

Philosophy in a Dark Time: Martin Heidegger and the Third Reich

TIMOTHY O'HAGAN

Like Oscar Wilde I can resist everything except temptation. So when I received Anne Meylan's tempting invitation to contribute to this *Festschrift* for Pascal Engel I accepted without hesitation, before I had time to think whether I had anything for the occasion. Finally I suggested to Anne the text of a public lecture which I delivered in 2008 and which I had shown to Pascal, who responded to it with his customary enthusiasm and barrage of papers of his own on similar topics. But when I re-read it, I realized that it had been written for the general public rather than the professional philosophers who would be likely to read this collection of essays. So what was I to do with it? I've decided to present it in two parts. In Part One I reproduce the original lecture, unchanged except for a few minor corrections. In Part Two I engage with a tiny fraction of the vast secondary literature which has built up over the years and which shows no sign of abating.

1. Part One: The 2008 Lecture

Curtain-Raiser

Let us start with two dates, 1927 and 1933. In 1927 Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (volume II) was published. So too was Martin Heidegger's magnum opus *Being and Time*. In 1933 two appointments were made: Hitler as Chancellor of the German Reich and Heidegger as Rector of Freiburg University. In 1927 it was a case of sheer coincidence; in 1933 the two events were closely linked.

Heidegger's life up to 1933

First, a brief sketch of Martin Heidegger's life up to 1933. He was born in 1889 in Messkirch, a small provincial town in the Baden. His father was a cooper and church sacristan in this reactionary, deeply Catholic backwater. Throughout his life Heidegger sustained a self-image of the provincial outsider, even peasant, within the cultural élite of Germany.¹ Heidegger went as a scholarship boy to high schools in Konstanz and then Freiburg. This was followed by studies at Freiburg University, from 1909-11 as a student for the Catholic priesthood in the theology faculty. But he lost his faith and soon turned against the Catholic Church. He pursued his studies in philosophy and science, gaining his doctorate in 1913 and his *Habilitation* in 1916.

In the Great War Heidegger served in the German army as a postal censor and as a weather forecaster. He married the Protestant Elfride Petri in 1917. He taught at Marburg University from 1926-8, when he was appointed to the Chair of Philosophy at Freiburg University, as successor to the preeminent phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, who had held the post since 1916.)

Following Hitler's seizure of power, Heidegger was elected Rector of Freiburg University on 21 April 1933 after the previous Rector, medical Professor and Social Democrat von Möllendorf, was removed by the Baden Ministry of Education.

The work which ensured Heidegger's appointment to the Freiburg Chair was *Being and Time*. I'll now highlight some specific themes of that book which will emerge, brutally transformed, in the notorious Rectoral address of 1933.

Being and Time: Context and reception

The appearance of Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) in 1927 would rock the philosophical world to its foundations. It announced the end of centuries of speculation concerning every philosophical conundrum, from the mind-body problem to the nature of language and truth, from skepticism in epistemology to nihilism in morality. Heidegger's strategy was not so much to *solve* these problems as to *destroy* them. He did this by calling for a radical

¹. We learn from Farias that Messkirch was a site of great tension between Catholics and Old Catholics: the former were conservative and authoritarian, while the latter were more progressive and sympathetic to liberalism and enlightenment; they also tended to be relatively rich and privileged. Thus Heidegger, poor and Catholic, had his future ideological enemies formed for him from the cradle. A classic case of Nietzschean *ressentiment*, one might say.

shift of focus which would allow us to look with fresh eyes on fundamental questions about our own being, questions which had been neglected since the presocratic Greek thinkers, and had subsequently been buried by generations of metaphysicians. In *Being and Time* Heidegger coined a bizarre philosophical jargon, partly idiomatic, partly scholastic.

Yet somehow the powerful critical thrust of Heidegger's message got through, first to his own pupils and then farther afield, so that even as commonsensical a philosopher as Gilbert Ryle recognized the importance of *Being and Time* in his review in *Mind*, although he expressed forebodings about the eventual outcome of Heidegger's thought. As we shall see in a moment, Ryle's anxiety was well-founded.

***Being and Time*: Phenomenology meets existentialism**

Being and Time carries the Dedication "To Edmund Husserl, in friendship and admiration" and at least in the first half it is true to the phenomenological programme of patiently describing, ever more deeply, the world we encounter, until, by stripping away all received assumptions, we reach its fundamental nature. In his early work Husserl had bracketed off the traditional idea of a substantial self as bearer of consciousness, leaving only consciousness itself and its stream of intentional objects. He was soon to retreat from that ultra-radical position and reinstate the subject of consciousness.

Heidegger rejected Husserl's revisionist move, holding that any philosophy which starts with a self existing in isolation from its world is doomed to end in solipsism. In Heidegger's new version of phenomenology, Dasein (human existence) and its world are given as a whole. The phenomenological task now becomes that of describing the essential character of that world as a whole, the world as it discloses itself to us, infused with meaning, irreducibly temporal. It is accessible to us primarily as creatures with projects and concerns, only derivatively as theorists and scientists.

Even truth becomes a process of disclosure. Thus in searching for truth our goal is not an increasingly accurate correspondence between an explanatory model and a set of phenomena. Instead we are seeking an authentic way of being, such that the world discloses itself to us as it truly is.

As the focus shifts to authentic being in Division II of the book, phenomenology begins to fuse with existentialism. The influence of Kierkegaard is felt and the tone becomes more declamatory. Forgetful of being, we lose ourselves in "idle talk", in the fog of cliché and catch-phrase which conceals from us who and what we are; most importantly it makes us forget our own mor-

tality. To live an authentic life one must achieve an authentic "being-towards-death".

Authentic Dasein now comes to occupy centre stage. According to Heidegger, it is only from a vantage point of authenticity, in particular an authentic "being-towards-death" that one can finally emerge from the fruitless search to validate knowledge, truth and values by reference to standards that might somehow transcend time. For Heidegger, this daunting vision that there is nothing *beyond* Dasein's essentially temporal being, far from inducing nihilistic despair, releases our capacity for making resolute choices; choices which are always to be made within a *historical*, horizon. Thus we *choose* our identities, *choose* how to interpret our place in the world, but that choice is made along with others (*Mitsein*) by choosers who are always aware of the historical significance of their choice.

Authenticity grounds *resoluteness*, which "as *authentic-Being-one's-self* does not detach Dasein from its world, nor does it detach it so that it becomes a free-floating "I". And how should it, when resoluteness as authentic disclosedness is authentically nothing else than Being-in-the-world?" Whew.

But worse is to come:

"... if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the world exists essentially as 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, of a people (*Volk*). Destiny (*Geschick*) is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates (*Schicksal*) ... 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. Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free ..."

From the innocent idea that we find our identities in being together with others, and that this process unfolds in time, we have moved to a conception of a people (a *Volk*) which at once invents and discovers its destiny, as it invents and discovers its history. A people forges itself by "handing down" traditions in "repetition" from generation to generation. This allows Dasein, now identified with the people, to go back into its history and "choose its hero".

It is not hard to see how this vocabulary of people (*Volk*) and hero could all too easily become part of an unphilosophical jargon of political ideology. And that was exactly what happened. Was Heidegger responsible for, even complicit in this hijacking of his work?

The events of 1933²

To seek an answer, we must fast-forward six years to the Rectoral address of 1933. Once more some dates:

- 30 Jan 1933: Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany.
- 21 April 1933: Heidegger appointed Rector of Freiburg University.
- 1 May 1933: Heidegger joined the NS Party.
- 27 May 1933: Heidegger delivered his Inaugural Lecture as Rector.
- 23 April 1934: Heidegger resigned from the Rectorate.

The *Rektoratsrede*

With those dates in mind, we now glance at the contents of the Rectoral Address (*Rektoratsrede*). It is entitled "The self-assertion (or Self-affirmation – *Selbstauffassung*) of the German university". In it Heidegger sought to combine a defence of the autonomy ("self-governance") of the university with its precise opposite, the demand that the teachers and students of the university should now be part of the "following" (*Gefolgerschaft*). There is no vulgar, explicit reference to the brutal reality of the Führer. In his place we encounter an impersonal "mission": "the leaders (of the university) are themselves led - led by that unyielding spiritual mission that forces the fate of the German people to bear the stamp of its history".

With the "return" to primordial "science", we are bidden to distance ourselves from subsequent ideologies, both "Christian-theological" and "mathematical-technological". True science "is not a cultural good, but all that binds the individual to people and state" (473). *Dasein*, the key term of *Being and Time* is here used repeatedly to denote the being of the individual as organic part of a people (*Volk*).

In *Being and Time* Heidegger had invoked the "call of conscience". There we were called to be self-aware, to shake off the cosy comforts of *Alltäglichkeit* (everyday life). Now the call is issued impersonally to science, which must submit to the command to

"become the fundamental happening of our spiritual being as part of a people ... The concept of the freedom of the German student

²For the chronology see Victor Farias, (English trans. p.84) and Hugo Ott (English trans. p.136).

is now brought back to its truth. Henceforth the bond and service of the German student will unfold from this truth."

The "bond", according to Heidegger, is three-fold, requiring "labour- service" (*Arbeitsdienst*), "military service" (*Wehrdienst*) and "knowledge-service" (*Wissensdienst*). Students will be required to perform all three services, but the third is their privileged mission. And that mission is particularly infused with ideological content.

The *Rektoraatsrede* is marked, even crippled, by a tension between the phenomenological image of Dasein as fundamentally self-questioning, and a political rhetoric which puts a brutal end to that questioning. It does that by laying down limits to any further questions concerning the nature of knowledge or science. These limits are revealed to Dasein as it comes fully to be identified with its historical (German) destiny. Three themes dominate the *Rektoratsrede* and mark it off from *Being and Time*: (1) criticism of specialization in the sciences, particularly the natural sciences, leading to a domination of intellectual life by what Heidegger will soon identify as *technology*; (2) proclamation of Spirit, with all its religious overtones, but stripped of religious content, to take the place of the dethroned vulgar sciences, and the identification of Spirit with German Spirit; (3) call for the university to be transformed by fusing students and teachers into a body trained for ideological struggle.

Heidegger's activity during the second world war

After his resignation from the Rectorate, Heidegger remained a powerful, maverick figure in Nazi intellectual circles. His ambition was to transform university education in Germany, to mould it into an ideological force infused by the German Spirit. He attempted to set up a new *Dozentenakademie* to train the new generation of university teachers. When that failed, he participated in party initiatives to revolutionize legal training and the teaching of political science. The aim was to bring these disciplines into line with the *Führerprinzip*. On each occasion Heidegger was sidelined, not because he lacked enthusiasm for the NS cause, but because his views were found to be too extreme, even anarchic by the hard-liners who were now dominant within the National Socialist movement.

Heidegger remained a Nazi party member throughout the war, but he retreated from direct involvement with politics. As Professor at Freiburg University he continued to teach and write until 1944, when he was called up, first to work on fortifications on the Rhine, then for service with the *Volkssturm*:

the oldest member of faculty to be enlisted, a clear sign, according to Heidegger, of the hostility he had incurred from NS officials.

After the war: Heidegger interrogated

After the allied victory in 1945 the French occupied Baden and, as a NS fellow traveller, Heidegger was brought before a denazification committee. The final verdict of the Committee, after lengthy deliberations and disagreements, was that Heidegger should be allowed to continue as a paid, emeritus Professor, but banned from teaching at the University. That ban was lifted in 1951.

Heidegger's initial line of defence was that he was a lofty intellectual who had acted naïvely, but with the best of motives in accepting the Rectorate, which he did to avoid a worse outcome, the appointment of a party nominee. It was: "to stem the coming development by means of the constructive powers which were still viable". And, as soon as he realized that this would be impossible, he resigned from office and took no further part in politics. While the first of these claims was true, the second was not: Heidegger continued to promote his own version of National Socialism, with little success, for many years to come. As historians continue to unravel the narrative, "... we know now that Heidegger intentionally misrepresented the facts."

One thing is certain: Heidegger held that there was an "inner truth and strength" in the National Socialist movement, namely a vision "some day (to) bring about a gathering of what is German unto the historical essence of the west ...". That heady dream was betrayed, according to Heidegger, by party hacks who had sold out to "technology".

Heidegger's view of what went wrong with National Socialism: the triumph of technology

The theme of technology became increasingly important in Heidegger's later work. In the *Spiegel* interview (1966), Heidegger condemned technology because it "tears men from the earth and uproots them". The term "technology" embodied all that Heidegger found wrong with the modern world, dominated by instrumental rationality and forgetful of Being. But technology also plays a sinister role in Heidegger's own forgetfulness of the brutal reality of the Holocaust: "Agriculture is now a motorized food-industry - in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps ..." (Lecture 1949). Heidegger was pressed repeatedly to accept that as a party member with a high public profile, however distant he may have been

from the centres of power, he shared responsibility for Nazi atrocities. He rejected all such demands. The mistake had been made by others, who had put technology in command. The dominance of technology would lead to many undesirable results, including battery chicken farms and also to the extermination camps. And these two examples are, from Heidegger's perspective, "essentially the same". The response is breathtaking. At the grotesque level of generality adopted by Heidegger, all morally relevant distinctions between the two cases evaporate, and with them all questions of moral responsibility.

Heidegger and anti-semitism

So was Heidegger an anti-semite? That apparently simple question requires a careful answer.³

Heidegger expressed hostility to Jewish influence as early as 1929 (the year he began dabbling in right-wing politics), when he proclaimed in a letter to an official in the Ministry of Education: "We now face a real choice whether we should again provide for our German spiritual life (*unserem deutschen Geistesleben*) talents and educators rooted in our soil, or whether we should surrender it once and for all to an ever-growing "jewing" (*Verjudung*) in both a broad and narrow sense". Heidegger had already used the term *Verjudung* as early as 1916 in a letter to his future wife Elfriede: "The *Verjudung* of our culture and the universities is really frightening and I think the German race (*die deutsche Rasse*) should find enough inner force to reach the summit." Heidegger later disagreed with party spokesmen about their different interpretations of the term, but like them he continued to deplore the *Verjudung* of German culture.⁴ Historians have tracked the recurring anti-semitic elements in Heidegger's wartime lectures.⁵

Heidegger disagreed with the Nazi race "theorists" on the question of "biologism". They claimed that Jews were tainted in virtue of inherited physi-

³. Safranski notes that, in his judgment on Heidegger's possible appointment to the Chair in Philosophy at Berlin in 1933, the party hack Jaensch criticized him for being "talmudic, rabbinic and Jewish in spirit". One can only assume that Jaensch recognized the hermeneutic turn taken in *Being and Time*. But since the heritage of biblical exegesis had been carried over into Christianity (and carried on by Koranic scholars in Islam), it is absurd to restrict it to only one of the three "religions of the book" (Safranski, p.268).

⁴. This previously unpublished letter was discovered by Ulrich Sieg and published in *Die Zeit* Feuilleton 52 (29 December 1989). It has since been widely quoted. I found it first in Safranski, ch.14. My thanks to Richard Maguire for getting hold of the German text for me.

⁵. Faye has assembled the most detailed and systematic inventory of Heidegger's anti-semitism that I have encountered. He quotes the recently published 1916 letter on p.10.

ological characteristics. Determinism of that kind was never part of Heidegger's philosophy. In *Being and Time* to subscribe to such a doctrine would be a mark of inauthenticity. Yet even in that text authentic Dasein, in resolving to identify itself with its people, has only one choice. Those and only those who have a shared history can make that choice.

There is still nothing in this story that would exclude Jews from identifying themselves with the *Volk*. Heidegger's biographer Safranski reports that in his lectures given in the 1930s he explicitly denied that there existed a "Jewish spirit" in philosophy.⁶ In theory at least, German Jews, no less than German "aryans" could have identified themselves with the *Volk*; provided they had absorbed its historical destiny.

Yet Heidegger showed himself indifferent to the fate of his Jewish colleagues and students, most of whom would soon flee Germany. Husserl remained in increasing isolation in Freiburg until his death in 1938. His widow managed to find refuge in Belgium until the end of the war.

Heidegger remained silent about the Nazis' persecution of the Jews throughout the time of their rise to power until the end of the war. He retained that attitude of indifference after the war, as is clear from his judgment that the extermination camps were "essentially the same" as industrial farming. Now there is nothing in *Being and Time* that entails Heidegger's attitude to the Jews. Rather there are yawning gaps. There is no space for the discursive realms of moral responsibility and interpersonal relations. So when he was interrogated about these matters after the war, Heidegger gave the impression of someone who did not understand the language in which the questions were posed.

If that gives an explanation, though not an excuse, for the behaviour of Heidegger the philosopher, what of Heidegger the man? ⁷ In the inner circle of Heidegger's star students in the 1920s many were Jews, or at least would be classified as Jews by the Nazis, though few had previously thought of themselves as such. They included Karl Löwith, Herbert Marcuse and, for two tempestuous years preceding the publication of *Being and Time*, Hannah Arendt. The story of the passionate clandestine affair between the 36 year old professor nearing the zenith of his acclaim and his beautiful Jewish student, seventeen years his junior, is only now coming to light.⁸ Hannah Arendt en-

⁶ Safranski, p.256.

⁷ In making that distinction I echo Herbert Marcuse, who wrote to Heidegger in 1947: "I - and many others - have learnt an immense amount from you as a philosopher, but we cannot separate Heidegger the philosopher and Heidegger the man. For to do that would be to contradict your own philosophy ..." (Reprinted in Martin, p.156)

⁸ See Lilla's brilliant narrative of the relationship between Arendt, Heidegger and Jaspers. For

tered the relationship an impressionable, insecure teenager, and emerged from it a woman of great moral and intellectual power. After the nazi takeover Heidegger did no more for his former lover than he did for any of his other Jewish students. She married, escaped to Paris and thence to New York, where she became one of the leading figures in post-war social thought. She published an angry denunciation of Heidegger in 1946, but was later reconciled with him and publicly defended his philosophical legacy. The story of a doomed love affair that turned into a lifetime friendship lies for the most part outside the domain of philosophy. But it constitutes a fitting inconclusive conclusion to this evening's lecture!

2. Part Two: Afterthoughts, 2013

In 2008 I presented the opposition between the two poles of interpretation as I have just done, and then proceeded swiftly and baldly to conclude that the second "continuist" pole was correct, in other words that there was a connection between *Being and Time* and Heidegger's political stance in the 1930s. Five years later I still think that judgment was right, but I have used the intervening time to return to a number of the more important commentators and to recast my conclusion in the light of their work.

Those denying continuity have rightly pointed out that *Being and Time* is a powerful extended reflexion on the human condition, a radical attempt to go beyond dilemmas of epistemology and philosophy of mind. *Being and Time*, on this reading, is no more concerned with politics than Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* or Ryle's *Concept of Mind* are. Marcuse expressed this response most clearly in his 1947 letter to Heidegger, in which he distinguished "Heidegger the philosopher" from "Heidegger the man". From this perspective Heidegger's political activity in 1933 would be a brief personal aberration, wholly detached from his philosophy.

Those asserting continuity included figures as diverse as Kolnai, Löwith, Lukacs and Adorno, all of whom found direct links between the philosopher of *Being and Time* and the National Socialist Rector of 1933. From this short list I shall say no more about Lukacs's *The Destruction of Reason*, in which Heidegger makes a brief appearance along with Jaspers, only to be summarily dismissed. For Aurel Kolnai, Jewish convert to Catholicism, writing in 1935, it was its exclusion of personal relations, along with privacy and autonomous morality. Karl Löwith sought refuge from the Nazis in Rome. He describes his

the full story see Ettinger, Grunenberg and Young-Bruehl.

meeting there with Heidegger in 1936, during the dourse of which he, Löwith, told his former teacher that in his opinion "his commitment in favour of National Socialism was in the essence of his philosophy. Heidegger unreservedly approved of my judgment and added that his notion of "historicity" was the basis of his political *commitment* He also left me in no doubt about his faith in Hitler . . ." (p.77). After the war Theodor Adorno argued in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964) that there was a direct link between the idea of authentic Being, involving "rootedness" and a sense of belonging, elaborated in *Being and Time*, was taken up in the vulgar rhetoric of the *Rektorsrede*. Underlying the jargon, according to Adorno, is a profound error, namely the doctrine of "reflected unreflectedness" The latter is a philosophical thesis asserting that unmediated Dasein has ontological primacy, yet that thesis, like any other piece of philosophizing, is itself an act of reflection. Much of the rest of Adorno's book consists of more polemical swipes, more or less *ad hominem*. But there too, in exposing the hypocrisy of the intellectual supposedly most at ease in the company of simple peasants.

But since 2008 I have begun to think that the more interesting commentators cannot easily be assigned to one or other of the two camps I distinguished. Most of them, in other words, have found certain elements in *Being and Time* which find echoes in the *Rektorsrede*, even though the latter, along with other texts from that period betray a radical change of direction.

An indispensable work here is Ernst Tugendhat's article "Heidegger's idea of truth" (1969), not least because in it the author addresses a purely philosophical problem, leaving his readers to draw their own conclusions about its relevance to Heidegger's politics. Tugendhat's starting point is *Being and Time*, 44.221: "... Dasein discloses itself to itself in and as its ownmost potentiality for Being. This *authentic* disclosedness shows the phenomenon of the most primordial truth in the mode of authenticity." Following Tugendhat we find that in this section Heidegger [a] started by applying the notion of truth as disclosedness to the truth of assertions and then ;b] extended it to all that can be uncovered, that is to all disclosure of "the world". Everything follows from [a], from the notion that the truth of an assertion lies in its disclosedness. This in turn is Heidegger's version of Husserl's theory of truth in *Logical Investigations*, in which truth was the correspondence between [i] the state of affairs as it is intended in signifying givenness and [ii] that same state of affairs as it is in itself. A relation of identity. Heidegger transformed Husserl's theory by removing "in itself". So now "The assertion is understood as its disclosedness. The truth of an assertion now consists simply in the pointing out, uncovering, disclosing of Being, with no reference to "as it is in itself".

Disclosure is now understood as an *occurrence*. In Husserl the act of assertion is understood *statically*. In Heidegger it is understood *dynamically*. It is actively relayed to its opposite – “closedness”, so that “we lift it out of concealment!”, Thus Heidegger abandons “as it is in itself” because uncovering, disclosing “must be true if it really is an uncovering”. But in normal usage uncovering is not equivalent to truth, since one may uncover the false. On this point Heidegger prevaricates: in the false assertion “the false is in a sense already uncovered and still not represented”. In short “if one limits oneself to the two concepts concealment and unconcealment, there remains absolutely no possibility of determining the specific sense of falsehood, and therefore also of truth”. “Because the truth of an assertion does not lie in the way that it is uncovered but only in the fact that it is uncovered, [Heidegger] is able to carry truth over to all truth in general”. There is no way of distinguishing between what is true and what is false once you accept that all disclosure is true. Disclosure of Dasein is itself “the most primordial truth”. In other words “self-manifestation is itself truth”. So “there is no place for critical consciousness to assess truth claims” (238). Against Heidegger Tugendhat defends “the regulative idea of certainty and the postulate of a critical foundation”. In Tugendhat’s final judgment, “Heidegger does not just set aside the notion of truth. He holds on to it and deforms it”.

Tugendhat’s reading of this crucial section of *Being and Time* is so valuable because, instead of dismissing the so-called “apophantic” account of truth out of hand, he takes it seriously and shows how Heidegger produced his own “deformed” theory from the sober phenomenological approach of Husserl. Although Tugendhat restricted himself in this paper to a purely philosophical question.

For Jürgen Habermas Tugendhat’s account of the apophantic theory of truth formed a key part of his own picture of the vulnerability of Heidegger’s philosophy to ideological subversion, a process in which philosophy gave way to *Weltanschauung*. Equally important, as Habermas saw it, were elements deep within the ontology of *Being and Time* which effectively precluded the serious study of intersubjectivity and society and of real historical processes. The process of subversion, argued Habermas, gathered momentum from 1929 onwards, coming ever closer to a diagnosis of the disorders of our time, rather than serious philosophical reflection.

It is at this point that I screw my courage to the sticking point and dare to mention the name of Derrida in a collection of essays dedicated to Pascal. I do it only because, if we cut through the fancy verbiage (or, as Pascal would have it, the bullshit), we find at the heart of Derrida’s *De l’esprit* an important insight

into Heidegger's Nazism. Derrida spotted that the term *Geist* (spirit), which Heidegger vowed to avoid in *Being and Time* (1927), and there used only rarely and always in quotation marks, plays a prominent role in the *Rektoratsrede* (1933) and in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935), texts in which Heidegger espoused National Socialism, while distancing himself from "vulgar Nazis" who had failed to grasp the spiritual dimension of their movement. In Derrida's words, *Geist* "is regularly inscribed in contexts that are highly charged politically". In such contexts spirit is essentially German and it summons German academics, teachers and students, to identify themselves with the historical (spiritual) destiny of the German people. Insofar as Derrida draws our attention to the sinister tone of Heidegger's invocation of *Geist* as bearer of a spiritualized *Führerprinzip*, his analysis rings true. But his diagnosis of Heidegger's error will convince only true believers in the Derridean gospel. His argument, as far as I can understand it, goes like this. Heidegger marks off his version of National Socialism from biologism and racism by identifying it with spirit. But that strategy "risks" turning spirit into a *subject*, something which should have been definitively replaced by *Dasein*, the central element of *Being and Time*. To Derrida it was self-evident that if you refer to a subject in a philosophical context, you are doomed to return to a metaphysical doctrine of the self as substance. It was so self-evident to Derrida that it barely merited an argument. According to Derrida, if the substantial subject embodied in *Geist* is free, as Heidegger said it was in the *Rektoratsrede*, then that freedom "always runs the risk of [turning into what Hegel called] a merely formal liberty of an abstract universality". This comment occurs in a footnote to a page in which Derrida mentions "those who state their opposition to racism, totalitarianism, Nazism, fascism etc in the name of . . . the freedom of (the) spirit, in the name of an axiomatic — for example that of democracy or 'human rights' (Derrida's quotation marks) which . . . comes back to this metaphysics of *subjectité*" (Derrida's coinage). This passage suggests that Derrida agrees with Heidegger in rejecting any version of ethics involving "rights talk", based on the idea of a morally autonomous agent. Derrida seems to accept, with Heidegger, that anyone who might think of doing serious moral philosophy will give up as soon as they have read Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* or *Beyond Good and Evil*. As a result, Derrida, like any rational person, assumed that "racism, totalitarianism, Nazism, fascism etc." are deplorable, while rejecting any attempt to demonstrate their unacceptability by means of a systematic moral theory. Monique Canto-Sperber has provided a clear account of the eclipse of moral philosophy in post-war France, a process in which Derrida played a leading part.

Up to this point my second thoughts had modified my first thoughts, without wholly shaking them. But after reading Hans Sluga's *Heidegger's Crisis* I began to wonder if I had entirely misjudged the Heidegger case from start to finish. In his book Sluga argues that it is pointless for historians to pass moral judgments on events in the past and, worse, that it is likely to distort their understanding of those events. To his rather sweeping dismissal of all moral judgments about the past, it could be objected that the historian he is certainly entitled to report the moral judgments of Heidegger's contemporaries. And anyway Sluga's dictum is open to challenge. His own teacher Michael Dummett evidently did not feel bound by it when he wrote in the Preface to *Frege's Philosophy of Language*: "There is some irony for me in the fact that the man about whose philosophical views I have devoted ... a great deal of time to thinking, was, at least at the end of his life, a virulent racist, specifically an anti-semitite." Dummett reports on the effect of reading the previously unpublished section of Frege's diary, which "shows Frege to have been a man of extreme right-wing political opinions, bitterly opposed to the parliamentary system, democrats, Catholics, the French and, above all, Jews, who he thought ought to be deprived of political rights and preferably, expelled from Germany. I was deeply shocked, because I had revered Frege as an absolutely rational man, if, perhaps, a not very likeable one ... From it I learned something about human beings which I should be sorry not to know; perhaps something about Europe, also." And the distinction between "the man" and "the philosopher" is very much easier to draw in Frege's case than in Heidegger's.

But Sluga's more important point about Heidegger's critics is that they have focused on him in isolation from more general trends of the time. So in entitling his book *Heidegger's Crisis* he drew attention to the fact that there was general agreement among German intellectuals between the wars they were living through a time of crisis and that the situation called for a drastic solution. When political parties and their leaders offered such solutions, they found a ready audience, particularly in intellectual circles/ Sluga concentrates on Germany, but what he says applies equally to most European countries. Sluga shows that numerous other German philosophers, of various schools of thought, had been critical of the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic since its inception, and ended up by subscribing to National Socialism. The DPG (*Deutsche philosophische Gesellschaft*) representing conservative philosophers, gave its allegiance to the party at its meeting in Magdeberg in 1933. By 1938 roughly half of German philosophy professors were party members.

Against that background Sluga argues that there is no particular link between Heidegger's philosophy and National Socialism since numerous other philosophers committed themselves to the cause while holding philosophical views contrary to Heidegger's. Critics of Heidegger point to three theses on his philosophy which make it susceptible to political subversion: [a] its rejection of transcendental norms and values; [b] its irrationalism; [c] its decisionism. But other supporters of the Nazis based their support on reason and universal values and, on the other hand some of its opponents subscribed to one or more of those theses. The list would include positivists, existentialists and many others.

Sluga devotes much of his book to a detailed investigation of these pro-Nazi philosophers. Most of them, with a few exceptions like Nicolai Hartmann, were previously unknown outside Germany. A particularly influential figure was Max Wundt, who was dedicated to German idealism in philosophy. Once he had espoused National Socialism he fabricated an ideology of the German (idealist) spirit which needed to be cleared of all contamination, especially Jewish, but also Catholic. In such company Heidegger appears relatively innocent, untainted by either pseudo-scientific idealist accounts of German racial superiority. In explaining the widespread cultural conservatism of the time, Sluga diagnoses a particularly severe case of nationalism present in Germany, partly due to the late emergence of the unitary state, exacerbated by defeat in the Great War and the economic collapse. So in the *Rektoratsrede* Heidegger "was not initiating a new kind of discourse but merely inserting himself into one that already had a long history ... None of [its] ideas was original and he made little of them in his philosophical thinking."

Sluga makes a compelling case for understanding Heidegger's engagement with National Socialism in its historical context. He has demonstrated that the myth of Heidegger's unique contribution to the Nazi cause is just that – a myth. But one is left wondering whether Sluga has thereby rendered that contribution *banal* (to echo Hannah Arendt's judgment that Eichmann embodied *The Banality of Evil*). But the historical record tells us that Heidegger, unlike Eichmann, was not a banal figure. The publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 had established his reputation throughout Germany and abroad. By the time of the Davos encounter with Cassirer in 1929 he had already become a celebrity, his fame having passed beyond the confines of academic philosophy. After the *Rektoratsrede* and his public espousal of National Socialism, despite his unorthodox and controversial version of its creed, he still received invitations from Berlin and Munich to take the Chairs in Philosophy at their respective universities. In short, while accepting Sluga's outstanding contri-

bution to establishing the cultural milieu in which Heidegger found himself, we can remain unapologetic in putting him in the foreground of the picture, both because his philosophy was and still is so interesting, and also because he played such a prominent role in the cultural politics of his time.

3. References

This is a list of some of the works I consulted when writing the lecture, along with one or two others I have encountered since then. It represents a microscopic fraction of the immense literature devoted to the topic whose scale can be appreciated by a glance at the bibliography, running to over 30 pages, in Faye's book. Moreover it makes no pretence at scholarship. I have simply used the versions of the texts which I had to hand, a motly mixture of items, some in their original languages, others in translation.]Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson, Oxford: Blackwell, 1962 (*Sein und Zeit*, first published 1927).

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