

University of New Orleans

ScholarWorks@UNO

---

Philosophy Faculty Publications

Department of History and Philosophy

---

Fall 1998

## Heidegger, the Polity, and National Socialism (review article)

Frank Schalow

*University of New Orleans*, [fschalow@uno.edu](mailto:fschalow@uno.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.uno.edu/phil\\_facpubs](https://scholarworks.uno.edu/phil_facpubs)



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Schalow, Frank. "Heidegger, the Polity, and National Socialism," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, 26/1 (Fall, 1998): 121-135.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of History and Philosophy at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

## Review Essays

### Heidegger, the Polity, and National Socialism

FRANK SCHALOW

*University of New Orleans*

John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), xi + 234 pp., \$15.95 paper.

Berel Lang, *Heidegger's Silence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), xii + 129 pp., \$19.95.

Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger's Philosophy and Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xi + 382 pp., \$47.50

Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), x + 285 pp., \$33.50 cloth, \$15.50 paper.

Leslie Paul Thiele, *Timely Meditations: Martin Heidegger and Postmodern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xii + 263 pp., \$49.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xv + 232 pp., \$49.95.

Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xxvii + 306 pp., \$19.95 paper.

#### I.

Since Victor Farias published his book detailing Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism (1987), a wave of books have appeared which develop this theme. One might expect that this trend of Heidegger criticism would produce such dark revelations about his fascist tendencies as to dampen all enthusiasm for his thought. Yet these works have had the reverse effect of stimulating new interest in his philosophy, even to the point of spawning "apologetics," if not for his actions at least for his philosophical vision. Indeed, as this century comes to a close, perhaps the greatest thinker of his time has never received greater notoriety. Precisely for this reason the need for balanced criticism of Heidegger's thought has never been more urgent. In this essay, I will develop such an approach by examining a wide spectrum of books which seek to un-

cover the truth about his fascist ties. In the process, I will point to a theme which remains dormant throughout the majority of those analyses, namely, the interconnection between Heidegger's concept of freedom and the example of his politics.

We can appreciate a thinker's politics only by considering his or her corollary treatment of freedom, even when the scope of that freedom remains unclear. When scholars analyze Heidegger's philosophy, however, they often subordinate their explication of his concept of freedom to a conclusion already drawn about his politics. In order to discern this tendency, we must examine the different interpretive strategies which scholars employ to outline the place of the polity in Heidegger's thought. Among the various books addressing Heidegger's Nazism and politics, we must first consider those which explore the tension between his innovative development of ontology and his reactionary political views. One such outstanding example, which follows on the heels of Farias' attempt to re-examine Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism, is Michael Zimmerman's *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*. From this spirit of an "immanent" criticism of Heidegger arises a more radical examination of his presuppositions, which is exemplified in John Caputo's *Demythologizing Heidegger*. Unlike Zimmerman, Caputo develops "deconstructive" strategies as practiced by the luminaries of postmodernity, including Levinas, Lyotard, and Derrida, to expose Heidegger's thought to the criticisms of those traditions which his brand of "Teutonic-Hellenism" excludes, e.g., Judaeo-Christianity. As we will discover, Caputo's work forms an important bridge between those scholars who sit on the Heideggerian fence and those who reject his philosophy because of his politics.

Although Farias champions this position, a more recent example within the English-speaking world comes from Tom Rockmore's *Heidegger's Philosophy and Nazism*. Rockmore implements a method of criticism, which Hans Sluga also exemplifies in *Heidegger's Crisis*, that may be described as "sociological-historical." This fact-gathering enterprise is crucial in order to support the conclusions, for example, that Heidegger embraced National Socialism and never recanted its ideology, that he exhibited antisemitic tendencies, and that his silence about the horrors of Auschwitz provides implicit evidence of his continual allegiance to National Socialism. Given this historical archaeology, we can evaluate different ways of making *inferences* from Heidegger the man-politician to Heidegger the intellectual-thinker and vice versa. Not surprisingly, several books paint the darkest implications of Heideggerian politics. Among these books is Richard Wolin's *The Politics of Being*, along with the literature detailing the atrocities of the Holocaust, including Berel Lang's *Heidegger's Silence*.

Wherever the criticism of Heidegger becomes most severe, attempts to reinterpret his thought in ways more compatible with our democratic vision become inevitable. One such example, which implements an "analytic" method to refute point by point the damning evidence his critics gather against him, is Julian

Young's *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*. We must also include Leslie Paul Thiele's *Timely Meditations*. This work stands apart by reinterpreting the key motifs of Heidegger's thought in order to outline a politics which undercuts the Nazi ideology he initially embraces.

## II.

Even prior to Farias' book, most proponents of Heidegger's thought had been aware of his brief flirtation with National Socialism when he became rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933 and supported Hitler's rise to power. Yet the overall "official story" has been to separate Heidegger the philosopher from Heidegger the politician, thereby creating a buffer between the brilliance of his ontological insights and whatever myopia he may have shown in his political judgment. The effect of Farias' revelations, however, was to tear away this buffer and foreclose the all too convenient option of insulating Heidegger's thought from the catastrophic historical events surrounding his life in Germany. As poignant as Farias' revelations were, they would not have had the impact they did upon many Anglo-American scholars if a transition were not already under way to engage Heidegger's thought with an area of philosophy he seemingly ignored: namely, ethics. If the inquiry into being is to have its root in the historical situation of human beings, then any such investigation must speak to those ethical dilemmas which distinguish perhaps the most turbulent period in world history. As Zimmerman, Caputo, and Charles Scott began to recognize in the 1980's, it is just as necessary to approach Heidegger's thought as an occasion to question the possibility of ethics as to present his philosophy as an esoteric narrative on the meaning of being. This shift in the emphasis on Heidegger scholarship not only parallels Farias' work, but, indeed, provides the climate for hearing the troubling allegations which he raises.

If concrete praxis orients the question of being, then practical concerns, e.g., of ethics and politics, must help to shape the landscape of ontological inquiry. While this correlation may have been slow in capturing the interest of many scholars, its importance had already been etched in Heidegger's thought with the publication of his magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927). In this work, he emphasizes that a thinker can engage in ontological inquiry only by participating in being's disclosure; hence, philosophy originates from the concrete situation in which the inquirer places him- or herself in question and owns up to his or her unique existence as a finite self. The thinker's commitment to authentic existence fosters the openness of philosophical inquiry. Given this reciprocity between thought and existence, it appears hypocritical to suggest that philosophy can secure a sanctuary for truth apart from its exemplification in the realm of human action. As Herbert Marcuse argues in a famous letter to his teacher:

‘. . . we cannot make the distinction between the philosopher and the human being Martin Heidegger—it contradicts your own philosophy. A philosopher can be mistaken about politics—then he will openly admit his error. But he cannot be mistaken about a regime that murdered millions of Jews merely because they were Jews, that made terror part of everyday life and turned everything that ever was really tied to the concept of spirit and freedom and truth into its bloody opposite.’  
(Quoted in Kettering and Neske, pp. xxiii–ix)

In *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, Michael Zimmerman embraces this statement as the leitmotif for his discussion. Thus the question he asks is not simply whether Heidegger had Nazi ties, but instead how and why his thinking became juxtaposed with such a destructive ideology. That is, what were the set of variables which shaped Heidegger's interest in National Socialism and seduced him into the misunderstanding that Nazi ideology could express the political implications of his thought? To answer this question, Zimmerman considers the interface between the intellectual *Zeitgeist* in Germany—from Spengler's emphasis on the “decline of the West” to Jünger's concern for the worker's encounter with the global forces of industrialization—and Heidegger's interpretation of the crisis of Western history as a descent into nihilism, the forgetting of being, and the end of metaphysics. The inquiry by which he can address all of these issues simultaneously and distinguish their unique configuration, of course, is “the question concerning technology.” As the process of “enframing,” technology exerts control and domination over all aspects of nature, granting humanity the power to impose its will on the diversity of being's manifestation.

One can debate the sociological factors which surround Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism, but the most basic consideration of all remains the problem of technology. Because of its global destructive power, technology solicits from us equally radical responses in social organization in order that we can combat this potential for destruction. As Zimmerman emphasizes, Heidegger saw both Western capitalism and communism as instruments of technology, and hence turned to National Socialism as the political movement which summons human beings to face this epochal challenge. The audacity of the politicians' decision became the corollary to the philosopher's attempt at original thinking. “Heidegger claimed that only authentic thinking and poetry could save Germany in its hour of crisis. By ‘thinking,’ he did not mean rational calculation, but instead the mode of comportment which opened one up to the awesome and dreadful presencing of things,” including its darkness and horror (p. 84). On the surface, the need to develop a new politics to face the crisis of our day, let alone the turmoil of Germany in the 1930's, is not far fetched. Yet Heidegger went astray by underestimating how political leaders could be subverted by the powers of technology which they seek to harness, i.e., spearheading violence and mass destruction themselves. As Zimmerman states:

Unfortunately, what the Nazis meant by the 'unrestrained' and 'dark' was not the being of entities, but instead blood and instinct, frenzy and violence, domination of humanity and nature. As reactionary modernists, the Nazis united instinct with technology in a way which led to unparalleled devastation. (P. 84)

In the end, Heidegger may succumb to a kind of hubris in believing that the flawed realm of politics could ever yield a leader with the kind of world-historical vision to match technology's global reach. Yet it is one thing to accuse a person of hubris and quite another to trace its origin. According to Zimmerman, Heidegger's hero combines a nostalgia for the Greek origins with a grandiose sense of "destiny" (*Geschick*) as reflected in Schelling's thought.

The self-mythifying Heidegger believed that he had been destined to proclaim the saving vision of his hero, Hölderlin, and that he himself was thus the world-historical figure who would transform the fate of the West. Consider Heidegger's [emphasis on] the 'destiny' linking him with Hölderlin. . . The grandson of the man born in a manger in Hölderlin's beloved Swabian countryside knew that he was destined to change the course of history! (P. 132)

The heroic leader must exhibit the creative power to transform tradition, that is, to seek in the strife of the present the possibility of transmitting one's heritage to future generations. Art becomes the vehicle for joining these apparently incompatible elements of harmony and strife, conflict and resolution. The artist's ex-centricity must be revered in contrast to the complacency of bourgeois convention and the self-serving politics of the modern enlightenment. Sacrifice rather than comfort provides the key to motivate individuals to place their trust in a new political regime. But the question becomes whether the artist's way of begetting creativity from chaos, harmony from strife, and destiny from destruction can provide even the barest recipe for politics.

Once having understood why Heidegger found National Socialism to be attractive, we must still ask where these revelations leave us as scholars. Not surprisingly, a rift emerges between the "right-wing Heideggerians" who uphold his status as a thinker attuned to the voice of being and the "left-wing Heideggerians" who employ deconstructive tactics to expose incongruities within the Heideggerian text (Schürmann, p. 127). For those who still espouse Heideggerian themes, it becomes increasingly evident that the question of politics lies at the forefront of any future appropriation of his philosophy. On the one hand, Zimmerman pinpoints the dissonance between Heidegger's grasp of the Western crisis and the prospect of translating that insight into guidelines of political action. On the other hand, a new opportunity arises to take Heidegger's shortfall as an occasion to re-examine the perennial problem of the relation between theory and praxis, philosophy and politics. Going forward, the greatest challenge is to recast Heidegger's thought through a dialogue which examines the possibility of politics in the contemporary world.

Within the past decade, there have been two major breakthroughs which have dramatically changed the face of Heidegger studies. The first involves the emergence of the political question and the revelations of Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism. The second pertains to the discovery of Heidegger's thought in the early 1920's; in his youthful "hermeneutics of facticity," he uncovers an ethos which includes motifs from primordial Christianity, e.g. love and community, otherwise absent in his stark concept of *Dasein*. In *Demythologizing Heidegger*, John Caputo blends these two developments in a way which plays the compassionate spirit of Heidegger's early religious orientation against the callousness of his subsequent commitment to totalitarian politics. Thus Caputo distinguishes the two major *dislocations* in Heidegger's thought from which a new topography of questioning can emerge.

According to Caputo, Heidegger's turn to National Socialism parallels his commitment to specific volitional categories of strength, self-affirmation, and heroism, all of which stem from Hellenic thought. "His baffling silence about the Holocaust, the scandalous comparison of the gas chambers to modern agriculture . . . these are all scandalously insensitive to real 'factual' pain and concrete human suffering" (p. 73). The exclusivity with which Heidegger upholds the Greco-German virtues amounts to dismissing the importance of another set of categories of Christian origin, the categories of tenderness, charity, and love. Despite the religious orientation of Heidegger's early thought, "he was deaf to the solicitousness about the flesh in the biblical narratives . . ." (p. 72).

The deconstruction of Heidegger's thought requires an alternative axis to unfold the key motifs of his ontology, including care, truth, and temporality. But an appropriation of Heidegger's thought cannot occur without undoing the Greco-Germanic "myth" of a privileged origin from which Western philosophy arises and the nostalgic search for it through a "homecoming" (Hölderlin). In advancing this criticism, Caputo concurs with Karl Löwith, who rebuked his teacher for his "self-stylization into a shepherd, thinker, and sayer of 'being'" (Löwith, p. 68). Only by purging Heideggerian thought of this tendency does it become possible to cultivate another ethos whose roots spring from the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Ironically, the German people's Christian heritage does not seem to have been much of a deterrent in preventing the atrocities of National Socialism. As Caputo indicates, Heidegger abandoned his early theological orientation in favor of Hölderlin's mythic-poetic vision of the gods. To open Heidegger's thought to the "piety" of other traditions, we must cultivate a pluralistic forum in which to express various criticisms of his philosophy: the need to heed the voice of the disenfranchised (Levinas), the persecuted (Lyotard), and the dissident (Derrida). According to Caputo, a new "justice" must emerge which speaks to the suffering of the individual, to the radically "singular," in contrast to the generic "truth" of being's claim upon *Dasein* (p. 207).

III.

Heidegger's most vehement critics converge in a single attempt to counter the wholesale attempt by "Heideggerians" to whitewash their mentor's involvement in National Socialism. In *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Nazism*, Rockmore exemplifies this critical stance, as does Sluga in *Heidegger's Crisis*. Both scholars proceed less as disciples steeped in Heidegger's texts and more as historians; their strategy is to uncover unusual facts about Heidegger the person and then weave them together in an ultimate detective story assessing his "guilt" and "innocence." As Rockmore states, the time has come to combat the "official story" that Heidegger briefly flirted with National Socialism in 1933 only to reject it shortly thereafter upon resigning from the post of rector in 1934, and that, despite whatever personal shortcomings Heidegger may have exhibited as a man, these have no bearing on our assessment of his thought. "What I call the 'official' view is propagated not only by Heidegger but by some of his closest students. It is the view that, roughly speaking, there is no, or no important, link between Heidegger's philosophical position and National Socialism" (p. 74).

Rockmore's overarching thesis is that Heidegger's thought is "intrinsically political" (p. 54). Rockmore thereby closes the loophole by which Heidegger's defenders seek an escape from confronting his Nazism, namely, maintaining the purity of his thought over against its contamination by his behavior from 1933 to his "Spiegel Interview" in 1966. Rockmore, however, construes the term "political" in a narrower sense to mean the implementation of a kind of ideology aligned with Heidegger's thought, rather than a reflection upon the principles of the polity. This distinction becomes important, for Rockmore maintains that the key motifs of Heidegger's philosophy (e.g., the "hero," "resoluteness," "conscience," "destiny") are adaptable to Nazism and only Nazism. Thus Rockmore makes a stronger claim than most in suggesting that Heidegger's "turn to Nazism was based in his philosophy" (p. 54). This is a different position than maintaining that Heidegger outlines the ontological presuppositions of the polis and hence his thought can be interpreted as implicating various political stances.

Because Rockmore couches the Heideggerian problem of this polis in this way, he can then establish the complex synergies which supposedly hold between fundamental ontology and National Socialism. Thus Rockmore makes the relevant associations between Heidegger's emphasis on the elitism of authentic philosophy and his leadership as rector of the German university, the self's exercise of resolve and his political decision of 1933, being's transmission of its destiny to a chosen intellectual and the German people's emergence as a vanguard of world history. Yet even given the plausibility of these connections, the most compelling question which Rockmore poses is whether some element in Heidegger's philosophy prohibited him from recognizing the atrocities perpetuated under the banner of National Socialism.

According to Rockmore, Heidegger sanctified the role of silence as an ingredient of authentic existence to the point that when the time came he had a built-in excuse for not speaking out against the forces of totalitarianism. But it may be more accurate to suggest that Heidegger acknowledged political developments only on a macro level proper to thought and not on the micro level of conflicting power interests. The question then becomes, Why does this dissonance occur? And one possible answer might be that Heidegger's concept of destiny includes a "tragic dimension" in the purest Greek sense—of strife and reconciliation, of illumination and blindness, of freedom and necessity. While the macrocosmic events of the Western crisis can be interpreted along these lines, the Holocaust may be of such a singular character that the depths of its darkness, unlike the nihilism Nietzsche envisioned, cannot be fit into the categories of Greek tragedy. Of course, there are different interpretations of the degree to which Heidegger was or was not antisemitic. But it is safe to say that he never saw the persecution of the Jews as a philosophical problem in its own right.

In *Heidegger's Silence*, Berel Lang points to a double fault by which Heidegger ignored the plight of the Jews during Hitler's uprising, and then, in retrospect, again neglected the "Jewish question" insofar as the Holocaust constitutes the most abominable act of human history (pp. 5–8). In agreeing with Rockmore, Lang maintains that it is necessary to "see a connection in Heidegger between the domains of the political and the philosophical, the public and the private, the professional and the occasional" (p. 5). In this sense Lang's thesis is not altogether novel. What stands out is his clear way of focusing the question for which even Heidegger's detractors do not have a simple answer: How can we continue to grant Heidegger such premier stature in the history of philosophy when his indifference to the plight of humanity appears so obvious? The irony is that "Heidegger attempts to break the very notion of the limits of thinking . . ." but in ignoring the "Jewish question" continues to "settle for limits to his thought" (pp. 100–101).

Yet Heidegger was not the only German intellectual to align with the dark forces of Nazism. What was it about not only Heidegger, but the intellectual life he shared with others, which made the politics of National Socialism attractive and which allowed intolerance toward the Jews to develop on such a broad scale? This is the question which Hans Sluga raises. In *Heidegger's Crisis*, Sluga reconstructs the historical environment which precipitated the rise of National Socialism. He emphasizes less the intricacies of Heidegger's thought and more the unique role which philosophy took in Germany as a catalyst of political action. While Zimmerman and Rockmore show that philosophy does not develop in a political vacuum, Sluga illustrates how thought can transform the fragmented tradition of the German *Volk* and its uncertain future into a vision of a single destiny. Ironically, philosophy assumes such a leadership role as compensation for a floundering economic and political life characterizing Germany

in the 1930's. Given this condition of social instability, the link between a philosophy which proclaims a new destiny and the rhetoric of a totalitarian politics becomes more than accidental. Indeed, the resurgence of philosophy prefigures the brand of Nazi politics to which the Germans ultimately succumbed.

While Heidegger may have embraced Nazi ideology, he nevertheless upheld a Greek view of politics as involving the determination of the polis as a "site" (*topos*). According to Sluga, this sense of the polis formed one important ingredient in an overall Gestalt of politics which took shape in National Socialism. In a setting where institutions are on the decline, a voluntaristic sense of action, an opportunism forged through the will, inevitably prevails. The action must be "timely," but in order not to appear arbitrary it must project as a "common descent" among all of its proponents (p. 19). And because the determination of this ancestry involves both establishing a hierarchy among its members as well as excluding those who do not belong, a process of self-legitimation necessarily occurs. "Politics is thereby always a process of self-legitimation in which particular priorities for action and particular social structures must be justified" (p. 22).

In outlining this Gestalt of the political, Sluga takes an important step in addressing to what extent a thinker's thought arises through a dialogue with the political crises of his or her time. Philosophy cannot then be "reduced" to the political, but rather a philosopher may inculcate within his or her enterprise a *questioning attitude* which speaks to the *possibility* of politics (pp. 245–48). We need to make this distinction in order to show that a philosopher harbors insights into the nature of the polis which may not be translated into any specific political beliefs he or she upholds. For example, Heidegger understood the Greek polis as a site that combines the human concern for the good with an occasion to act, which unfolds within the historical compass of being's manifestation. And while one may try to extract totalitarian elements from Heidegger's vision, it may be possible to develop other inferences about the polity which conflict with the specific ideology of fascism. To preserve the *question of politics* proves to be one of the greatest strengths of Sluga's careful analysis.

#### IV.

There are many different philosophers to whom we might turn to provide insight into the nature of the polis—Plato and Hegel, Mill and Kant, Arendt and Marcuse. But despite Heidegger's Nazi ties, it is not obvious that he qualifies as one of these "political" thinkers. Because fascism is so contrary to the tenets of Western democracy, it is not especially provocative to claim that his ontology uncovers some of the basic components integral to any polis: e.g., freedom, community, and the possibility of law, for most critics construe these

motifs as formal concepts whose meaning can only be derived from the circumstances in which Heidegger first articulated them, his commitment to National Socialism.

Richard Wolin is one such critic we must address before entertaining the hyperbolic prospect of a “Heideggerian politics.” In *The Politics of Being*, Wolin paints a grim picture of what happens when a philosopher breaks with the enlightenment tradition of political checks and balances and seeks to recreate the polis ex nihilo from a single “decision” (*Entscheidung*). The abruptness of Heidegger’s political decision of 1933 has its analogue in his concept of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). While this correlation is among the most obvious, it is perhaps the most problematic. For Heidegger, resolve is a way of bringing oneself in concert with what the situation demands, in order that one can develop those possibilities which speak to the dilemma in question. According to Wolin, however, resolve is of such a singular character as to render indeterminate any prescription of the good within that decision (pp. 35 ff.). The indeterminacy of Heidegger’s concept of authentic selfhood implies that one could exhibit the steadfastness of resolve and yet do terrible things, e.g., support the inhumane ideology of National Socialism. Thus Wolin emphasizes the lack of ethical content in Heidegger’s concept of resolve.

Wolin pinpoints a problem which anyone sympathetic to the prospect of developing a Heideggerian politics must confront. Heidegger believed that ontological concepts must be developed out of the ontic stream of concrete, factic experience. But once having developed concepts on an ontological plane, how can their scope be readjusted to include the diverse variables of ontic concern so that action becomes a locus of truth and the language of thought provides a sanctuary of freedom? In *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, Reiner Schürmann addresses this problem by suggesting that praxis constitutes the domain for explicating the insights of Heidegger’s thought; hence only praxis can illustrate the mode of governance which thought seeks in divesting itself of all rational principles (*arche*) and models of presence. An “anarchic praxis” unfolds at the forefront of a new epochal relation between being and thought, in such a way that thinking must be informed by action and not simply the other way around. In many respects, Schürmann stands alone as a scholar who tackles a tenacious problem and offers steps toward a solution. Anarchic praxis “will be diametrically opposed to the *Führerprinzip*; it would be a type of action irreconcilably alien to all reduction to the uniform, action hostile to the standard” (p. 14). Yet his solution operates on a plane of generality; it holds only if we accept the deconstructive paradox that governance arises from overturning pre-existing models of political rule.

We must recall that Schürmann published his book in French five years before the publication of Farias’ book; and while the former addresses the dangers involved in totalitarianism, he makes neither an encounter with Heidegger’s Nazism nor an apologetic for it primary. As our discussion of the previous

books indicates, the ensuing decade would produce more caustic criticisms of Heidegger's Nazi allegiances than attempts at defending a political philosophy based on his thought. Because in academics every movement pushes to its extreme, it is not surprising that the pendulum would swing in the other direction and a defense of Heidegger would emerge. In *Heidegger, Philosophy, and Nazism* Julian Young counters the criticisms of the scholars mentioned above, as well as those of a wide spectrum of European thinkers from Levinas to Lyotard, Lacoue-Labarthe to Derrida.

Young proceeds like an "analytic" philosopher to provide a point by point refutation of Heidegger's opponents. Against Rockmore and Wolin, Young claims that Heidegger's turn to National Socialism was far from a sudden and momentous decision; instead, Heidegger adopted a reactionary form of politics which had been percolating in Germany for almost two decades (p. 50). Against Hugo Ott, Farias, Rockmore, and Wolin, Young maintains that Heidegger was not antisemitic but rather exhibited concern toward many of his Jewish students (pp. 38–41). Moreover, Heidegger was skeptical of any attempt to apply biological categories such as "blood-line" to designate a people as "superior" or "inferior" (p. 41).

In a way which is couched more in the language of logic than phenomenology, Young claims that Heidegger's critics commit a fallacy in inferring a connection between his thought and Nazism. The fallacy works itself out on two fronts as the claim that either Heidegger's philosophy harbors concepts which "positively implicate" National Socialism or his thought "negatively implicates Nazism by failing to provide grounds for its rejection" (p. 79). On the first front, Young appeals to Heidegger's concept of authentic selfhood as promoting a sense of responsibility which is contrary to the demand toward conformity epitomized in totalitarianism. On the second front, Young argues that Heidegger's concept of solicitude promotes a concern for the other, for his or her own integrity, in a way which condemns the exploitation of people under a fascist regime. Young concludes that *Being and Time* harbors an ethic of respect for persons in a way missed by Heidegger's "'decisionist' critics" (p. 104).

Young makes a case against Heidegger's critics which, if it does not answer all of their objections, at least exposes some of their one-sidedness. Along with Young, Fred Dallmayr crystallizes a perspective that there is "another Heidegger" beyond the Nazi ideologue. According to Dallmayr, Heidegger's example of injustice provides an ironic way of re-examining his texts to discover insights into the nature of justice. By drawing upon Heidegger's eclectic interests in Anaximander and Schelling, Dallmayr suggests that justice can be understood anew as a "juncture" (*Fuge*) or measure which disposes us "to let others be and to attend to them with considerate care" (p. 125). When joined with Young's emphasis on solicitude, Dallmayr's appeal to "letting be" holds great promise as a key for developing our political obligations toward others. But in either case a further exploration of the parameters of human freedom may be

required in order to rectify the omission which Lang identifies, namely, that Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* lacks moral emphasis on “tolerance” (pp. 48–49).

As much as Heidegger’s texts can be directed against him, they can also yield nuances to enhance our reflections on the polis. Yet the fact that Heidegger’s thought can take this novel turn may not be sufficient evidence in its own right to “vindicate” him either for his Nazi allegiance or subsequent silence about it. A still more unorthodox approach must be taken which can transpose Heideggerian motifs within a political context presumably alien to them, e.g., Western democracy, in order to articulate the democratic precepts we uphold. Such an approach harbors a concession which most of Heidegger’s critics have refrained from making, namely, that democracy includes its own presuppositions which, if fully articulated, may exhibit shortcomings in our system of government as we know it. Of all the scholars who appropriate Heidegger’s insights into politics in a *positive* way, Leslie Paul Thiele follows this lead.

In *Timely Meditations*, Thiele raises the question which would reorient philosophy within a practical context, although in a way which can speak to the assumptions of contemporary democracy. If our democratic system is naive about its assumptions, then an ontology must be able to cast light on the operational concepts implemented in our democratic practices. Thus, as Thiele indicates, Heidegger develops an original understanding of freedom as “letting be.” Correlatively, this “disclosive freedom” may evoke other facets of the liberties we assume, including resetting the parameters of free speech which we accept as a constitutional “right” (pp. 81–83). As Thiele emphasizes, the key to developing a democracy lies in safeguarding maximum participation among its members. In this way a community develops. What Heidegger recognizes, however, is that the power which permits political participation, namely, language, simultaneously allows for the cultivation of individuality with a communal setting, that is, the self’s unique way of dwelling with others. Language is not simply an instrument of verbal expression, but calls each of us to submit to it as a place of dwelling. In the proximity of this place we receive the guidance to act as members of a community and thereby engage in dialogue over the most equitable mode of governing. As Arendt suggests, the “word” first inserts us into the space of action in a way which gathers together each of us (as speakers) within the nexus of community (*The Human Condition*, p. 198).

By tracing the synergy between logos and community, language and dwelling, Thiele develops a “postmodern politics.” Yet this perspective remains rather abstract unless it can develop a critical edge to match liberal thinkers’ criticism of Heidegger’s political views. Thiele locates this critical fulcrum in the way that language exhibits the disclosive power of truth, which for Heidegger is synonymous with freedom. In other words, there is a more primordial connection between freedom and speech than appears in how the adjective “free” qualifies the activity of “speech” in a democratic sense. Free speech is not a “right” by which one individual asserts his or her self-interest over against

another person, but rather is the “openness” through which contrary voices can participate in serving the good of the community as a whole. “The justly hal- lowed right to free speech might be grounded not only in the speaker’s preroga- tive to utter opinions and beliefs, but also on the listener’s duty to remain open to, even solicitous of, the ontological difference these opinions and beliefs may harbor” (p. 128). While freedom as “letting be” can admit discord among its participants, it cannot allow speech to become a self-indulgent expression of will which is rooted in concealment rather than unconcealment.

Through his clever extrapolations, Thiele shows how democracy can be predicated upon the spirit of dwelling in Heidegger’s sense. “Democracy is a journey toward freedom that remains ever under way. . . . Disclosive freedom beckons to the democratic challenge” (p. 167). Thiele’s attempt to link Heideg- ger’s thought with democracy—as Charles Sherover does with the help of a Kantian framework—merits serious consideration (Sherover, pp. 5–12, 60–63). Yet, in recalling Sluga’s criticisms, there is a subtle enigma which remains unclarified about the interface between philosophy and politics. While Heideg- ger construes philosophy as the vanguard of politics, the situation is almost the reverse in a democratic setting: the polis sanctions the philosophical enterprise as an enterprise of free exchange. Is there a motif in Heidegger’s thought which could provide the linchpin for such a reversal, and thereby suggest that his philosophy may “implicate” the opposite political stance which his own fascist ideology condemns?

In his 1930 lectures on human freedom, Heidegger argues that his exchange with previous philosophers must take the form of *Auseinandersetzung* (*Vom Wesen*, p. 292). Literally, *Auseinandersetzung* means to “set apart” or “place in opposition.” According to Heidegger, philosophical exchange thrives on such controversy to the extent that the invitation of conflict reveals what is at stake in freedom of speech: namely, inviting a contrary response from the other. The welcoming of contrariness is not arbitrary, but like philosophical dialogue serves a greater master, the process of unconcealment itself. As Heidegger states in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, philosophical inquiry is a “work of human freedom” (p. 16). But freedom takes shapes within a forum of exchange which safeguards the voice of the other. While philosophical inquiry depends upon *Auseinandersetzung*, the voice of the other can resound only because there is a forum reserved for it within the polis. Thus Heidegger’s philosophy comes in conflict with itself at the point where its commitment to free speech yields to an ideology supporting censorship. (For a discussion of how prominent censorship was in Nazi Germany and its connection with the persecution of the Jews, see Sluga, pp. 86–100.)

Since by its nature the philosophical enterprise is iconoclastic, controversial, and even subversive, it thrives within a polis where freedom of speech assumes the greatest importance. Although in his rectoral address Heidegger discounts “academic freedom” as weak spirited, philosophy can flourish only when it is

reawakened to the challenge of freedom. Ironically, philosophy responds to this challenge not by accepting the elitism of its task, but, on the contrary, by re-locating itself within the polis and the tradition as a whole, in which the facticity of each citizen is rooted. As Heidegger's words so eloquently suggest, philosophy can then flourish through the "tradition [which] is a delivering into the freedom of discussion (*die Freiheit des Gespräches*) with what has been" (*What Is Philosophy?*, pp. 33, 35).

In this spirit, a Heideggerian politics would then become possible at the time when such freedom could be translated into a "multivocality" which facilitates dialogue among diverse traditions. Perhaps this time will arrive sooner than we think.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: World Publishing, 1962.
- Bailiff, John. "Truth and Power: Martin Heidegger, 'The Essence of Truth,' and the Self-Assertion of the German University." *Man and World* 29 (1987): 327–34.
- Blitz, Mark. *Heidegger's Being and Time and the Possibility of Political Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*. Trans. Peter Collier. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Brainard, Marcus (ed.). "Heidegger and the Political." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14, no. 2, 15, no. 1 (1991): 1–611.
- Dallmayr, Fred. *The Other Heidegger*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- David, Pascal. "A Philosophical Confrontation with the Political." *Heidegger Studies* 11 (1995): 191–204.
- de Beistegui, Miguel. *Heidegger and the Political Dystopias*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Farias, Victor. *Heidegger and Nazism*. Trans. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.
- Fritsche, Johannes. "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger." *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 18, no. 1 (1995): 111–86.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Die Grundprobleme de Phänomenologie*, GA 24. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975.
- . *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, GA 31. 1982.
- . *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958.
- Kettering, Emil, and Gunther Neske. *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*. Trans. Lisa Harries. New York: Paragon Press, 1990.
- Kovacs, George. "On Heidegger's Silence." *Heidegger Studies* 5 (1989): 138–48.
- Löwith, Karl. *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*. Ed. Richard Wolin. Trans. Gary Steiner. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Liotard, Jean-Francois. *Heidegger and the "jews."* Trans. Andre Michel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., 1990.

- Milchman, Alan, and Alan Rosenberg, eds. *Heidegger and the Holocaust*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1996.
- . “Resoluteness and Ambiguity.” *Philosophical Forum* 25, no. 1 (1993): 72–97.
- Olson, Alan M., ed. *Heidegger and Jaspers*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.
- Ott, Hugo. “Heidegger’s Catholic Origins.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (1995): 137–53.
- . *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*. Trans. A. Blunden. London: Fontana, 1994.
- Petzet, Heinrich Wiegand. *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger*. Intro. by Parvis Emad. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Richardson, William J. “Heidegger’s Truth and Politics.” In A. Dallery, C. Scott, and H. Roberts, eds. *Ethics and Danger*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). Pp. 11–24.
- Safranski, Rüdiger. *Martin Heidegger Between Good and Evil*. Trans. Ewald Osers. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Schalow, Frank, “Heidegger on Free Speech.” *Philosophical Writings*, 1, no. 4 (1997): 27–38.
- . “A Question Concerning Heidegger’s Involvement in National Socialism.” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 24, no. 2 (1993): 121–39.
- . “Revisiting Anarchy: Toward a Critical Appropriation of Schürmann’s Thought.” *Philosophy Today* 41, no. 4 (1997): 554–62.
- Schürmann, Reiner. *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. Trans. Christine-Marie Gros. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Scott, Charles. *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Sheehan, Thomas. “A Normal Nazi.” *The New York Review of Books*. January 14, 1993, pp. 30–35.
- Sherover, Charles E. *Time, Freedom, and the Common Good*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1989.
- Van Buren, John. *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Wolin, Richard. *The Politics of Being*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Zimmerman, Michael E. “The Thorn in Heidegger’s Side: The Question of National Socialism.” *Philosophical Forum* 20, no. 4 (1989): 340–55.