitive knowledge of nature (which we gain from practical work with natural products) to a rationalistic understanding of nature, whether scientific or industrial. For when we create something out of nature for our own use, *"under simple craft conditions it also has an assignment to the person who is to use it or wear it. The work is cut to his figure; he 'is' there along with it as the work emerges."* But when work is mass produced, "it is merely indefinite, and points to the random, the average."[63] From the personalized, craft work use of nature, nature itself becomes part of the world which constitutes *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world. By applying objective reason to nature, either to study it or to increase the productivity of our work, nature is excluded from *Dasein*. In the later essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger again refers to the different ways nature reveals itself, but here contrasts not craft and science, but craft and industry: "The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit."[64] Craft is an authentic way of dealing with nature, as appropriating the tradition of a people is an authentic form of *Mitsein*. Industry and science are as inauthentic ways of relating to nature as absorption into the mass psychology of the "They" is an inauthentic way of relating to other people.

After the publication of *Being and Time* Heidegger's concern with the technological and rationalistic conception of the world, especially in the sciences, became more pressing. In his inaugural lecture as a Professor at Freiburg, "What is Metaphysics," Heidegger lamented that the technical specialization of the academic disciplines that had diverted them from a common search for the essence of truth:

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[63] Heidegger, *Being and Time.*, p. 100 (italics added).
[64] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," *Basic Writings*, p. 320.

What happens to us, essentially, in the grounds of our existence, when science becomes our passion? The scientific fields are quite diverse. The ways they treat their objects of inquiry differ fundamentally. Today only the technical organization of the universities and faculties consolidates this burgeoning multiplicity of disciplines; the practical establishment of goals by each discipline provides the only meaningful source of unity. Nonetheless, the rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has atrophied.[65]

According to Heidegger's own post-war apologia, it was the desire to address this concern that led him to take an active role in academic politics by accepting the rectorate. Heidegger envisioned a reform of the university by turning against technological thinking: "by returning to the essence of truth itself instead of persisting in a technical organization-institutional pseudo-unity, it was to recover the primordial living unity that joins those who question and those who know."[66] In his Rectoral Address, Heidegger condemned the "mathematical-technological thinking of the modern age"[67] and called for a return to what he saw as the essence of the Greek concept of *theoria* which he saw not as abstract and isolated contemplation, but as embracing the practical and communal world.

In his early thought regarding technology in the period before and after *Being and Time*, Heidegger tends to use the word technology as synonymous with rationalism: an understanding of the world that labels, subdivides, and categorizes human knowledge and life into discrete compartments, thus denying the essential unity of the human being with fellow humans and the external world as *Dasein* as Being-in-the-world and Being-with. Heidegger's thinking regarding technology from the 1930s onwards was transformed and

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[65] Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" *Basic Writings*, p. 95.

[66] Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," Karsten Harries, trans., *Review of Metaphysics* (March, 1985), p. 482.

[67] Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," p. 473.

deepened by his reading of Ernst Jünger, one of the key figures of the Conservative

Revolution, and the leading representative of what Jeffrey Herf has called the

"reactionary modernist" stream within the Conservative Revolution: the attempt to

combine traditional German conservative ideas of *Gesellschaft*, cultural nationalism, and

an economic "third way" with a simultaneous embrace of technological progress.

Jünger's writing foresaw a radical transformation of the world and human nature through

mass technologization. Jünger tended to be sanguine about this prospect, while

Heidegger, a more traditional romantic conservative by temperament, saw this as a

nightmare scenario. But Heidegger was nonetheless profoundly influenced by Jünger's

account. Through his reading of Jünger, Heidegger became convinced that the

development of technology was intimately related with the philosophical history of

Western metaphysics:

> In the year 1930 Ernst Jünger's article on "Total Mobilization" had
> appeared; in this article the basic features of his book *The Worker*, which
> appeared in 1932, announced themselves. Together with my assistant
> Brock, I discussed these writings in a small circle and tried to show how
> they express a fundamental understanding of Nietzsche's metaphysics, in
> so far as the history and present of the Western world are seen and
> foreseen in the horizon of this metaphysics.[68]

As Herf puts it, "Heidegger differed from the reactionary modernists in his

rejection of technology, but he shared their view that it was an autonomous force with a

will of its own."[69] Heidegger's encounter with Jünger's ideas on technology are thus

intimately related with Heidegger's attempts during the 1930s to interpret and criticize

Nietzsche's metaphysics. While Nietzsche was a cult figure on the German intellectual

right, and was proclaimed (or perhaps co-opted) as the philosophical forebear of Nazism

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[68] Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34," p. 484.

[69] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 115.

by the National Socialist ideologues, Nietzsche had hardly figured in Heidegger's early

writings or *Being and Time*. But by the mid-1930s, Nietzsche "has become the most

important philosopher of modern times for Heidegger."[70] In his Rectoral Address,

Heidegger had called Nietzsche "the last German philosopher."[71] While it is beyond the

scope of this essay to deal with the complex question of Heidegger's reading of

Nietzsche, the more concise question of how Jünger and the Conservative Revolution

stimulated Heidegger's consideration of Nietzsche, and the evolution of Heidegger's

attitude towards technology in dialogue with Jünger and Nietzsche needs to be

considered to understand Heidegger's mature thought on technology.

In the early 1930s Heidegger was partially enamored of Jünger's vision of a

technological revolution that would sweep away the old order and prepare the new,

feeling that technology could be controlled and guided to use liberating forms of

technology to oppose the technological nihilism he saw in capitalism and communism.

With his disillusionment with Nazism in that late 1930s, Heidegger came to vehemently

oppose Jünger's prescriptive technological optimism, but he remained convinced that

Jünger's descriptive account of the total technologization of existence was prophetic.

Heidegger's assessment of Nietzsche traced a similar path: at first Heidegger took him at

his word as the philosopher who had finally overcome Platonic metaphysics, but by the

late 1930s Heidegger came to believe that rather than overcoming metaphysics,

Nietzsche had simply revealed in the total subjectivism and ultimate nihilism of all

metaphysical thinking.

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[70]Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Heidegger's Decline: Between Philosophy and Politics," *Political Studies* 42 (1994), p. 509.

[71] Heidegger, "Self-Assertion of the German University," p. 474.

Deeply affected by his experience of the war, Jünger derived from his reading of

Spengler and Nietzsche his concept that each historical period is shaped by a particular

Gestalt, a form or stamp, of the metaphysical force of the Nietzschean Will to Power.

This *Gestalt* shapes the entire era in its image. In modern times, the governing *Gestalt*

was that of the Worker. The *Gestalt* of the Worker, as the new manifestation of the Will

to Power, would put an end to the declining, decadent bourgeois civilization. Jünger's

Worker is not conceived of in Marxist class terms, but rather in aesthetic terms. For

while bourgeois life was consumed with the pursuit of the trivial, a seeking after security

and the avoidance of pain, Jünger's Worker embraced the tidal wave of change brought

about by modern technological warfare, mass industrial production, and violent

revolution, which was seen as a type of creative destruction that brought out the

possibility of a new form of aesthetic existence. Jünger's Worker was a type of

Nietzschean superman. As Michael Zimmerman notes, the Jüngerian version of the

superman "who combined personal creativity with personal violence, reflected the

mesmerizing power of the *Fronterlebnis* [life-experience of the front] that made so many

veterans feel that ordinary life was meaningless."[72]

The experience of total warfare in World War I, followed by the mass social

revolutions in Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy, convinced Jünger and many others on the

right and left that bourgeois society was ending, and that a total transformation of society

by technology was taking its place. A bourgeois clinging to the old order in the face of

the technological onslaught was pointless: "The degree to which man stands decisively

in relation to technology and is not destroyed by it depends on the degree to which he

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[72] Zimmerman, "Ontological Aestheticism," p. 60.

represents the *Gestalt* of the worker. In this sense technology is the mastery of language that is valid in the realm of work."[73] Jünger's Worker turns the world around him into *Bestand*, or standing reserve, a term adopted by Heidegger. Everything in the world, including man himself, is transformed into part of the technological machine.

This vision of total war and mass technology seems outwardly horrifying, not something aesthetically pleasing, but Zimmerman points out that it is "part of an aesthetic tradition initiated by Edgar Allan Poe" which "believed that contemplation of the horrifying brought insight into the spiritual abyss and drew one nearer to the terrifying eternity of things."[74] The ability to find beauty in the horror of warfare and technologization helped one embrace reality, and understand the working of the Will to Power in the present day. "Jünger's 'magical realism' hypostasized aesthetic experience as the highest value, since in such experience one could apprehend the horrifying dimension of the eternal Will to Power at work in all things."[75] In this belief that horror could be transformed by aesthetic insight, Jünger followed Nietzsche's teaching that only artistic self-assertion can preserve the human will and allow for action once man becomes aware of the absence of any intrinsic meaning to existence. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wrote that:

> Here, when the danger to will is greatest, *art* approaches as a saving
> sorceress, expert at healing. She alone knows how to turn these nauseous
> thoughts about the horror or absurdity of existence into notions with
> which one can live: these are the *sublime* as the artistic taming of the
> horrible, and the *comic* as the artistic discharge of absurdity.[76]

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[73] Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter* quoted in Zimmerman, p. 62.

[74] Zimmerman, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[75] *Ibid.*, p. 77.

[76] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans Walter Kaufmann, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1968), p. 60.

Heidegger approached Jünger's nightmare vision with decidedly mixed feelings. On the one hand, he shared with Jünger and the other Conservative Revolutionary thinkers in the desire to sweep away the bourgeois order of nineteenth century Germany. Heidegger accepted Jünger's analysis of mass technology as the modern manifestation of the Nietzschean Will to Power. On the other hand, the vision of a totally transformed technologized society on Bolshevist or Futurist lines struck Heidegger as being the worst possible fate, the final triumph of Western metaphysics in the total obliteration of Being. Even as an aestheticized Nietzschean embracing of the horror and absurdity of life, he could not accept it. Therefore, instead of embracing the *Gestalt* of the Worker as a means of existing within the fate of technological Will to Power, Heidegger determined that the flood of technologization had to be heroically resisted, not by shoring up the decadent bourgeois society of Weimar Germany, but through a new politics that drew its inspiration from the historic traditions of the originary encounters of the Western man with Being in early Greek thinking and German poetry. But this could not be a matter of a simple romantic longing for a by-gone era. Jünger had shown what the stakes of technologization were and how the method of total mobilization that would be brought to bear to transform all of society and all of the earth into the image of the *Gestalt* of the Worker. Only an equally fierce opposition seemed capable of resisting it – it was necessary to think in a Jüngerian way against Jünger. In Heidegger's observation of the political scene in the early 1930s, the only force in German society that seemed capable of effecting such a revolutionary change, such a resolute resistance to the seemingly inevitable flow of global technology, was the equally determined, willful, and violent reactionary movement of National Socialism.

Heidegger's embrace of National Socialism as a means to provide determined

resistance to technological fate and to encourage Germany to return to its origins in the

opening to Being is seen in his speeches and articles during the Rectorate. He uses his

polemics of this period both to call for Jüngerian discipline and will, and for an anti-

technological return to tradition. The Rectoral Address, for instance, contains a call for

both a return to the Greek origins of science as the questioning of Being and away from

technical specialization, and also for the total mobilization of the university on industrial

and militaristic lines under decisive leadership. The members of the university are called

to "place ourselves under the power of the *beginning* of our spiritual-historical being.

This beginning is the setting out of Greek philosophy."[77] The Greek origins of science is

said to be in the "awed perseverance of the Greeks in the face of what is" which allowed

"exposure to the hidden and uncertain, i.e. the questionable." This primordial

questioning "shatters the division of the sciences into rigidly separated specialties" and

allows the creation by science of a "truly spiritual world."[78]

But while containing this anti-technological call for a return to a primitive

openness to Being, Heidegger also expresses the belief that the university has a three-fold

purpose: providing labor service, armed service, and knowledge service to the State, and

that the three services must "primordially coalesce and become *one* formative force," that

students and teachers must awaken their "will to essence" and that the will of the

university must be made prepared for battle. "All faculties of will and thought, all

strengths of heart and all skills of body, must be unfolded through battle, heightened in

battle, and preserved in battle."[79] Thus, even while opposing the modern condition of the

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[77] Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University," p. 471.
[78] *Ibid.*, p. 474.
[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 478-479.

university imposed by the technicalization of the disciplines, and calling for a repetition of the historic tradition of Greek learning, Heidegger uses the language of work, will, and warfare, of total mobilization, garnered from Jünger.

In this period of Heidegger's career, it has been suggested that he saw himself, as the nationally and internationally recognized star of German philosophy, as uniquely positioned to offer spiritual leadership to Germany at the very moment when the metaphysical tradition of the West under the guise of technology was about to complete the annihilation of Being. Some of his critics, following Karl Jaspers, have claimed that he saw himself as the *"Führer fuhren,"* the one leader who could act as the spiritual guide for the German revolution.[80] Whether he saw himself in quite such a messianic role is open to question, but there is no doubt that he hoped to act as a positive force, guiding the revolution in a direction opposed to the technologization of communist Russia and capitalist America which he dreaded, and saw as the twin powers of Jünger's *Gestalt* of the Worker.

But quickly after his political failures as rector and his resignation, he became disillusioned with the revolution, which he came to see not as resistance to nihilism in the face of the Soviet and American threats, but simply the embrace of technological nihilism in a new nationalistic form. This despondence is seen in Heidegger's 1935 lectures, published later as *the Introduction to Metaphysics.* The ruthless technological advance foreseen by Jünger is seen as imminent due to the lack of determined resistance:

> Europe, in its ruinous blindness 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

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[80] Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being* (New York: Columbia, 1990), p. 87.

unrestricted organization of the average man. [81]

He goes on to describe this new age as "a time when the farthermost corner of the globe has been opened to economic exploitation" where "time has ceased to be anything other than velocity, instantaneousness, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from the lives of all peoples." The universal, instantaneous nature of the age has led to the forgetfulness of the historic tradition of a people, which requires particularity and a more reflective attitude towards the passage of time. With society so surrendered to the "They," it is no wonder that "mass meetings attended by millions are looked on as a triumph,"[82] a clear reference to the Nuremburg rallies, which Heidegger found to be a horrible spectacle.

For National Socialism had let down Heidegger, and had failed to live up to its potential to confront the perils of the age. "The works that are being peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism...have nothing to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely the encounter between global technology and modern man.)"[83] There is some controversy whether the parenthetical remarks, which were added to the text in 1953, were part of Heidegger's original lecture notes, or whether he modified the text to downplay the reference to the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism. Nonetheless, Heidegger's disappointment with the failure of Nazism to confront technology was palpable. In 1945, he felt that Jünger's prophecy had been fulfilled and that Nazism had simply been absorbed by technology rather than overcoming it:

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[81] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Ralph Manheim, trans., (New haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 67.
[82] *Ibid.*, p 68.
[83] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

> What Ernst Jünger thinks with the thought of the rule and shape of the
> worker and sees in the light of this thought, is the universal rule of the will
> to power within history, now understood to embrace the planet. Today,
> everything stands in this historical reality, no matter whether it calls itself
> communism, or fascism, or world democracy.[84]

Even at the end of his life, Heidegger remained convinced that the National Socialism

originally had had the admirable intention of limiting the hegemony of technology.

In his *Spiegel* interview, Heidegger said:

> ...I see the task of thought precisely in this, that within its own limits it
> helps man as such achieve a satisfactory relationship to the essence of
> technicity. National Socialism did indeed go in this direction. Those
> people, however, were far too poorly equipped for thought to arrive at a
> really explicit relationship to what is happening today and has been
> underway for the past 300 years.[85]

The main failing of the Nazis, it seems, is not that they were bad people, but that

they were bad philosophers! The growing realization that National Socialism had not

been the movement of willed resistance to technology that he had dreamed it could be,

but had in fact helped fulfill Jünger's vision by transforming all of Germany into a

technologized Worker / Soldier state, led Heidegger to a renewed confrontation with the

Jünger's philosophical hero, Friedrich Nietzsche.

At the beginning of the 1930s, Heidegger like many other German philosophers,

turned to Nietzsche as the prophet of the age. He felt that in Nietzsche he had found the

key to the overcoming of the metaphysical tradition that still haunted the West and had

diverted it from the question of Being. In the Rectoral Address, he says that if we accept

Nietzsche's statement "God is Dead" as true, then "we have to face up to the

forsakenness of modern man in the midst of what is."[86] As Otto Pöggeler expresses it,

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[84] Heidegger, "The Rectorate: 1933/34," p. 485.

[85] Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us", in Sheehan, ed., p. 61.

[86] Heidegger, "Self-Assertion", p. 474.

Heidegger is saying that "If one accepts this phrase, then what began with Plato comes to an end, the grounding of the truth of beings in a pre-eminently existing or highest being."[87] In other words, Nietzsche has overcome the metaphysical tradition of the West stretching from Plato to Hegel. Nietzsche has replaced the attempt to search for a metaphysical ground of truth to seeing truth as an expression of will. The will to power is the essential state of modernity.

At first, Heidegger seems to accept Nietzschean Will as consistent with his own idea of resoluteness. To Jünger's vision of the technological Will to Power, Heidegger imagines a counter-will that would return to the pre-technological unity of Greek thinking. Heidegger may have imagined contemporary events as a struggle between two Nietzschean heroes with iron will -- Jünger's modern technological (Soviet?) Worker and Heidegger's primordial Greco-German poet or thinker – facing each other on the battle field of history.

But after his political disillusionment with the Nazis, when he saw them as simply absorbing the technological Will to Power, rather than opposing it, Heidegger came to reconsider whether Nietzschean Will was a sufficient response to technology, and whether Nietzsche's thought had succeeded after all in overcoming metaphysics. As Pöggeler writes, "Heidegger's examination of Nietzsche finally comes to the experience that precisely the will and its willing to create, as it becomes dominant in modern times, hinder an experience of the truth of Being and thereby obstruct being open for what is essential, indeed the divine."[88]

Heidegger's reevaluation of Nietzsche's thought was a major theme of his work

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[87] Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, p. 83.
[88] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

of the late 1930s, including a series of important Nietzsche lectures. Heidegger's defenders have pointed to his critical interpretations of Nietzsche, at a time when a vulgarized Nietzscheanism was canonical National Socialist orthodoxy, was a courageous act that showed Heidegger's rejection of Nazism. Perhaps a less apologetic interpretation would be that it shows Heidegger's willingness, after the disappointment of his political ambitions, to give voice to his own idiosyncratic "private National Socialism," dedicated to exploring the "inner truth and greatness" of the confrontation of the German people with technological modernity.

At this time, Heidegger came to hold that Nietzsche, far from rejecting the metaphysical tradition that he so despised in Plato, was in fact the consummation of metaphysical thinking. While Plato tried to ground Being in the absolute truth of the Ideas, Nietzsche chose to assert that there was no truth, and no Being but only becoming. But, as Heidegger said later regarding Sartre, "the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement."[89] Furthermore, in Nietzsche's vehement rejection of any socially grounded convention or morality, he totally embraces subjectivity, which for Heidegger was the essence of the modern metaphysics initiated by Descartes. Heidegger went as far as to say that "we must grasp Nietzsche's philosophy as the metaphysics of subjectivity."[90]

Heidegger analyzed the relationship of Western metaphysics to science in a 1936 series of lectures entitled "What is a Thing?" In this lecture he singled out Descartes as the father of the modern turn towards subjectivism, and related it directly to the

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[89] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 232.
[90] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 3, *The Will to Power as Knowledge and Metaphysics*, J. Stambaugh, trans., (New York: Harper and Row), p. 159

simultaneous rise of mathematical science. In a discussion similar to the passages of *Being and Time* distinguishing between the relation to nature as the ready-to-hand world of the craftsman and the pure presence-at-hand of the scientist, Heidegger points out the change in relation to nature brought about by modern mathematics. In the Mathematical theorizing about the universe of Galileo or Newton, nature is no longer the self-revelation of things that have a specific inner form or essence, as in Aristotelian science, but the things are mere instruments which reveal the fundamental mathematical nature of the universe as a whole. A feather does not have a quality of lightness, or a hammer a quality of heaviness, rather both of them possess a greater or lesser amount of the abstract property of mass, and it is mass, not feathers or hammers, which makes up the universe. "The mathematical is, as a *mente concipere*, a project of thingness which, as it were, skips over the things. The project first opens a domain where the things—i.e. facts—show themselves."[91] The fundamental principles of mathematics were axioms, abstract truths which were assumed as the basis of the entire project of artificial world-construction. Descartes, very much part of this mathematical revolution, fixed upon the idea of rooting knowledge in the subjective *cogito* to provide metaphysics with its own abstract mathematical axiom as the basis for world construction. Nietzsche, as the consummation of metaphysics, rejects the Cartesian or Kantian conception of the rational subject as the foundation of a system of truth, but while rejecting reason and truth Nietzsche remains trapped in the framework of the axiomatic subject.

Nietzsche's doctrine of the Will to Power was for Heidegger the final end of Western metaphysics of subjectivity, and the modern technology produced by the

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[91] Heidegger, "Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics" in *Basic Writings*, p. 291.

application of mathematical science to nature was the handmaiden of this metaphysics.

As Leslie Thiele points out, on Heidegger's account, "The cultural analogue of

Nietzsche's furious attempt at self-creation, in turn, is to be found in the understanding of

freedom that drives contemporary technology."[92] Heidegger's critical analysis of

Nietzsche in the late 1930s led directly on the critique of technology that was to figure so

prominently in Heidegger's post-war writing. Pöggeler notes:

> Heidegger's examination of Nietzsche has a proximate as well as a distant
> goal. The proximate goal is the representation of the inner unity which
> Nietzsche's metaphysical position has as the fundamental position of our
> age; the distant goal is the development of the question as to whether the
> highest conflict to be waged is the metaphysical struggle for domination of
> the earth, or whether our history can find another beginning which is no
> longer metaphysical.[93]

As the Nazi regime showed more and more of its brutality, and later as the tide of

war turned against Germany, Heidegger felt that the Nazi capitulation to technology and

the victorious rise of the supremely technological nations of the Soviet Union and the

United States meant that technology had triumphed on a world-historical scale. In

Heidegger's first major post-war public writing, "The Letter on Humanism," technology

does not figure as major theme, but the passage explaining how Heidegger's philosophy,

as opposed to Sartre's existentialism, provides the key to the understanding of and

philosophical dialogue with Marxism, reveals the direction of Heidegger's thinking on

technology. Read in light of his other writings on technology and metaphysics,

Heidegger's claim to be seeking a dialogue with Marxism seems disingenuous, an appeal

for the sympathy of *marxisant* French existentialists, not a call for sympathetic

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[92] Leslie Paul Thiele, *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 39.
[93] Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, p. 87.

understanding of Communism. For according to Heidegger, the essence of Marxist materialism is not the mere assertion that everything is matter but the "metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor."[94] Marxist materialism is the world seen through the eyes of Jünger's Worker, and the fulfillment of Nietzschean metaphysics:

> The essence of materialism is concealed in the essence of technology, about which much has been written but little has been thought. Technology is in its essence a destiny within the history of Being and of the truth of Being, a truth that lies in oblivion... As a form of truth technology is grounded in the history of metaphysics...[95]

Heidegger criticizes those who see communism as a mere party, like those who consider Americanism a mere lifestyle, as missing the fact that "from the point of view of the history of Being" they contain "and elemental experience of what is world-historical," without saying that what is world-historical about Marxism is the triumph of the technological Will to Power as the final end of Western metaphysics. The failure of Europe to confront technology as metaphysical destiny is above all a failure of thought.

> The danger into which Europe as it has hitherto existed is ever more clearly forced consists presumably in the fact above all that its thinking – hitherto its glory – is falling behind in the essential course of a dawning world destiny which nevertheless in the basic traits of its essential provenance remains European by definition.[96]

European metaphysics, from Plato, through Descartes, to Nietzsche, had given rise to the technological Will to Power, yet tragically remained unable to understand it even as in its Soviet and American forms it turned Europe itself and Europeans into material for its technological mastery. While Heidegger was not the first opponent of

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[94] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 243.
[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244.
[96] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

technology – they had existed since the Luddites, and were prominent in the Romantic movement that contributed so much to German conservatism – he was perhaps the first to link the rise of technology to the history of Western metaphysics itself.

Heidegger's response to the apparent triumph of global technology with Nietzsche's Will to Power bringing the metaphysical destiny of the West to completion was an inward turn towards quietism, a search for the hidden presence of Being still to be found in poetry, art, and the early Greek thinkers. Thus we come to the final stage of Heidegger's thinking about technology, a critique which has one a wide and sympathetic readership in contemporary forms of political and social thought such as postmodern theory and deep ecology. Heidegger's 1953 lectures on "The Question Concerning Technology" represent the bringing together of years of Heidegger's thought about technology with his experience of political impotence in the face of mass technologization.

In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger asks what is technology not simply in its particular manifestations, but in its essence. Heidegger criticizes the commonplace definition of technology as simply the instrumental means used to pursue any given human ends. Treating technology as mere means, consistent with a modern metaphysics that only considers efficient causes, and not the final or formal causes of Greek metaphysics, ignores the fact that each act of *techne* whether in craft, art, or industrial production is a form of revealing truth (in Heidegger's sense of truth as unconcealment) about a thing. Technology is no mere means, it is a way of revealing truth.

The ancient forms of *techne* were for the Greeks forms of *poiesis*, or bringing-forth, as was the emergence of growing things in nature. The craftsman, the poet,

revealed truth by bring things forth from hiddenness, as for example a sculptor may

reveal something of the hidden nature of the piece of marble which she carves. But

modern technology for Heidegger does not reveal truth in the sense of *poiesis*. It is rather

a challenging-forth which transforms nature into a supply of material or energy for future

use. This challenging, or setting upon, of nature does not bring forth its hidden essence,

it simply transforms it into an ordered stockpile of energy, reflecting the modern

scientific worldview in which things no longer contain specific forms or essences, but are

simply interchangeable units of mass or energy. This ordered stockpile is labelled

standing-reserve, or *Bestand*. Most disturbingly, man himself, to the extent that he is part

of an industrial machine that is transforming nature into standing-reserve becomes

himself part of the standing-reserve:

> If man is challenged, ordered, to do this, then does he not himself belong
> even more originally to that nature within the standing reserve? The
> current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a
> clinic, gives evidence of this. The forester who measures the felled timber
> in the woods and who to all appearances walks the forest path in the same
> way his grandfather did is today ordered by the industry that produces
> commercial woods, whether he knows it or not.[97]

It is in this context of seeing technology as something that turns man himself into

standing reserve, that one of the most controversial remarks Heidegger ever made must

be considered. In the same section of an earlier 1949 version of this lecture not published

until many years later, Heidegger included some remarks that have earned an important

place in the literature discussing Heidegger's relationship to Nazism: "Agriculture is

now a motorized food industry – in essence, the same as the manufacturing of corpses in

gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of

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[97] Heidegger, "Question Concerning Technology" in *Basic Writings*, p. 323.

nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs."[98]

This comment, comparing the Holocaust to the mechanization of agriculture has led to justifiable outrage. Yet in the context of Heidegger's thought, it is not the analogy *itself* which should be seen as offensive. Undoubtedly, Heidegger shows a fundamental lack of conscience in refusing to take any personal responsibility for his own involvement in the Nazi movement which was responsible for this atrocity. By comparing the Holocaust with contemporary Soviet and American advances in technological warfare (the Berlin blockades and the hydrogen bomb), the Holocaust is reduced merely a by-product of technology which contributes to the dehumanization of the world, and not also a conscious effort by a specific movement, the Nazis, to eliminate a specific people, the Jews. In fact, inasmuch as the adoption of technologization was a failure of the "inner greatness" of Nazism, on this interpretation the Holocaust is not the fulfillment of Nazism, but a betrayal of it. This has the appearance of a cowardly attempt at self-justification.

Nonetheless, in his lecture Heidegger is noting that technologization turns man into a mere ordered commodity, part of the stockpile of standing reserve. The technological horrors of war, including the Holocaust, are an apt metaphor for this. Leslie Thiele writes:

> Heidegger's comparisons, while certainly objectionable in the ways outlined, should not be dismissed. Nazism was a technologically driven enterprise in which concern for the world was denied so that the lust for domination might run rampant. Agribusiness, in turn, is a technologically driven enterprise in which concern for the world is subordinated so that the lust for profit may run rampant.[99]

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[98] Quoted in Sheehan, "Heidegger and the Nazis," pp. 41-42.
[99] Thiele, pp. 143-144.

Heidegger's comparison may be offensive, but it is not as far off the mark as some of his critics have suggested if you accept his premise that technology is no mere means to human ends, but something that transforms man into its image. Technology for Heidegger is driven by an underlying essential imperative which challenges and orders man to challenge and order nature and humanity itself into standing-reserve. Heidegger labels this phenomenon "enframing" or *Gestell*. Enframing as the essence of technology is the product of Western metaphysics, and thus originally of human thought and will, but it is something that all people today find themselves inescapably enframed within. "Thus the question as to how we are to arrive at a relationship to the essence of technology... always comes too late."[100]

Enframing was for Heidegger the foreseeable, if not inevitable, result of the history of Western metaphysics which he had long elaborated. In the sciences "man's ordering attitude and behavior display themselves first in the rise of physics as a modern science," thus "modern physics is the herald of the enframing."[101] Cartesian and Nietzschean subjectivity have also played their part in the enframing, forgetting that "the essence of freedom is *originally* not connected with the will or human willing."[102]

At this stage in Heidegger's thought, there was no immediate or political way out of the enframing of technology. "Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it."[103] Yet Heidegger remains hopeful that technology, by highlighting the crisis of the loss of Being, bears within it the potential to turn us back towards Being. He quotes approvingly from Hölderlin: "But where danger

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[100] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," p. 329.
[101] *Ibid.*, pp. 326-327.
[102] *Ibid.*, p. 330.
[103] *Ibid.*, p. 339.

is / grows the saving power also."[104] Being is still present, but it is hidden. Although

enframing "thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence – it is

precisely this danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man within

granting may come to light."[105] What was required was a turning towards the other forms

of *techne*, art and poetry, that led to the *poiesis* or the bringing forth of the truth of Being

from nature. For "human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a

higher essence than what is endangered."[106]

It is no longer willful resistance, but poetic reflection that holds the only hope for

resisting the capture of the innermost essence of man from technology, not an ontological

politics by "the piety of thought."[107]

The complete disappearance of the political from the post-war Heidegger is

striking. As David Farrell Krell notes in his introduction to this essay:

> the work of art now comes to be more prominent in Heidegger's thought
> than ever: whereas in 1935 "the deed that founds the political state"
> participates in the revelation of beings, in 1953 the political is in total
> eclipse. Not the political but the poetical appears as the saving power; not
> *praxis* but *poeisis* may enable us to confront the essential unfolding of
> technology.[108]

The later reflections of Heidegger on the technological come back to these same

themes, the world enframing dominance of technology, and the incapacity of finding

political solutions. In his 1966 *Spiegel* interview Heidegger still despaired of political

solutions to technology:

In the past 30 years have made it clearer that the planet-wide movement of

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[104] Hölderlin's "Patmos," quoted in Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 337.

[106] *Ibid.*, p. 339.

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 341.

[108] David Farrell Krell in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, p. 310.

modern technology is a power whose magnitude in determining our history can hardly be overestimated. For me today it is a decisive question as to how any political system – and which one – can be adapted to an epoch of technology. I know of know answer to this question. I am not convinced it is democracy.[109]

More and more in his later work Heidegger speaks the language of the inward, reflective turn. *Gelassenheit*, releasement or tranquil acceptance, replaces authenticity as Heidegger's behavioral ideal. The human condition is described as one of waiting for some new, distant poetic revelation of Being. There is talk of a new confrontation of the West with Buddhist and Taoist thought. It is in this context that the famous statement from the *Spiegel* interview was made, that "only a god can save us." For since practical action is impossible to liberate man from technological enframing, "the only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in our decline…"[110] This god would be literally a *deus ex machina* who reveals to humanity some new way of living in relation to the essence of technology. In the light of the global conquest of technology, the Conservative Revolutionary pursuit is reduced to a romantic longing for restoration. Like an eighteenth century Scotsman loyal to the "king over the water" or a White Russian in Paris between the wars hoping for the return of the Tsar, fidelity to Being and resistance to technology can no longer take an active form, but can only be expressed in the poetry and thought of romantic remembrance and longing for the true, but lost, destiny of a people. The novels of Sir Walter Scott or the religious philosophy of Berdayev are examples of the art and thinking of proponents of these lost historical / political causes which helped to sustain them as idealized visions long after any practical

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[109] Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us" in Sheehan, ed., p. 55.
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

opportunity for their recovery had passed.

A careful reading of Heidegger's dystopian view of technology, and his abandonment of political solutions after the failure of the Nazi experiment in Conservative Revolution gone awry, is important in determining his political import. But there remains another aspect of Heidegger's political thinking in addition to his views of history and technology that is necessary to complete the picture: Heidegger's view of language. If politics is to be abandoned for poetic waiting and the "piety of thought" it remains to be asked what kind of poetics and thinking Heidegger means. Heidegger has very specific preferences among poets and thinkers, with a heavy bias to the pre-Socratic Greeks and German romantics, especially Hölderlin. The Greek and German form of this poetry and thought is also important to Heidegger. The last essential element of Heidegger's political thought that remains to be considered is his view of the relationship of language to poetry and thought and to the destiny of a people.

Part II - Heidegger on Language: Peoples and Poets

Like technology, language is a topic that was developed only partially in *Being and Time* but which became a major preoccupation of Heidegger's thinking in the 1930s and later. Heidegger's analysis of language, and the poetic as the highest expression of

language, is also an important aspect of Heidegger's political thinking. To Heidegger it is language which creates the essence of a people. For Heidegger, "man is not only a living creature who possesses language... Rather, language is the house of Being in which man ek-sists by dwelling..."[111] An important theme of the later Heidegger is the alleged primordial nature of Greek and German as languages which are somehow closest to the experience of Being, which led to Heidegger's conviction that Germany alone had the spiritual resources to save the West from its metaphysical fate.

The centrality of language to Heidegger's thinking was not extensively discussed in *Being and Time*. Catherine Zuckert comments that many of Heidegger's early interpreters misunderstood the political implications of Heidegger's ontology because in *Being and Time*, "Heidegger did not explain how 'being-in-the-world,' 'falling,' from 'authentic' into 'inauthentic' existence, and the essential historicity of human life and knowledge were all rooted in language."[112] In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger pointed to the failure of the existentialists to notice the crucial significance of his discussion of language:

> What is said in *Being and Time*, sections 27 and 35, about the 'they' in no way means to furnish an incidental contribution to sociology... Rather, what is said contains a reference... to the word's primordial belongingness to Being... But if the truth of Being has become thought provoking for thinking, then reflection on the essence of language must also attain a different rank. It can no longer be a mere philosophy of language. That is the only reason *Being and Time* (section 34) contains a reference to the essential dimension of language and touches upon the simple question as to what mode of Being language as language in any given case has.[113]

But perhaps Heidegger's existentialist interpreters cannot be blamed for missing

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[111] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 237.
[112] Catherine Zuckert, "Martin Heidegger: His Philosophy and His Politics," *Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (February, 1990), p. 55.
[113] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," pp. 221-222.

the significance of the linguistic aspect of Heidegger's view of authenticity. Like his discussion of historicity, it comprises but one section of a large work that elsewhere talks in individualistic terms of an authentic *Dasein* which asserts itself in opposition to the banality of the social and public sphere. It was perhaps only in the 1930s that these ideas regarding language and history achieved their fullness in Heidegger's own thinking.

In the section of *Being and Time* that Heidegger alludes to, he discusses language as essential to the disclosure of Being in beings, for it is language that preserves the original states of mind and understanding that occur in the experience of the unconcealment of Being by naming them. On Heidegger's account, *Dasein*'s interpretation of Being leads directly to assertion, which necessarily takes a spoken form. Thus language is born, and so: "this phenomenon has its roots in the existential constitution of Dasein's disclosedness."[114] Because language is intimately connected with the experience of the disclosure of Being, Heidegger holds that the words used in interpreting and asserting this experience remain intimately connected with the original understanding that occasioned them. "To significations, words accrue. But word-Things do not get supplied with signfications."[115] The theory of language in which words are simply arbitrary tokens to which meanings are attached is vehemently rejected. Heidegger's conception is more like the (now generally dismissed) linguistic theories of Benjamin Whorf, in which the thinking of a concept is essentially related to having a particular vocabulary in which those concepts can be expressed. According to this theory, members of cultures that have fewer words for colours would actually not be able to perceive the differences between, say, blue and green. The Hopi Indians were

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[114] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 203.
[115] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

supposed by Whorf not to have a general concept of time, because their language

allegedly only had words for particular moments.[116] Thus, for Heidegger the etymologies

of words are vitally important as they reveal to him the original experience of thinking

about Being which brought the word into existence.

As these isolated experiences are transformed into words, languages as complete

entities take their form. "Language is a totality of words – a totality in which discourse

has a 'worldly' Being of its own..."[117] So language, in addition to consisting of the sum

of the words which are the frame in which *Dasein* has its conception of Being, is a form

of being in its own right. The question of the nature of a language as an entity in its own

right is raised, but not explored fully:

> In the last resort, philosophical research must resolve to ask what kind of
> Being goes with language in general. Is it a kind of equipment ready-to-
> hand within-the-world, or has it Dasein's kind of Being, or is it neither of
> these? What kind of Being does language have, if there can be such a
> thing as a 'dead' language? What do the 'rise' and 'decline' of a language
> mean ontologically?[118]

Even without answering these questions, Heidegger is provocative. The

possibility is raised that language is far more than simply a symbol system which man

uses, but an entity with a life, perhaps even a form of consciousness or knowledge, of its

own. And languages may be spoken of as "living" or "dead," "rising" or "declining,"

suggesting a kind of hierarchy of languages based on their proximity to the disclosure of

Being.

Indeed, this idea of a linguistic hierarchy is present already in *Being and Time*,

where Greek words are seen as closer to the original experience of Being than the Latin

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[116] Benjamin Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1951)

[117] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 204.

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 209.

cognates used to name the same phenomenon: the Greek definition of man as *zoon logon echon* is superior to the Latin translation of it as *animal rationale*, because *logon* has the same root as *legein* which means speech.[119] Thus the Greek expression suggests that man is the animal who comes to have knowledge through the act of speech, while the Latin suggests that man is an animal who already possesses reason as an abstract property.

This might be seen as an example of the corruption of the language of true discourse into "idle talk," a form of speech in which words, instead of conveying the original experience of Being which occasioned them, merely passes it on at the level of an "average intelligibility" in which "what the talk is about is understood only approximately and superficially."[120] This 'idle talk' or the public world of the 'They' has the effect of uprooting *Dasein* from the genuine experience of Being, leaving it "cut off from its primary and primordially genuine relationships-of-Being towards the world, towards Dasein-with, and towards its very Being-in."[121] Just as the false public ethic of instant gratification and material comfort has to be rejected in favour of the authentic collective experience of appropriating the historical tradition of a people, language must be liberated from the "average everyday" world of "idle talk" to return to the primordial understanding of Being which was incarnate in the original discourse.

While Heidegger's concept of historicity, with his stress on the importance of resolutely accepting the demands of a tradition, and the Jüngerian / Nietzschean emphasis on will helped Heidegger to accept the authoritarianism of National Socialism, it is perhaps more in his concept of language that one can find the Heideggerian grounds for

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[119] *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48, 74.
[120] *Ibid.*, p. 212.
[121] *Ibid*, p. 214.

embracing German nationalism. For as words bear an intimate connection to the primordial experience of Being, and languages as a whole can be closer to or further removed from these primordial experiences, Heidegger gave German, along with Greek, privileged status as the two most primordial languages of the West, both inherently superior to the Latin-derived Romance languages.

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger examines the etymology of various forms of the word *Sein* in Greek, Latin, and German. In commenting on the derivativeness of Latin, he comments that "Western grammar sprang from the reflection of the Greeks on the *Greek* language. For along with German the Greek language is (in regard to its possibilities of thought) at once the most powerful and most spiritual of languages."[122] Heidegger noted, for example, that while Greek and Latin preserved the present and future stems of the Indo-European roots for "to be," only Germanic languages retained the past form of *wes* in *Wesen*. As Catherine Zuckert puts it, for Heidegger

"It was no accident that the Greeks developed and the Romans perpetuated a conception of 'Being' as presence persisting permanently into the future, while the Germans later came to understand the fundamental character of things historically in terms of how they had been."[123] Thus Heidegger can call Germany "the most metaphysical of nations," having the most complete notion of Being and its rootedness in past experience. If Europe was to be spared the fate of technologization and the submergence of Being, "this nation, as a historical nation, must move itself and thereby the history of the West beyond the center of their future 'happening' and into the primordial realm of the powers of

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[122] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 57.
[123] Zuckert, p. 61.

being."[124] This uniquely German ability to connect to the primordial experience of Being is rooted for Heidegger in the German language.

The primordialness of the German language remained a feature of Heidegger's thinking throughout his later life. As the tide of war turned against Germany in 1943, Heidegger remarked in his lectures that "when it comes to victory, this historical Volk has already triumphed and is unconquerable if it remains the nation of poets and thinkers that it is essentially."[125] In the "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger explains how he uses the concept of "homeland" in Hölderlin's poetry "in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically, but in terms of the history of Being."[126] The homeland is nearness to the source of Being. Yet it is no coincidence to Heidegger that those who have thought most deeply about the homelessness of modern man in the face of the disappearance of Being - Hölderlin and Nietzsche - were German. "'German' is not spoken to the world so that the world might be transformed through the German essence; rather, it is spoken to the Germans so that from a fateful belongingness to the nations they might become world-historical along with them. The homeland of this historical dwelling is nearness to Being."[127] If this expression of a special German closeness to Being seems incautious in "The Letter on Humanism," a work that was partially intended to rehabilitate Heidegger to a non-German audience, in the *Spiegel* interview Heidegger was even more blunt. When asked whether he felt German thinkers had a special task, Heidegger replied: "I am thinking of the special inner kinship between the German language and the language of the Greeks and their thought. That is something the French confirm for me again and

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[124] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 38.
[125] Heidegger, *Parmenides*, quoted in Wolin, *Politics of Being*, p. 129.
[126] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," p. 241.
[127] *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

again today. When they begin to think, they speak German. They assure me that they do not succeed with their own language."[128]

The political implications of Heidegger's conception of language is profound, for it amounts to a denial of the fundamental unity of human nature. If each language relates to Being differently (and as Heidegger points out, there was no difference for the earliest Greeks between *ousia* or being and *physis* or nature), then there can be no universal conception of *physis* for all of humanity. In the 1959 essay "The Way to Language," Heidegger is emphatic that there is no universally ubiquitous conception of language. "There is no such thing as a natural language, a language that would be the language of human nature at hand in itself without its own destiny. Every language is historical, also in cases where human beings no nothing of the discipline of history in the modern European sense."[129] Catherine Zuckert points out that Heidegger's understanding of man's nature as *zoon logon echon* is fundamentally different from Aristotle's. For while Aristotle emphasizes the commonality of humanity in having to meet its "animal" needs for self-preservation through the forming of the *polis*, Heidegger emphasizes the *logos* which appears to the human animal in speech as foundational to existence. The consequence of this view is that:

> If human life is fundamentally shaped, even determined by language, the differences among 'nations' or 'regimes' are not, as Aristotle suggested, merely reflections of differences in physical and economic circumstances... If the world in which human beings live is constituted through their language, and languages differ, there is no universal reason or conception of right.[130]

Heidegger's supporters have long defended him from charges of racism on the

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[128] Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us," p. 62.

[129] Heidegger, "The Way to Language," in *Basic Writings*, p. 422.

[130] Zuckert, p. 61.

grounds that he publicly spoke against the biologism and naturalism of the Nazi ideologists of race in his Nietzsche lectures of the late 1930s. This is true, and must be counted among the more courageous acts of Heidegger, one of the few positive entries on the ledger of his actions under the Third Reich. In his explication of the true meaning of Nietzsche's "blond beast" and his discussion of the Germanic instinct, which Nazi apologists interpreted as support for their biological Aryan supremecism, Heidegger proclaimed that "Nietzsche's racial thought has a metaphysical, not a biological sense."[131] But the idea that one people can, *qua* people, be closer to Being than another by virtue of the primordialness of its language is hardly less tendentious than the idea of genetic superiority. Jacques Derrida asks, "Is a metaphysics of race more or less serious than a naturalism or biologism of race?"[132]

While language itself was held to be a form of revelation of Being, and while the German language, allegedly more primordial, allowed the question of Being to be asked in a deeper way, certain kinds of speech and language were more revelatory than others. Even among Germans, most people were caught in the bourgeois forgetfulness of Being of the "They." Among the charmed circle of those who had thought their way into the precincts of Being were a very few philosophers and poets, all Greek or German. And as language became a successively greater focus for Heidegger's thinking, poetry became as important as philosophy as a source of Heidegger's reflection.

In the analysis of Heidegger's account of historicity, the extension of Heidegger's concept of the hero to include the poet or the artist was examined. The artist, as one who brings forth new meaning from the hiddenness of Being, was initially compared by

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[131] Heidegger, *Nietzsche* Vol. 3, p. 231.
[132] Derrida, *Of Spirit*, p. 74.

Heidegger to the founder of a state, the one who stands at the beginning of a political

tradition by giving birth to a new society, often out of conflict. Just as the Heideggerian

hero was not one who acted on the basis of subjective self-assertion, but by embracing

the destiny handed on as a heritage, true poetry or art is not the self-expression of the

artistic soul, but a channeling of an experience of Being that lies beyond the poet's own

knowledge. The poet, like the statesman, can also act as a type of founder. For at the

beginning of a tradition stands the moment where Being is first encountered through

language, and it is the language of the poet which is preserved and handed down as the

memory of this moment:

> In this departure language was being, embodied in the word: poetry.
> Language is the primordial poetry in which a people speaks being.
> Conversely, the great poetry by which a people enters into history initiates
> the molding of its language. The Greeks created and experienced this
> poetry through Homer. Language was manifested to their being-there as
> the departure into being, as a configuration disclosing the essent.[133]

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Homer is every bit as much a founder and a

law-giver for the Greeks as Solon. Heidegger later came to privilege the poetic founding

above the political founding as the true beginning of a national tradition. As Zimmerman

points out, "By the late 1930s, increasingly skeptical about Hitler, he was no longer

including statesmen in the ranks of authentic creators. Genuine 'creating' is linguistic:

only poets and thinkers speak a new world into being."[134] In the essay "Hölderlin and the

Essence of Poetry," Heidegger expresses this privileged position of the poet with regard

to creation, stating that "the poet names the gods and names all things for what they

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[133] Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 171-172.
[134] Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 114.

are."[135]   Heidegger quotes with approval the final line of Hölderlin's poem *Andenken*:

"But what endures, the poets establish." Perhaps the clearest expression of Heidegger's

relationship of the poetic, the philosophical, and the political aspects of the founding of a

nation is found in his 1934-35 lectures of Hölderlin:

> The historical Dasein of nations – their emergence, flowering, and decline
> – originates from poetry; out of the latter authentic knowledge in the sense
> of philosophy; and from both of these, the realization of Volk as Volk
> through the state – politics. The original, historical age of peoples is
> therefore the age of poets, thinkers, and state-founders, that is, of those
> who authentically ground and establish the historical Dasein of a Volk.
> They are the authentic creators.[136]

In this account of a nation's founding, the poet, the philosopher, and the

statesman are related as a strict hierarchy. First the poet must expose the Being of

beings, then the philosopher must comprehend it and communicate it, and only lastly

does the statesman establish a state that is true to the essence thus poetically and

philosophically revealed. So it is no wonder that as the Nazis revealed their contempt for

philosophy and art, even that of a *Volkisch* inspiration, that disillusionment set in for

Heidegger.

Heidegger's mid-1930s retreat from politics and his turn towards poetry as the

true founding principle of a nation is fully consistent with a Conservative Revolutionary

approach to politics. The Conservative Revolution had disdained partisan politics, which

helps account for the refusal of many of its prominent figures to support the National

Socialists, despite similarities in outlook. Instead, they looked for the renewal of

Germany on a spiritual basis, a revolution that gave a leading role to the poet.

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[135] Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," in *Existence and Being*, R. Hull and A. Crick, trans., (Chicago: Regnery, 1949), p. 305.
[136] Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein,"* quoted in Wolin, *Politics of Being*, p. 128.

Probably the most important contemporary poet for the Weimar Conservative

Revolutionaries was Stefan George, a poet deeply influenced by the French Symbolists,

but also a leading figure in literary criticism and the center of the so-called *George-Kreis*

which tried to shape the whole of interwar German literature in its image. George had a

great influence on the Conservative Revolution, especially through the Youth Movement

that Heidegger was familiar with through his sons and students. His poems talked of a

new *Reich* and the coming *Führer*, albeit in a mystical, non-political sense. As Walter

Laqueur describes it, "George believed in the vision of the poet, in a new aristocracy of

spirit, in great heroes dwelling far from the madding crowd."[137]

Clearly George had literary goals that Heidegger could sympathize with, and

Bourdieu goes as far as to call George one of "Heidegger's spiritual masters."[138] The

later Heidegger, in his turning from politics, found many echoes in George. In 1928,

George had expressed the very Hölderlinian or late-Heideggerian sentiment that "Dead

was the nation whose gods had died."[139] In the late 1950s, Heidegger drew on George's

poem *"Das Wort"* for two lectures on language. The poem, which metaphorically

describes the struggle of the poet to turn his thought into language, ends with the line:

"Where the word is wanting no thing may be." In the Heideggerian interpretation of the

poem, as Robert Bernasconi writes, this means that "the word alone gives Being to the

thing."[140] The later Heidegger in his turn away from the political Third Reich and

towards the inner Reich described by poets like George was if anything even more of a

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[137] Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1974), p. 127.

[138] Bourdieu, p. 31.

[139] Quoted in Henry Pachter, *Weimar Etudes* (New York: Columbia, 1982), p. 111.

[140] Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1985), p. 58.

Conservative Revolutionary than he had been in his Nazi period.

But while Heidegger was influenced in his turn towards the poetic by George and others including Rilke, and later Trakl and Char, and of course by Greeks like Sophocles and Homer, the supreme place in the pantheon of poets was reserved for Friedrich Hölderlin. As the poet came for the later Heidegger to stand above the statesman as the essential founder of tradition and molder of the destiny of a people, Hölderlin came to occupy for modern Germany the position of Homer for the ancient Greeks as the founder of the new German national destiny. Only the vision of Hölderlin, who looked beyond modernity to a new German nation that owed its inspiration not to the Platonic-Christian tradition, but to the Greek and German pagan past, was a sufficient light to illuminate the German historical destiny. As Heidegger says in the "Letter on Humanism":

> The world-historical thinking of Hölderlin... [is] essentially more
> primordial than the mere cosmopolitanism of Goethe. For the same reason
> Hölderlin's relation to Greek civilization is something essentially other
> than humanism. When confronted with death, therefore, those young
> Germans who knew about Hölderlin lived and thought something other
> than what the public held to be the typical German attitude.[141]

For Heidegger, it is not enough to be German, or even a great German poet of the stature of Goethe to be liberated from the inauthenticity of the "They." Indeed, as a poet of Enlightenment humanism, Goethe can be taken to be one of the founders of modern inauthenticity. But in Hölderlin, the close friend of Hegel who looked beyond the supposedly final, history-ending triumph of Hegel's world-spirit to a new beginning, Heidegger found his prophet. Hölderlin was the voice of Being who precedes the unfolding of the history of Being. Hölderlin, like Heidegger, looked to the experience of the Greeks for guidance in the present day. Hölderlin lamented the passing of the

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[141] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," pp. 242-243.

Christian God, but looked for its replacement in a new dawning, the coming of new gods.

For Heidegger, this was prophetic of the situation of the West after the triumph of

technology. For technology was the final working out of the metaphysical essence of the

West, which had gone from Plato's Ideas, to the Christian God, to Descartes' subject, to

Nietzsche's Will to Power. With this tradition finally exhausted, there was an opening

for Hölderlin's "saving power": the return of the gods. Hölderlin became even more

essential as a prophet of modernity for Heidegger than Nietzsche, for while Nietzsche

had foreseen the end of the Western tradition, Hölderlin had seen beyond the end to the

new beginning. As Otto Pöggeler puts it, despite being chronologically prior to

Nietzsche, for Heidegger "he nonetheless reached farthest into the future. He let the truth

be seen as the holy, as the element of the divine, and this in a time, as Nietzsche

expressed it, in which God had been killed."[142]

In Heidegger's post-Rectorate retreat into political quietism, his increasing

conviction that technological Will had triumphed completely and his belief that salvation

from this fate will not take a political, but a poetic, form are closely related. Language,

which stands at the beginning of a tradition and shapes the destiny of a people as the

primordial form of the encounter with Being, is also the path by which the recovery of

Being must occur after the exhaustion of the Being-denying technological Will. The

philosopher is reduced to waiting for the gods, through the poets, to speak again, for now

"only a god can save us."

It is worth asking what form Heidegger saw this post-technological salvation

through the poetic awaiting of the gods as taking. Two interpretations must be dismissed.

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[142] Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, p. 175.

Heidegger did not make a belated turn towards theological faith. Even in the period

during the 1920s when Heidegger was more open to the Christian God, he was a critic of

theology and religious dogma in the manner of Eickhart or Kierkegaard, seeing theology

as the abandonment of the mystery of an ineffable God for a merely human idea of God.

And the invocation of "gods" or "a god" as opposed to "God" in the later Heidegger is

entirely deliberate. The god Heidegger awaits is not an "onto-theological" construct, a

master idea that defines all Being, but a lesser divinity, a *daimon*, genius, or muse that

leads humans beyond ourselves into the disclosure of Being, without being a god who

incarnates or reveals Being fully within itself.

Second, Heidegger is not prophesying a millenarian apocalypse, an inevitable

self-destruction of technological civilization that will allow a new beginning in its ruins.

This may be possibility for Heidegger, but he does not insist on the inevitability of this

or any other future events. On the contrary, awaiting the gods should be seen as an

invocation of that "questioning, which is the piety of thought." Technology may indeed

be totally dominant in the modern world, and Heidegger admits that this domination may

last for centuries. But the acceptance of technology as fate would be an admission that

all knowledge, all humanity, all beings can be fully enframed and turned into standing

reserve. It is an admission that the metaphysics of subjective will can indeed transform

all existence. By keeping open the possibility that something hides beyond the horizons

of human knowledge and experience, that Being could still disclose itself poetically to

humans in some previously unforeseen form, Heidegger seeks to deny technology the

complete possession of human life and thought. As Leslie Thiele puts it:

> To wait for gods is to acknowledge that the disclosure of the transcendent
> is not solely under human command... Heidegger concludes that the loss
> of the question of the transcendent within the technological world, the

'overshadowing of Being by beings,' is not completely within the purview of the human being to address.[143]

For Heidegger, as long as there are poets who await the disclosure of the word of Being, rather than pursuing subjective aestheticism and self-expression, technology will be denied total mastery, and the possibility of a new founding, in poetry, philosophy, and finally in politics, remains possible.

Language then plays a double role in the unconcealment of Being. First, language itself bears the imprint of the primordial encounter of humanity and particular cultures with Being. Second, it is the source through which the poet is able to extract new truths from Being to help form the destiny of a people in new beginnings which are ever reappropriated from the first origins. Both languages themselves and the works of the poets can stand in a stronger or weaker relationship to Being. Perhaps in these assertions, which ground both German nationalism and cultural elitism, Heidegger shows the Conservative Revolutionary provenance of his thinking. Nonetheless, there is a deep resonaance in his emphasis on language not as a mere tool, but as something that discloses the nature of truth, and on the possibility of poetic truth to maintain horizons of transcendence for human life which can not be violated by the technological nihilism of our age. These ideas have proved profoundly attractive to those seeking a philosophy of language that goes beyond the concern with structure and logic in analytic philosophy to discover the human truths that language mysteriously embodies, and to those who continue to look to art and poetry as ways to transcend the apparent barrenness of our technological age.

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[143] Thiele, p. 209.

Chapter 4 - Heidegger and Contemporary Political Theory

Having considered several aspects of Heidegger's thought and how they contributed to his political views, it remains to be questioned whether his thinking has anything of enduring value to contribute to contemporary political theory. Any claim that there is continued value in Heidegger's specifically political thought is inevitably controversial in light of the conclusive evidence that Heidegger's philosophy was directly connected with his embrace of Nazism, and the more general connection between Heidegger and the Conservative Revolution, a movement which is not Nazism *per se*, but which is clearly an authoritarian movement of the right that few contemporary political thinkers in liberal democracies would want to be identified with. Undoubtedly, Heidegger has played an important role in political philosophy in continental Europe, especially in France. His influence on post-modern theorists such as Derrida, Foucault, and Lacoue-Labarthe is indisputable. Liberals such as Jurgen Habermas and Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut have drawn attention to the Heideggerian origins of postmodern theory to argue that their thought is tainted by Heidegger's Nazi associations, and a vigorous debate has ensued. In the Anglo-American world, however, the importance of Heidegger to political theory is far less clear. This section will concentrate on analysing the influence and relevance of Heidegger's thought for contemporary Anglo-American political theory.

Leaving aside the question of the sources of Heidegger's political thought, or the nefarious political ends which he used his philosophy to promote, there remains a profundity to the Heideggerian critique of modernity that cannot be ignored, and which has already had an influence on Anglo-American political theory. Many critics have lamented that modern liberal democratic politics seems characterized by a lack of

historical perspective and an appeal to the lowest common denominator of public opinion as determined by polling data. In this environment, the appeal to the foundational traditions of a community or a nation as the grounds for guidance in political practice, instead of following the ephemeral opinion of a temporary majority, has a strong resonance. How many times do we hear American commentators expressing regret that there are no Washingtons, Lincolns, or Jeffersons on the contemporary political stage? Yet without a willingness to abandon public opinion and the Gross National Product as the main criteria of political success, the emergence of heroes in the mould of these founders, who all were involved in war and willfully imposed their beliefs, and sometimes sacrifice, on the populace, may be impossible. Normal liberal democratic politics is perhaps the enemy of historically conscious heroism.

Heidegger's differentiation between the public world of "idle chat" of the "They" and the authentic *Mitsein* of the historic tradition of a people represents a powerful challenge to the notion that liberal democracy can fulfill the deepest needs or aspirations of a community or nation. The political community formed by the amalgamation of isolated, inauthentic subjectivities is not an authentic historical community. But Heidegger's solutions to overcome this inauthentic democratic politics, either in embracing an authoritarian leader who will willfully direct and force the nation to confront its historic destiny, or in a retreat into quietism and poetic mysticism that will allow the absent voice of authentic destiny to be heard again, seems unsatisfactory and potentially dangerous. Yet some theorists have adopted his analysis of modern democracy, but sought other political solutions based on transforming, rather than rejecting, democracy.

To take one example of a democratic appropriation of Heidegger's critique of

modernity, his former student Hannah Arendt shared much of Heidegger's analysis of the weakness of modern liberalism, but did not abandon hope for a truly democratic form of politics. In her best known theoretical work, *The Human Condition*, Heidegger is not mentioned, but his influence is palpable. In her later writings and her final book, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt came to acknowledge the full extent of her intellectual debt to Heidegger's thinking. As Dana Villa puts it:

> Heidegger's diagnosis of the alienation of the modern age, an alienation rooted in the attempt to cast the subject in a foundational epistemological and ontological role, provides Arendt with the frame for a critique of modernity that illuminates the *political* consequences of this pervasive subjectification – a critique Heidegger himself was ill-equipped to make.[144]

Perhaps the clearest echo of Heidegger in Arendt is in her conviction that the crisis of modernity is not simply a product of the sixteenth to eighteenth century modern turn, but deeply rooted in the foundations of the Western philosophical tradition. Arendt agrees with Heidegger that the fateful turn in Western thought had occurred as early as Plato, but the nature of the mistake was not the same as that identified by Heidegger. In *The Human Condition* she states:

> And this tradition, far from comprehending and conceptualizing all the political experiences of Western mankind, grew out of a specific historical constellation: the trial of Socrates and the conflict between the philosopher and the *polis*. It eliminated many experiences of an earlier past that were irrelevant to its immediate political purposes...[145]

Thus while for Heidegger, the wrong turn was taken in the privileging of Platonic metaphysics over pre-Socratic poetic thought, for Arendt it was the privileging of the life of the mind over the life of action. For Arendt, action takes the foundational role that the

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[144] Villa, p. 13.

[145] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 12.

unconcealment of the truth of Being to the poet or thinker plays in Heidegger's thought. "Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is for history."[146] The revival of the true vocation of the West is not found for Arendt in a return to ancient Greek modes of poetic thought and language, but in the ancient Greek practice of the active, agonistic life of the *polis*. This form of action is freed from the subjectivism of autonomous will, because active life in the *polis* is a public and collaborative effort. Nor is this form of life subject to a totalizing or authoritarian vision, as the *polis* is by nature the scene of struggle between men and contains an irreducible pluralism. Whether or not Arendt's project is totally successful, she demonstrates how there may be an adoption of a Heideggerian perspective on modernity, and proposals for replacing the public life of the "They" with an authentic *Mitsein*, without abandoning the practice of democratic, pluralistic politics.

Another aspect of Heideggerian thought that has been found compelling to many who in no way would share other aspects of his political thought is his critique of technology. While there have been critics of technology since the Industrial Revolution, (or perhaps since the Tower of Babel in Genesis) Heidegger was perhaps the first to pose the question of technology as an ultimately metaphysical question. His critique of technology is not simply a rejection of the ends for which technological objects are used, or a lamenting of the destruction of traditional and pastoral forms of life by the rise of cities and machines, although this romanticism was not foreign to his thought. His suggestion that technology is no mere means, but an enframing system of thought which ultimately controls the human "nature" that believes it is using technology for its own

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[146] *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

purposes, and the origins of technological enframing in the unfolding of Western metaphysics and the Nietzschean Will to Power, was truly radical. This depth of suspicion towards technology seems more commonplace today in the age of genetic engineering and after several decades of ecological theorists and technological critics such as Arne Naess, Jacques Ellul, or George Grant who have advanced similar claims. But the critique of technology as metaphysics seems to have originated with Heidegger, and no subsequent formulation of it has presented as sophisticated a picture of its genesis in the history of philosophy.

There are definite parallels, widely remarked on by both environmentalists and Heidegger specialists, between Heidegger's thought and the emerging school of "deep ecology," those who critique technology not simply for its destructive effects, but as somehow revealing the radically anthropocentric character of Western rationality. Michael Zimmerman, while fully cognizant of the depth of Heidegger's National Socialism, concludes that aspects of Heidegger's thought, including his critique of humanism and anthropocentrism, his call for *Gelassenheit*, his condemnation of industrial technology, and his notions "homeland" and of life as the interplay of the "fourfold" of mortals, gods, earth, and sky, "support the claim that he is a major deep ecological theorist."[147] Deep ecology has been criticized on many grounds, even within the environmental movement, for its alleged mysticism and anti-rationalism, charges which have also been frequently leveled against Heidegger. Leftist opponents of deep ecology have condemned it specifically for its similarities with and linkages to Heidegger, and therefore tainted by his connection with fascism.[148] Nonetheless,

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[147] Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, p. 243.
[148] Murray Bookchin, "A Reply to My Critics," *Green Synthesis*, 29 (December, 1988), pp. 5-7.

Heidegger clearly will remain an important figure in the theoretical debates regarding ecology by virtue of his seminal analysis of the origins and nature of technology in the history of Western thought.

Heidegger and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate

Even if there are aspects of Heidegger's thinking which will endure, indeed deserve to endure, despite some of the less admirable features of his thought and life, it is still uncertain what his status will be at the "high table" of debates over political theory. Heidegger may be a major source for Arendt, who has undoubtedly influenced mainstream Anglo-American political thought, but in many ways he was a hidden, implicit source, far less obvious in his importance for her thinking than Aristotle. And while Heidegger is taken seriously by ecologists, ecological theory is not yet very influential as a subdiscipline within the broader discourse of political theory and philosophy. So Heidegger still remains in the shadows of debates over political theory, at least in the Anglo-American world.

Yet it would seem that discussion of Heidegger would be highly relevant in one of the major debates of political theory in recent years, the debate between liberals and communitarians. Liberalism has not lacked for philosophical critics, even in the Anglo-American world. But in Anglo-American political philosophy, outside of the small coterie of Heideggerians, his name is hardly ever invoked as a critic of liberalism, even by the communitarian critics of liberalism who on a *prima faciae* basis would seem to share some of Heidegger's deepest concerns.

In fact, defenders of liberalism often point to Heidegger to delegitimize

philosophical anti-liberalism. Liberal theorist Stephen Holmes accuses American communitarians of hiding the importance of Heidegger for their own thought in order to avoid some of its more unpleasant associations. When asking how American intellectuals could possibly oppose liberalism after the experience of Hitler and Stalin, Holmes looks to Heidegger: "A generation ago, Martin Heidegger's subterranean but hypnotic influence prepared the way for this odd development. His harsh indictment of "modernity" was adapted to the mental horizon of their new American audience by Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss."[149] Despite the alleged importance of Heidegger for the contemporary critique of liberalism, antiliberals are accused of ignoring him. "The forefathering of contemporary antiliberalism deserves stressing because contemporary antiliberals frequently neglect it. They typically furnish a stylized, even sanitized, genealogy for their central ideas."[150]

Some communitarian thinkers would agree with Holmes in suggesting that the neglect of Heidegger is a serious lacuna in the literature. Daniel A. Bell states that one of the purposes of his *Communitarianism and its Critics* is to call "attention to the importance of Heidegger for communitarian thinkers, complementing the more usual references (found in the works of Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Sandel, among others) to Aristotle and Hegel."[151] What then is the status of Heidegger for the contemporary communitarian critique of liberalism? Is he a major "subterranean" influence, whose importance has been unjustly (or dishonestly) neglected, or is the similarity between Heidegger's criticisms of technology and the lack of rootedness of

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[149] Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. xi.
[150] *Ibid.*, p. xii.
[151] Daniel Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), p. 14.

contemporary politics in historical tradition merely coincidental with those of the communitarians?

The study of Heidegger does illuminate many of the issues at stake between contemporary liberals and communitarians. As Lawrence Vogel notes, the immanent debate in Heidegger's own writings and among his followers, the dispute between existentialists who appeal to the early Heideggerian concept of "authenticity" and more recent interpreters of Heidegger who stress his historicism and his rejection of existentialism and humanism, in many ways "anticipates the contemporary debate between liberals and communitarians over how to construe the relationship between the individual and the community."[152] As we have seen, the common reading of Heideggerian authenticity as involving a decisionistic, radically self-determining moral choice has been effectively countered by pointing out that for Heidegger, choice is rooted in historicity, in the taking up of the heritage of a people which has been handed down from the founding heroes' primordial encounters with Being. There are strong similarities here to the communitarian critique of the liberal formulation of a just society as one that maximizes people's potential to fulfill their own freely chosen individual life plans, and which is therefore neutral as to the content of any particular life plans. Communitarians reject this view as based on a conception of freedom that is "emotivist" and which assumes an "unencumbered self," ignoring the rootedness of individuals in an historical narrative with "constitutive attachments" to the community that help define their identity.

On the other hand, many critics of Heidegger have remarked that even if the

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[152] Lawrence Vogel, *The Fragile "We": Ethical Implications of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994), p. 106.

authentic choosing of *Dasein* assumes a communal, historical framework of meaning, that there is still no basis for choice between fundamentally different communal-historical conceptions, between the choice of Caesar or St. Francis as one's hero. Similarly, liberals have accused communitarians of replacing the alleged moral solipsism of liberalism with a form of communal relativism that provides no basis for choice between rival collective conceptions of the good. These evident parallels between the liberal-communitarian discussions of the right versus the good and the intramural Heideggerian debate between existentialist and historicist conceptions of authenticity suggest that mainstream Anglo-American political theory could help clarify its own concepts by studying Heidegger and his interpreters.

Perhaps a more interesting question is the extent to which the communitarian critics of liberalism have already drawn, implicitly or explicitly, on Heidegger for their own critique of liberalism. At first glance, there is little evidence of borrowing. Heidegger does not figure in MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, or Charles Taylor's discussions of the liberal-communitarian debate from the early 1980s. Yet as Evan Simpson points out, the advocates of non-foundationalist communally and historically rooted ethics, a position which he calls "post-modern moral conservatism," and which he believes describes Sandel, MacIntyre, and Taylor along with the likes of Oakeshott, Arendt, and Gadamer, are dependent on the "hermeneutic turn" in modern social theory.[153] While Heidegger's student Hans-Georg Gadamer, a close associate of his for over forty years, is more frequently credited as the source for these ideas in contemporary discussions of political theory, Gadamer's

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[153] Evan Simpson, "Moral Conservatism," *Review of Politics* 49 (January, 1987), pp. 29-59.

hermeneutics are ultimately derived from Heidegger.

Many communitarians have absorbed Heideggerian elements indirectly. Michael
Sandel quotes approvingly from Hannah Arendt, "What makes mass society so difficult
is not the number of people involved, but the fact that the world between them has lost its
power to gather them together to relate and to separate them."[154] This statement could
easily have been one of Heidegger's own lamenting the oblivion of Being from the public
life of "They," which has led to the lack of possibility to conceive the world as a with-
world.

Charles Taylor is another notable thinker usually classified as a communitarian
critic of liberalism who has drawn on Heideggerian themes. One of his most publicly
accessible works, the Massey Lectures published as *The Malaise of Modernity*, is a
strikingly Heideggerian analysis.[155] First, he points to the moral force of the "ideal of
authenticity" to modern culture, yet he critiques any attempts to derive authenticity
simply from autonomous self-expression. Instead, authenticity must be derived from
within the framework of "horizons of meaning," horizons that are ultimately derived
from language in the broadest sense, and which are external to ourselves. The slide from
the genuine authenticity to subjectivism is condemned. The traditional cosmological
vision of the West has been lost, and nineteenth century poets (including Rilke and
Hölderlin) are forced to rearticulate a cosmological vision amidst our sense of absence.
Instrumental rationality has reached its apotheosis the "enframing of technology."
Remarkably, while Aristotle, Herder, and Weber are joined to Robert Bellah and

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[154] Michael Sandel, "Morality and the Liberal Ideal," in John Arthur and William Shaw, eds., *Social and
Political Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1992), p. 568.
[155] Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Toronto: Anansi, 1991)

Christopher Lasch as critics of technological modernity in the lecture, Heidegger is only

mentioned in one footnote, where he admits that his discussion of technological

enframing "obviously borrowed a great deal from Heidegger."[156] Yet the section of the

lecture on technology takes Weber's idea of the "iron cage" of bureaucracy as its central

metaphor.

In his more technical writing, Taylor has been more candid regarding the

importance of Heidegger for contemporary theorizing about politics. In the 1987 essay

"Overcoming Epistemology," Taylor credits a number of recent European thinkers, but

especially Heidegger, with having helped overcome the epistemological tradition of post-

Cartesian Western philosophy. Taylor points out that this critique of epistemology that

has only recently penetrated Anglo-American political and moral thought through the

work of Richard Rorty and others. For Taylor, "The tremendous contribution of

Heidegger... consists in having focused the issue properly. Once this is done, we can't

deny the picture that emerges."[157] In post-Heideggerian thought, one must admit that

there is no isolated subject, but that *Dasein* is inherently collective, and that knowledge is

not representation but the "disclosure" of the unknown.

Taylor comments that the embrace of this critique of epistemology has inevitable

political consequences. He credits Sandel's critique of Rawls as an "excellent example

of this," and remarks:

> In politics, the antiatomist thrust of the critique makes it hostile to certain
> forms of contemporary conservatism, but also to radical doctrines of
> nonsituated freedom. I believe that there is a natural affinity between this
> critique, with its stress on situated freedom and the roots of our identity in

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[156] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

[157] Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Caambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 11.

community, on the one hand, and the civic humanist tradition on the other,
as the works of a number of writers, from Humboldt to Arendt, testify.[158]

Here one must demur with Taylor. There is something faintly remarkable in the
claim that a primarily Heideggerian critique of Cartesian epistemology is hostile to
conservatism (by which presumably Taylor has in mind libertarian economic
conservatism) and has a "natural affinity" with civic humanism, when Heidegger himself
rejected humanism and embraced fascism. Undoubtedly, Heidegger influenced Arendt,
and Heidegger's ideas regarding language were in turn influenced by Humboldt, but
clearly Heidegger did not embrace Arendtian democracy or Humboldtian liberalism. On
the other hand, a Heideggerian critique of epistemology does raise severe doubts
regarding the adequacy of any political theory based on a "thin" conception of the self,
whether along the lines of Rawls' progressive liberalism or Nozick's libertarianism.

For precisely the reason that critics of the moral emptiness of liberal
individualism have sometimes sought to undermine democracy in response, some liberals
hold even the most humanistic and democratic critiques of liberal democracy under
suspicion. George Kateb, in a comparison of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, calls them
thinkers "whose love of Greece, inflamed and mediated by German philosophy, set them
against modern democracy." Surprisingly, despite Strauss' deep conservatism and
cultural elitism, Kateb thinks that "...of the two, Arendt may be the more serious enemy
of modern democracy."[159] For modern representative democracy, according to Kateb, is
inevitably a matter of self-interest and has a quality of moral lightness repugnant to
Arendt. "It may be that one has to choose between reverence for polis democracy and

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[158] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[159] George Kateb, "The Questionable Influence of Arendt (and Strauss)," in Hartmunt Lehmann, ed.,
Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 29.

appreciation of modern deomcracy."[160] Kateb is critical of any attempt to judge the

American democratic experience according to the standards of European social theory,

despite its much greater sense of the tragic and heroic elements of human existence

compared with Anglo-American writers: "It is incontestable that European political,

social, and cultural theory is often denser and more interesting than American theory.

The trouble is that it may be too interesting..."[161]

If even the most benign and democratic critics of modern liberalism come under

suspicion of latent authoritarianism from liberal theorists, it is little wonder that

communitarian critics of liberalism like Taylor are loath to publicly invoke the name of

Heidegger, despite the obvious relevance of his work to many of the issues at stake in the

liberal-communitarain debate. Nonetheless, it is clear that Heideggerian thinking has

influenced this debate, and it would probably be more productive on all sides that the

importance of Heidegger be acknowledged in a non-demonizing fashion.

Heidegger's critique of modern public life and his prescient critique of

technology have something powerful to say to the condition of modern liberal

democracies. Having Heidegger openly discussed within the liberal-communitarian

debate would help both to deepen and strengthen the philosophical basis for the

communitarian critique, while serving as a warning reminder of the potential dangers of

too directly transposing an ontological critique of modernity to political action. Perhaps

Heidegger does offer insights that can help political theorists in developing a fuller, more

historically rooted, sense of the self as the basis for political practice, and an emphasis

on greater respect for the natural environment and an awareness of the dangers of

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[160] *Ibid.*, p. 30.
[161] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

technological rationalization of all elements of the lifeworld. But the potential for the

dangerous applications of some of these ideas is perhaps best openly and honestly

acknowledged. To reverse Hölderlin, those who would look to Heidegger for an escape

from the apparent banality and emptiness of modern political life and technological

society should keep in mind that "where there is saving power, danger also grows."

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