

## Beyond Struggle and Power: Heidegger's Secret Resistance

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*The Germans have been torn away from their essential ground—which they have never yet found, much less grounded—and are staggering in the alienation from their essence that was thrust upon them by modernity.*

Überlegungen IX

We no longer need to speculate about Heidegger's political ideas during the National Socialist regime, or about the depth and nature of his commitment. Twenty years ago, only some speeches and documents from the rectorate of 1933-1934 and a few, cryptic later statements were publicly available; now, thanks to the ongoing publication of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, we have thousands of pages of lecture courses and private writings that give us a clear picture of his positions.

There is both bad news and good news. On the negative side, for example, the lecture course of winter semester 1933-1934 shows Rector Heidegger at his most chilling: interpreting Heraclitean *polemos* as *Kampf* in a genuinely Hitlerian spirit, he calls for the relentless pursuit of the (unnamed)

internal enemies of the *Volk*—to the point of “complete annihilation,” *völlige Vernichtung* (GA 36/37, 91; see Addendum 1). Perhaps Heidegger could not have known that within a decade, the “dark future” of Germany (GA 36/37, 3) would assume the particular merciless shape of the death camps or *Vernichtungslager*—but it is disingenuous or self-deceptive of him to insist defensively, in a postwar letter to Marcuse, that “the bloody terror of the Nazis in point of fact had been kept a secret from the German people” (GA 16, 431 = Wolin 1993, 163). Terror and annihilation were essential elements of National Socialism; Heidegger knew this, and in the first year of the regime he celebrated it. When Heidegger defines evil on the day after Germany’s surrender as a hidden, self-disguising “uprising” (GA 77, 208), he is evading or repressing the fact that he saw the evil at the time of the uprising of 1933 and explicitly endorsed it. But perhaps these very acts of evasion and repression confirm Heidegger’s definition: dishonesty is part of the concealment that belongs to evil.

And the good news? The private writings now published in the third division of the *Gesamtausgabe* prove that by the outbreak of the war, Heidegger had developed a point of view that was strongly opposed to official National Socialism. His postwar claim that he developed a “spiritual resistance” to Nazism, particularly in his Nietzsche lectures (GA 16, 402), has often been received with skepticism, but we now have good reason to believe it—or at least, we know that in his secret writings, Heidegger applied his interpretation of Nietzsche to a thorough denunciation of totalitarian ideology.

What is more, Heidegger’s intellectual adherence to the party was *never* total; if his political superiors accused him of a “private National Socialism” during his term as rector (GA 16, 381 = Heidegger 1990, 23), the accusation was correct. Already in January 1934 Heidegger speaks in the harshest of terms about writer Erwin Kolbenheyer’s biological interpretation of National Socialism, which was entirely orthodox and was to serve Kolbenheyer well as he pursued his career as an acclaimed ideologue for the duration of the regime. Against Kolbenheyer, Heidegger defends an interpretation of the revolution and its meaning that is not racial but historical (GA 36/37, 209–13; on Kolbenheyer, cf. GA 39, 27).

The most candid and significant statements of Heidegger’s opposition to Nazi ideas can be found in the texts that he composed in private, beginning with the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–1938). These writings continue to rank history over biology—a constant theme in Heidegger’s thought—but also turn away from other typically National Socialist motifs, in

particular struggle and power, and move in the direction of play and letting-be (*Gelassenheit*). There should be no doubt that Heidegger emphatically rejects Nazi ideology in these texts; but does he reach an insightful and appropriate judgment about the politics of the times? We will characterize the general evolution of Heidegger's thoughts and attitudes in the fifteen years following *Being and Time* before we look more closely at the private writings of 1936-1941, and then consider how we should judge what we may call Heidegger's secret resistance to Nazism.

#### HISTORICITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Heidegger told Karl Löwith in 1936 that his concept of "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*) was the root of his political "engagement" (*Einsatz*) (Wolin 1993, 142). (After the war, Heidegger was to write a very positive recommendation for Löwith—with the significant qualification that "perhaps historical thinking in general" was "alien to him": GA 16, 395.) But why would an insight into historicity bring Heidegger into the vicinity of Hitler? Section 74 of *Being and Time*, on authentic historicity, speaks in brief, abstract, but emphatic terms of the need for a generation to discover the destiny of the *Volk* through "communication" and "struggle" (*Kampf*) (Heidegger 1984 = SZ 384; the German pagination is also provided in both available English translations of *Being and Time*). Presumably, authentic communication and struggle could not take the form of everyday idle talk (SZ §35), but would have to be revolutionary acts that would shatter the complacency of the "they"-self (SZ 129). We can speculate that such acts would not be encouraged by liberalism: elections and guarantees of personal liberties would do nothing more than reproduce the chatter of the day and reinforce the illusion that a people is nothing but a sum of individuals, whereas in fact being-there (*Dasein*) is essentially being-with (SZ §26). When we combine *Being and Time*'s concept of historicity with its talk of choosing a hero (SZ 385) and "leaping ahead" (SZ 122), it is not difficult to read it as National Socialism *in potentia* (Fritsche 1999; Faye 2005, 29–33).

However, the danger in reading these passages in retrospect is that such an interpretation reduces the possibilities of Heidegger's text to their "fate"—the actuality in which they were realized six years later. According to Heidegger's own understanding of possibility, fate, and destiny, this is a mistake. Fate is neither inevitability nor actuality, but "a possibility that *Dasein* has inherited yet has chosen" (SZ 384). A possibility is recognized as such only when it is maintained *as possibility*; it cannot be reduced to the particular acts

or happenings in which it becomes manifest (SZ 145, 262). *Being and Time* is a book that opens possibilities; it does not call for a particular choice or act, but encourages its readers to ask how their community can be defined.

We cannot say, then, that Heidegger's concept of historicity is essentially fascist, but we can certainly say that it played a key role in the transition from *Being and Time* to the later work—the move “from the understanding of being to the happening of being” (GA 40, 219). Heidegger comes to see his analysis of Dasein as too rigid, his account of time as the transcendental horizon of being as too ahistorical (Kisiel 2005). “The Dasein in man” must be explored and chosen as a historical possibility, and our very way of thinking of this possibility must become more historical. This means that philosophy cannot stand above historical happening and describe it in a neutral language, but must understand itself as participating in a historical language and acting within the very history that it is trying to understand.

This point applies not only to philosophy in the abstract, but to the philosopher himself. We can feel Heidegger's restlessness, mingled with some apprehension, when he says in his lectures on Plato's allegory of the cave in 1931-1932: “The philosopher must remain solitary, because he *is* so in his essence. . . . Isolation is nothing that one would wish for. For this very reason, he must always be there in decisive moments and not give way. He will not superficially misunderstand solitude as drawing back and letting things take their course” (GA 34, 86). (When Heidegger revisits this theme during his political engagement as rector, he expresses the precariousness of his situation: “Speaking out from solitude, [the philosopher] speaks at the decisive moment. He speaks with the danger that what he says may suddenly turn into its opposite”—GA 36/37, 183.)

In 1933, Heidegger saw his opportunity to intervene in the cave—on thoroughly anti-Platonist grounds. The movement that had come to power was appropriately historical, or so he thought: it was based not on abstract, universal principles, but on the particular thrownness of this people (Heidegger/Blochmann 1989, 60). It did not call for debate and calculation, but for resolute struggle. For a thinker who viewed primal truth as surging from a moment of disclosive resoluteness, an intersection of possibility and heritage that revealed the present as a “situation” (SZ 299), the opportunity was nearly irresistible. Only by participating in this moment of crisis, when the German destiny was being decided, could he fulfill his dedication to truth. Philosophy itself required an “engagement”: “seizing a necessary possibility, exposing one-

self to the *necessity* of fate, complying with the freedom of a resolute opening” (GA 36/37, 78).

#### “THE INNER TRUTH AND GREATNESS”

After his acts as rector failed to mesh with political and academic realities, Heidegger became increasingly uneasy with the disjunction between his “private National Socialism” and the ruling party ideology. If he was to carry out a true engagement, it would have to be less direct and more philosophical, more questioning and less obedient to authority.

As we have seen, a key point of difference between Heidegger and mainstream National Socialists concerned the racial interpretation of the *Volk*. Heidegger had adopted some of the *Blut und Boden* language of the party, claiming, for instance, that it was urgent “to draw out the grounding possibilities of the proto-Germanic ethnic essence [*des urgermanischen Stammeswesens*] and bring them to mastery” (GA 36/37, 89). But he increasingly insists on the ambiguity of the very concept of race (GA 38, 65) and on the need to interpret blood and soil not in terms of biology, but in terms of historical *Dasein*. Thus, when he develops the concept of “earth” in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he does not mean a given, pre-cultural nature that determines an essence, but a dimension of *Dasein* that can be revealed only in “strife” with culture or the “world.” The earth can provide meaning and direction only if the world struggles to reveal it, fails, and learns from this failure (Heidegger 2002, 26–27). The earth is not a fixed ground that could determine a world without such creative struggle. To interpret the earth in racial terms is not to struggle with it, but to subject it unthinkingly to a world—in fact, the nineteenth-century English world of liberalism and Darwinism (GA 36/37, 210).

We can go farther: in the absence of critical reflection, neither an individual nor a people can truly *be*. To be someone requires asking who one is. This is the case because the being of *Dasein* is “existence”—that is, a way of being for which this being itself is an issue (SZ 12, 42). As Heidegger had said as early as 1924, if the being of *Dasein* has this reflexive, self-problematizing character, “Then *Dasein* would mean being questionable” (GA 64, 125).

In 1924 the ultimate question was, “Am I my time?” (GA 64, 125). But in the 1930s, the being of the people as a whole needs to be put into question. Heidegger asks with increasing urgency, “Who are we?” Unless the people struggles with this question, it cannot genuinely be itself. “In the ques-

tion of ‘who we are’ there lies and stands the question of *whether* we are” (GA 65, 51). If the Germans, then, suffer from “alienation from their essence” (Heidegger n.d., IX, epigram), this is not to say that they have been estranged from a predefined *eidōs*. They must learn to embrace the very question of who they are as part of their being. The German mission is not to resurrect or actualize an ideal essence, but to help the people’s destiny be born, in a process that combines creation and discovery.

The imperative to question one’s identity implies that the revolution must maintain its revolutionary spirit, rather than settling into a new everydayness. The revolutionary is the true relation to the inception and thus to history (GA 45, 37). The Germans must feel the urgency that led to the revolution in the first place. But in Heidegger’s judgment, Germany has failed to hold itself within revolutionary urgency. Since 1929-1930, he had been diagnosing his times as suffering from the emergency of the lack of urgency (GA 29/30, 239–49). The new regime is not overcoming this tranquilized self-satisfaction; it is not revolutionary enough. For example, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) repeatedly criticizes current measures as half-hearted or superficial (Heidegger 2000, 40, 50, 54, 56). The “inner truth and greatness” of the National Socialist movement has not yet awakened, and it is certainly not captured by officially sanctioned Nazi “philosophy” (Heidegger 2000, 213).

In order, then, to decide what National Socialism can be—to create and discover its destiny—Heidegger pursues his own confrontation with the philosophical ideas that the political movement echoes or claims to echo. His first lecture course on Nietzsche (GA 43, composed 1936-1937) focuses on the question of art—the question that he wished in 1934 that Kolbenheyer had addressed, instead of resorting to biologism (GA 36/37, 212). Heidegger’s progressively more negative readings of Nietzsche parallel his disillusionment with the quasi-Nietzschean Nazi regime. The most promising contemporary Nietzscheanism, that of Ernst Jünger, proves to be inadequate and one-sided (GA 90, e.g. 213), but even a broader and deeper interpretation of Nietzsche is forced to conclude that his thought is the end of metaphysics, not a new inception (e.g. GA 87, 155). In the emergency of their alienation from their essence, the Germans must turn not to Nietzsche but to Hölderlin, who suggests poetic dwelling and not the exercise of power as the way to come to terms with the supreme difficulty: “Nothing is harder for us to learn than the free use of the national” (GA 39, 294).

## FROM POWER TO LETTING-BE

Heidegger's confrontation with the Nietzschean "will to power" is part of his own journey from a fascination with power in the earlier 1930s to a renunciation of both will and power in the 1940s.

Heidegger never had a simplistic understanding of power in terms of activity and passivity. For example, Dasein's use and understanding of ready-to-hand equipment is a "letting-be-involved" (SZ 84–85); this "letting" is not inaction, of course, but neither is it the imposition of human plans and efforts on a valueless material world; in our activities, each of us encounters the teleology of everyday things as a given. "On the Essence of Truth" extends this notion into a general "letting-be" (*Sein-lassen*). To let be is not to detach oneself, but "to engage oneself with the open region and its openness" (Heidegger 1998, 144). In the late 1930s, Heidegger still insists that letting-be requires the highest form of "insistence" or "steadfastness" (*Inständigkeit*: GA 66, 103). Letting-be is not passive: it activates us, as it were, by allowing us to encounter beings—by connecting us to what *is*.

Because of this enduring complexity of Heidegger's thought, we cannot characterize him as moving from a simple "activism" to a simple "quietism." However, it is clear that his enthusiasm for action and power reaches a peak around the time of his own political activity. "Power" (*Macht*) is a relatively insignificant term in *Sein und Zeit* (although it appears at the climax of the text: SZ 384–85). But during his rectorate, Heidegger celebrates *polemos* as "confrontation with and among the *primal powers*" (GA 36/37, 92). By 1935, he is experimenting with a family of words stemming from *Macht* and *Walten* in order to express the relation between being and Dasein. Faced with the overwhelming sway of being, man must use violence and unfold his own powers in the face of the overpowering (Heidegger 2000, 160, 172–74). Although this is an interpretation of *physis* in the tragic age of the Greeks, and not directly of Heidegger's own understanding of being, he seems to embrace the language of power when he says that we need to recapture the archaic sense of *physis* in the face of its "disempowerment" (e.g. GA 65, 126).

But it is not long before he is criticizing the expression "the disempowerment of *physis*": it lends itself too easily to a Nietzschean reading, which itself is possible only because originary *physis* has been lost (see Addendum 2). We must read this remark as part of Heidegger's turn against the dominant National Socialist ideology, a turn that often takes the form of anti-Nietzscheanism and anti-Romanism. Nietzsche writes in a late text that he

admires the Romans more than the Greeks. For him, the hardness of Roman style reflects the hardness of the Roman worldview, which is matched among the Greeks only by the sophistic and Thucydidean interpretation of human action in terms of power struggles (*Twilight of the Idols*, “What I Owe to the Ancients”). But by the late thirties Heidegger has thoroughly rejected this standpoint, and he accordingly condemns Nietzsche’s thought for being “un-Greek” at every crucial point—in its interpretations of being, the good, truth, and humanity. In short, his thought is “*the philosophy of the antiphilosophical Romans*” (GA 67, 102). We need hardly point out that the Nazis borrowed from Italian Fascism and the Roman Empire in their ideology, organization and imagery (consider Speer’s plans for Berlin). When Heidegger writes in 1939, then, that with the Roman translation of *energeia* as *actus*, “with one blow the Greek world was toppled,” he is implicitly criticizing the Nazi worldview (Heidegger 1998, 218). *Energeia* is originally the same as *physis*: the emergence of what is into enduring self-display, the coming-into-being of beings as such. But *actus* misinterprets this coming-into-being in terms of *agere*, acting and leading. This understanding sinks to the level of beings and their effective behavior; at its crudest, it reduces this behavior to the mechanistic impact of an active thing on a passive thing. Being as emergence into unconcealment has been forgotten (GA 66, 187, 195–96, 289).

Heidegger makes the political dimension of these thoughts very clear in the *Überlegungen* (late 1930s?):

What must in the future be called by the name *brutalitas* (not accidentally Roman), the unconditionality of the machination [*Machenschaft*] of being...is the mirror image of the essence of man, of the *animalitas* of the *animal rationale*, and thus also and precisely of *rationalitas*. That man had to be defined as *animal rationale* and that the *brutalitas* of beings should one day drive on to its fulfillment—these have the same, single ground in the metaphysics of being. ...[The many] need the romanticism of the “Reich,” of the people [*Volkstum*], of “soil” and “camaraderie”... The *brutalitas* of being has as a consequence, and not as a ground, that man himself, as a being, makes himself expressly and thoroughly into a *factum brutum* and grounds his animality with the theory of race...[a theory that] apparently affirms everything “spiritual,” and even first makes it “effective,” yet at the same time denies it as deeply as possible in a denial that drives toward the most radical nihilism; for everything is “in the end,” that is, already at the start, an “expression” of the race...the predator is the original form of the “hero”... But the predator equipped with the means of the



highest technology fulfills the actualization of the *brutalitas* of being. ... (Heidegger n.d., XI, §42)

While in the *Contributions* Heidegger is still speaking of the “empowerment” of time-space and be-ing (*Seyn*) (GA 65, 386, 430), in *Besinnung* he claims that be-ing lies beyond both power and powerlessness (GA 66, 83, 187–88). Although he remains interested in the possibility of a kind of philosophical mastery—a “masterful thinking” that participates in an inception—he insists that “the violence that is set loose in the essence of machination always underlies power alone, and never grounds mastery” (GA 66, 16).

Grounding as active founding is gradually deemphasized in Heidegger's thought. In the *Contributions*, “the event of appropriation” (*das Ereignis*) means *das Ereignis der Dagründung* (GA 65, 183, 247); this “event of the grounding of the there” requires us to take up the truth of be-ing and to build Dasein on this ground (GA 65, 307). Our role is to receive the impetus of be-ing and extend it creatively into a world. But Heidegger comes to see this passion for founding as misguided. By the end of the war, he is recommending “pure waiting” (GA 77, 217).

Similarly, he moves away from the concept of will. In the *Contributions* he could endorse a “will to ground and build” (GA 65, 98) and even a “will to the event of appropriation” (GA 65, 58). But it is not long before “willing’ (?) that be-ing essentially happen” no longer sounds appropriate (GA 69, 27; Heidegger's question mark). Heidegger proposes that the essence of modern metaphysics could be understood by completing the sentence, “If being is ‘will’...” (GA 67, 159). Against this tradition, by the mid-forties he turns to *Gelassenheit*. This is not a human act or choice at all, but the fact that humanity primordially belongs to, or is let into, the region of truth. “Man belongs to the region insofar as he is inceptively ad-apted [*ge-eignet*] to it, and indeed by the region itself” (GA 77, 122).

#### FROM STRUGGLE TO PLAY

The appearance of the word *Kampf* in §74 of *Being and Time* is an omen of a strong polemical motif that develops in Heidegger's thought (Fried 2000). This theme reaches its height in conjunction with the theme of power, but it continues to exert some fascination for Heidegger for some time after his turn away from power. One of its most important developments is the struggle between earth and world in “The Origin of the Work of Art”: unconcealment takes place in the artwork as strife between the disclosive power of the

world and its self-concealing ground in the earth. In the *Contributions*, this strife is fundamental to all truth, and being itself is engaged in strife (GA 65, 269, 322, 349, 484, 497). As he develops these thoughts, Heidegger comes to understand struggle and strife in a sense that is increasingly distant from military reality. Finally, he comes to rely on “play” as a concept that is more suited to suggest the dynamic of being.

We could trace some of these developments in terms of Heidegger’s readings of Heraclitus’ famous fragment 53: “*Polemos* is both the father of all and the king of all; some it has shown as gods, others as men; some it has made slaves and others free.” Heidegger is particularly interested in this fragment at the height of his political engagement, and this is also when he takes *polemos* as “struggle” in a concrete, political sense (GA 36/37, 91). (References to Heraclitean *polemos* were not uncommon among thinkers aligned with National Socialism. Alfred Baeumler, for instance, interprets Nietzsche in “Heraclitean” terms: Baeumler 1937, 59–79. Heidegger’s letter to Carl Schmitt from August 1933 praises Schmitt’s analysis of the *polemos* fragment: GA 16, 156.) But by 1935 Heidegger is translating *polemos* as *Auseinandersetzung* instead of *Kampf*, and emphasizing that it is not a human war (Heidegger 2000, 65, 120, 153). (In Winter Semester 1933-1934 Heidegger already uses the word *Auseinandersetzung* in addition to *Kampf*, and claims that *polemos* is not a “military” question; but he interprets it as “standing against the enemy...of the people” in a highly political sense—GA 36/37, 90–91. This sense has been diluted considerably by 1935; in 1945 Heidegger claims that he always distinguished *polemos* from ordinary war—GA 16, 379–80 = Heidegger 1990, 21.) By the time that war in the literal sense is raging, Heidegger has deemphasized *polemos* to the point that the two great lecture courses on Heraclitus (GA 55) make no mention of fragment 53.

Play—another Heraclitean motif—becomes more important as struggle declines. By the late thirties, Heidegger is writing that philosophy “puts the truth of be-ing into play in the time-play-space of be-ing” (GA 66, 41). He envisions a “play in which, in the future, one must play with the ‘engagement’ of be-ing itself” (GA 66, 45). This development culminates in his postwar descriptions of “the fourfold.” Before the war, Heidegger described the relation of earth, world, gods, and man as the “struggle of struggles” (GA 66, 15). By 1949, the relation of earth, sky, gods, and mortals has become a “mirror-play” (GA 79, 18–21). The polemical tension has largely been superseded by a harmonious cooperation—although it has not disappeared (the 1955 open letter to Jünger, “On the Question of Being,” refers to fragment 53 in con-

nection with Nietzsche and the *Aus-einander-setzung* of being as the four-fold—Heidegger 1998, 321).

CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY:

THE QUESTION OF GROUNDING THE PEOPLE

We are now ready to take a closer look at the private writings of 1936-1941, beginning with the *Contributions* (1936-1938). This is the text in which Heidegger works most intensely on developing “be-ing-historical thinking”—a way of thinking that enters into and belongs to the event of appropriation as the essential happening of be-ing, initiating the “other inception” of Western thought (57–58, 64; references in this section are all to GA 65). Attuned by “restraint” (§13), the new thinking is “telling silence” (78–80), a way of speaking that never pretends to represent or reproduce the intrinsically self-concealing happening of be-ing, which “can never be said conclusively” (460).

The question in the *Contributions* is “How does be-ing essentially happen?” (78). In other words, how does what there is, as such, come into question for us? How is the questionable gift of meaning and truth given to us? Heidegger’s response is: “be-ing essentially happens as the event of appropriation” (*das Seyn west als das Ereignis*: 30, 256, 260; on the different senses of *Ereignis* in different periods of Heidegger’s thought, see Polt 2005). Appropriation is “the appropriating event of the grounding of the there” (247) and “the happening of owndom” (320). In this happening, it becomes possible for man to enter the condition of Dasein and become a self (245). Thus, the essential happening of be-ing is a requirement for Dasein. The reverse is also true: be-ing can essentially happen only if the there and Dasein are grounded (407). Then the truth of be-ing can be “sheltered” in beings (389–92).

None of this should be understood as an eternal, “always already” given set of relationships; appropriation is a historical possibility that must be experienced as an “emergency” (46; for an extended interpretation of the *Contributions* in these terms, see Polt 2006, especially chapter 1). In an age that is indifferent to emergency, the greatest danger is that be-ing will fail to happen. And in fact, perhaps be-ing has never happened—for man has never yet entered genuinely historical Dasein (492, 454). Heidegger looks to the future as he tries to think of “the passing of the last god” (406) that would take place in the newly grounded “there.”

As the event of the grounding of the there, or the founding of the “site of the moment” (323), be-ing necessarily has a political dimension,

and the *Contributions* are a political text, in a broad sense. Heidegger apparently hopes to create the philosophy of the German people—and make the Germans the people of his philosophy (43). But despite a certain craving for a moment of revolutionary urgency, the text is far from a manifesto; it is hesitant, vague, and focused on the essence of the people rather than on any concrete policies. Heidegger has come to realize that there is a gap between politics and philosophy. Because philosophy “*opens up* experience” rather than directing and constraining it, philosophy can never “*immediately* ground history” (37).

Philosophy should, however, develop a critique of the present; after all, the need for a new grounding implies that contemporary humanity is inadequate and groundless. “The Echo,” the most polemical part of the *Contributions*, thus describes modernity as “the age of complete lack of questioning and bewitchment” (124), an age of “nihilism” (138–41). Modernity is dominated by “machination” (*Machenschaft*)—“an interpretation of beings in which the makeability of beings comes to the forefront, in such a way that beingness defines itself precisely in permanence and presence” (126). Machination is accompanied by a craving for “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*)—subjective stimulation, information, and entertainment (109, 129). The manipulation of the ‘external’ world thus corresponds to a manipulation of the ‘internal’ world. In both cases, we simply control and toy with our representations, instead of opening ourselves to an event greater than we are that calls for genuine decision. A related phenomenon, “the gigantic” (§§70–71), characterizes the contemporary triumph of quantity as quality. To be now means to be measurable, and there are no limits to measuring. Nothing is seen as impossible or unreachable any more, so the possibility of “the in-exhaustible unexhausted” (137) is eliminated (Elden 2006, chapter 3).

Mass rallies and spectacles, such as the 1936 Berlin Olympics, would be convenient examples of machination, lived experience, and the gigantic. However, Heidegger intends to describe a pervasive understanding of being that is not limited to massive objects and displays. Even the most private and inconspicuous experiences have been infected by modernity’s reductive and manipulative relation to beings. We all live in an age of decline.

But this decline, as understood by the few “future ones,” is not simply a disaster but also an opportunity to undergo a destiny; these few are ready to become “those who go under” in order to gain true selfhood (7, 397). Like Nietzsche’s hero in the opening of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, they are willing

to go down so that they may be transformed and reach a new inception. The future ones include thinkers, poets, and men of action—those who ground Dasein by deed and sacrifice (96). Different domains require different ways of grounding, but all the future ones will be united by their awareness of the final god (395) and their masterful knowing (396).

Heidegger quickly deflects the notions of a master race and political control: masterful knowing cannot be applied to current business (396). Mastery is distinct from power and violence—although not incompatible with them (282). Mastery is a free creativity whose “bequest” opens new possibilities (281). To be futural is to be masterful—not by forcing beings to obey one’s will, but by participating in a new event of be-ing.

What about the many who cannot yet take part in such an event? They will be needed—for ultimately only a people can ground the truth of be-ing (97). Conversely, unless the people grounds this truth, it is not yet a true people—so its pioneers, the future ones, must often seem to be its enemies (398). Yet these future ones, not the man on the street, are the genuine voice of the people (319); only they can set the people “free for its law that is to be brought forth in struggle” (43).

The question of what it means to be a people is essential (42), but Heidegger addresses it only tentatively, and for the most part negatively. He insists above all that the people’s highest goal is not to maintain itself as one entity among others, but to watch over the truth of be-ing (99, 321). The people cannot be an end in itself (98–99, 139, 319, 398). Selfhood, for a people as for an individual, does not mean remaining selfsame, but experiencing one’s own being—and thus being as such—as a question. We must ask who we are in order to be who we are (51). Because we fail to put ourselves in question, we take ourselves as examples of a fixed human essence, rather than entering a unique historical moment. Participation in history is then reduced to “presence [*Vorkommen*] within a belonging-together that has come to be” (61).

A deeper belonging could be prepared only through a happening that would bind together the few and the many—“an originary gathering” (97). As for how such a gathering might take place, Heidegger is nearly silent. He no longer has faith that political measures can bring it about—although he does not rule out the possibility (98). The rebirth of the people is more likely to happen through a religious awakening: the people must seek its own god, and the future ones will lead this search (398).

Heidegger's conception of the people as ineluctably *questionable* separates him from official National Socialist ideology. As always, he insists that race and the body are not absolutes. They enter history only as part of the earth: when the earth conflicts with the world, a people can come to belong to its god (399)—but it is grotesque to try to ground history on blood and race (493). Physical traits do not found a people. They are part of the given into which a people is thrown, but the people's leaders must find ways to project possibilities on the basis of this thrownness, drawing the people beyond collective navel-gazing and setting it back into beings (398). The leitmotif of Heidegger's critique of Nazism, then, is that it turns the people into a fixed, self-centered subject, instead of recognizing its potential as Dasein. A "total" worldview typically overlooks its own concealed ground "(e.g. [the] essence of the people)" (40). The Nazis reduce the people to "the communal, the racial, the lower and underlying, the national, the enduring" (117). If a *völkisch* principle is ever to play a role in German destiny, it will have to be handled by those who have reached the "highest rank of be-ing" (42; cf. 24, 319, 479; see Addendum 3).

This is not to say that Heidegger feels any nostalgia for the Weimar Republic. Instead, he groups together all the political ideologies of his time, claiming they all posit man "as what one already knows in its essence" (25). For example, the "innermost essence of 'liberalism'" is self-certainty, presumably because the liberal insistence on individual rights presupposes a settled conviction about what it means to be an individual subject (53, cf. 319). When Nazism exalts the body over the mind and soul it merely becomes "biological liberalism" (53), since it still presupposes that it knows what it means to have a soul, a mind, and a body (Polt 1997). By the time he finishes the *Contributions* in 1938, Heidegger has decided that the ideologies that are about to clash in the looming war are all metaphysically the same.

AFTER THE *CONTRIBUTIONS*:  
CRITIQUE OF THE METAPHYSICS OF POWER

The *Contributions* are followed by a series of other private writings, including *Besinnung* (GA 66, 1938–1939, translated under the title *Mindfulness*); "Die Überwindung der Metaphysik" (1938–1939), included in *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (GA 67); *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (GA 69, 1938–1940); *Über den Anfang* (GA 70, 1941); and a set of notebooks titled *Überlegungen* (scheduled to be published as GA 94–96). These writings go farther along the path begun in the *Contributions*, but place a new emphasis on

the critique of power and make more explicitly political observations—as one might expect from texts written around the outset of the Second World War. The concept of *Ereignis* is somewhat stabilized and formalized, as *Besinnung* develops a thought that was briefly introduced in the *Contributions* (GA 65, 310): the event of appropriation is a “crossing” in which “the encounter of the god and man crosses the *strife* of earth and world.” Heidegger calls this crossing the “out-come” (*Aus-trag*)—an event of clearing in which god, man, earth, and world *come out*, or are drawn out, from concealment *into* the truth of be-ing (GA 66, 84).

Heidegger still employs the word *Kampf*: “*be-ing now demands that its ownmost essence be struggled forth*” (GA 66, 85), and we need a “*struggle for a passing of the god*” (GA 69, 219). As we have seen, unlike the rather idyllic and pastoral “fourfold” of Heidegger’s postwar writings, the out-come is “the struggle of struggles” (GA 66, 15). However, Heidegger distinguishes this “struggle” from modern war, which is nothing but “domination through technical power” (GA 69, 65). He has also moved away from Heraclitus as he searches for a new inception: appropriation and out-come are not *polemos* (GA 67, 36, 77). There may be a “struggle” between the first and other inception (GA 67, 36), or “a decision between be-ing and ‘beings,’” but all this is “what is originally wholly other than *polemos*” (*Überlegungen IX*, §9). Heidegger even begins to suspect that the very concept of struggle is too indebted to the concept of power, as we can see in his comment that there can be no genuine struggle against power—that would just reproduce the machinational essence of power (GA 69, 69).

Heidegger now develops an extensive interpretation of this essence and its implications (for a clear summary, see especially GA 69, §57). Power has become the contemporary meaning of being: beings are now essentially manifestations of power and occasions for the use of power (Dallmayr 2001). Power seeks to overpower itself, overcoming its current level and increasing without limit as it “mobilizes” everything, subjecting all beings to it (GA 66, 62–63, 176; this interpretation of power stems from Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche’s will to power—see “Nietzsche’s Metaphysics,” in Heidegger 1987, 195–96). This is the metaphysical root of contemporary phenomena such as “the ‘total’...the ‘imperial’...the ‘planetary’” (GA 66, 18).

Heidegger expands the *Contributions*’ concept of machination and uses it to indicate “the makeability of beings, that makes and makes up everything” (GA 66, 16)—that is, the fact that beings appear as manipulable

and producible objects. Machination empowers overpowering as the essence of power.

The drive for overpowering creates oppression and devastation (GA 66, 20). Heidegger gives devastation a new meaning: it is not the destruction of objects, but the undermining of the possibility of decision: “beings no longer come into the decision of being” (GA 69, 48). We might hear an echo here of Kierkegaard’s critique of the present age: essential relationships have been reduced to “a reflective tension which leaves everything standing but makes the whole of life ambiguous: so that everything continues to exist factually whilst by a dialectical deceit, *privatissime*, it supplies a secret interpretation—that it does not exist” (Kierkegaard 1962, 42–43).

Power thus destroys everything inceptive and all worth (GA 69, 74). It creates a “total organization” without true “commitment” (GA 69, 83). Under the sway of this organization, all beings and acts are viewed as subject to calculation and planning. However, the plans bring themselves into a wasteland that they cannot control, and necessarily run into the incalculable and unforeseeable (GA 69, 84).

Power manifests itself as both “planetarism” and “idiotism,” where the first is the tendency to extend the rule of power over the entire Earth, while the second is a self-centered subjectivism that is turned in upon what is peculiar to it (*idion*) yet views all individuals through the same lens of the essence of modern subjectivity (GA 69, 74). The planet, we might say, is becoming one huge, greedy, anonymous subject. Heidegger resurrects a famous term from *Being and Time* and claims that this idiotic subject is “the unconditional essence of the ‘they’ in the history of be-ing” (GA 70, 35).

Power knows no goals or standards other than itself; as violence, it uses itself to enhance itself (GA 69, 22, 75). This violence becomes a “brutality” that turns not only against other brutal forces but ultimately against itself (GA 69, 76–77). To call such machination “evil” would be to evade the genuine horror of it: it dissolves the very standards of good and evil, the very concept of a final goal (GA 69, 217).

Heidegger is talking about political power, of course, but also about how being itself is manifested in terms of power, in everything from science to art. (Art is reduced to propaganda and kitsch—GA 66, 31, 174–75; the ideal of manliness becomes a muscle-bound figure with an empty, brutal face—GA 66, 34.) Even specifically political phenomena must be understood



from a metaphysical, not political point of view (GA 69, 66). So Heidegger attributes little responsibility to dictators; we live under the “dictatorship” of power itself (GA 69, 20), not of persons such as Hitler. The so-called possessors of power cannot in fact get power within their grasp—instead, power possesses *us* (GA 69, 63–64). Those who appear to be free because they are powerful are in fact enslaved to power and warped by an interpretation of selfhood in terms of power. Because power destroys all moral and legal standards, the age of power must include the “planetary criminals”—unnamed individuals who Heidegger says can be counted on the fingers of one hand (GA 69, 77–78). Their destructiveness bursts the bounds of ethical judgment and legal punishment; “even Hell and the like is too small” for them (GA 69, 77).

Power does not belong to the “powerful” tyrants, then, but neither does it belong to the people. The public face of power, its propaganda and pageantry, presents the power as belonging to society at large; but this “socialism” covers up the fact that the people is actually disempowered (GA 69, 82). The capacity for decision is obliterated by an atmosphere of declarations and commands (GA 66, 19); these create only a fanaticism that seizes on a ready-made appearance of salvation (GA 66, 119). Political action is then nothing but “calculating how to mobilize the masses as a whole” (Heidegger n.d., IX, §58a) or the “total planning of ‘life’ that is directed to self-securing” (GA 69, 100). The youth is particularly used and abused by this process, because young people are sufficiently ignorant and shameless to carry out “the planned destruction” without question (GA 66, 19). This entire so-called “struggle” is only the evasion of the “questionability of be-ing” (GA 66, 141).

How could the dictatorship of power be overcome? Obviously not by an attempt to overpower it—that would simply be a reaffirmation of power, and our ultimate enslavement to it. But powerlessness is also unsatisfactory—it is simply weakness that thirsts for power (GA 69, 67). We must find “what has no need of power,” a position that no longer allows power to “make” opposition to itself (GA 69, 70). “The master of power is one who transforms its essence. Such a transformation arises only from be-ing” (GA 69, 21). Thus genuine mastery would be the “*charis* of be-ing as be-ing” (GA 69, 69) or the inceptive worth of be-ing (GA 66, 16–17). Only the mastery of be-ing is “mastery in the inceptive sense,” transcending hierarchy and size (GA 66, 193) and lying beyond both power and powerlessness (GA 66, 192).

Clearly, then, Heidegger looks to the event of appropriation for salvation, and not to human action; he now views “activism” with contempt

(GA 67, 40) and says philosophy cannot provide a foundation for “the ‘active life’” (GA 66, 52). He approvingly quotes Heraclitus’ scornful attitude toward *politeuesthai* (Diogenes Laertius IX, 3, quoted in GA 69, 88–89; but see GA 55, 11–12 on the possibility of a higher concern with the *polis* here). Revolutions lead only to “deracination” and “destruction” (GA 66, 66); by trying to reverse the inception, they get stuck unwittingly in the past. Neither conservatism nor revolution is an authentically historical relation to the inception (GA 67, 39; cf. GA 69, 23).

Such remarks reject the practice of National Socialism; Heidegger also attacks its theory, beginning with its deepest source—Nietzsche. Machination and overpowering are the root of Nietzsche’s “yes to ‘becoming’” (GA 66, 26) and, of course, his “will to power,” which reduces all beings to conditions of power, or “values” (GA 67, 48). As for later thinkers inspired by Nietzsche, Heidegger takes Spengler and Jünger seriously as visionaries who anticipate or express the political dimension of the will to power. Yet Spengler’s “Caesarism” and Jünger’s concept of the worker do not penetrate far enough into the metaphysical roots of contemporary politics (GA 66, 27–28). We must see how metaphysics culminates in “world-war thinking on the basis of the highest will to power of the predator and the unconditionality of armament” (GA 66, 28).

Other Nazi ideas fare still worse in Heidegger’s analysis. The irrationalist “biological worldview” is not a genuine alternative to rationalism, but simply a different way of calculating with humanity and with beings as a whole (GA 66, 250). The ideal of “heroic realism” propounded by ideologues such as Baeumler and Werner Best leaves no room for genuine *Angst* (GA 67, 114): instead of accepting and affirming the struggle for power as the essence of reality, we must question being once again (GA 66, 19–20). As for the neopagan life-philosophy of Ludwig Klages, which reached the height of its popularity at this time, it vulgarizes the will to power by reducing it to “vitality” (GA 67, 114). Heidegger comments with disgust: “boozing and whoring have received their metaphysical justification” (GA 67, 122). To this we can add the confused Teutonism of militarized “Wagnerism” (*Wagnerei*: Heidegger n.d., VIII, §22, §27; IX, §91).

Heidegger certainly shares the Nazis’ general desire to rescue the Germans as a people, but he disagrees both with their means and with their conception of salvation. The Germans have failed to find and ground their essence, and modernity has driven them farther away from their essence than

ever before (Heidegger n.d., IX, epigram; by willing that the Germans find their essence, Heidegger is thinking with “love” for Germany—GA 66, 63). “The future ones...belong to the hard stock that will rescue the Germans and bring them back into the urgency of their essence” (GA 66, 61). But the way to this essence is not through control and violence, and essence cannot be found in blood and land (GA 66, 167). Heidegger rejects the notion of breeding a strong human type; readiness for be-ing is not a question of breeding (GA 66, 42). Racial calculation is a consequence of subjectivism, as are both nationalism and socialism (GA 69, 44): whether the goal is to save a race or to protect individual freedom, subjectivity and its drive for power are at work (GA 69, 154). Heidegger proposes that any racial thinking will involve ranking some races over others, on the basis of their achievements or expressions (GA 69, 70; see Addendum 4). This racism is unacceptable—not because Heidegger is an egalitarian, but because the racist perspective unhistorically reduces Dasein to a substrate, an underlying thing whose power is manifested in its thoughts and acts. “Peoples and races” are not understood in terms of their relation to being when they are interpreted as “units of life” (GA 66, 282).

The most dramatic political passage in all these writings may be §47 of *Besinnung*, which begins with a sentence from a speech delivered by Hitler on 30 January 1939: “There is no attitude that cannot find its ultimate justification in the utility it provides for the [national] whole.” Heidegger proceeds to attack every concept in this sentence, not in order to impose his own ideology but in order to restore a measure of questioning to a political standpoint that has hardened into a worldview. “Who is the whole? ...What is its goal? ...Who determines the utility? ...What does *attitude* mean?” (GA 66, 122). Heidegger concludes that Hitler is promoting only man’s oblivion of being and entanglement in beings—an obsession with domination in the name of “ideas” that alienate us from our true essence (GA 66, 123).

But any reader who hopes to see Heidegger draw closer to liberal or leftist points of view will be disappointed. All political systems demand a blind “*faith in faith*” (GA 67, 115). All ideology is a thoughtless vulgarization of the metaphysics of ideas that must ultimately be blamed on Plato’s *idea tou agathou* (GA 67, 40–41)—and perhaps, in the case of liberalism and communism, on “Judeo-Christian domination” (GA 66, 39). He looks upon democratic idealism and “cultural optimism” with contempt (GA 66, 39–40), seeing the “‘common sense’ [Heidegger uses the English words] of the democracies” as essentially identical to “the rational conformity to plan of ‘total authority’” (GA 66, 234).

The fate of our subjectivistic age is nihilism—the happening in which being loses its meaning or truth. With Nietzsche, this process has reached its philosophical end, but the completion of nihilism is still to be carried out in culture and politics. Which peoples are destined to fulfill this fate? Heidegger speculates that the encounter between Germany and Russia—not on a military, but on a metaphysical level—will be decisive (GA 69, 120). The future mission of Russia (not of Bolshevism) is the salvation of the “earth”; the mission of the Germans (a mission for their thought, Heidegger emphasizes) is the salvation of the “world” (GA 69, 108, 119). As for the sector of humanity that is destined to bring machination to its acme, it is neither German nor Russian. (Bolshevism is capable only of “destruction,” not of “devastation, for which the highest spirituality remains necessary”: GA 67, 147.) The ultimate devastation, the “erection of the unessence of machination, is reserved for Americanism.” Americanism, for Heidegger, is more horrible than “Asiatic wildness”: it is the ultimate rootless oblivion of being, dressed up in mendacious moralism (GA 67, 150; cf. GA 70, 97–98).

Heidegger broods on the coming war in similarly dark and metaphysical terms. The ideologies of liberalism, fascism, and communism are bound to clash, even though they are metaphysically the same: they are all expressions of the overpowering essence of power, which requires “the invention of a planetary opponent” (GA 66, 18, cf. 20). Such war does not rise above the enemy who is to be overpowered, but sinks into “the lowest level of opposition” (GA 69, 153). This new, boundless kind of war makes the entire reality of a nation subservient to it (GA 69, 44). But this is not to say that Heidegger is a pacifist. “World peace (in the Christian-Jewish-ambiguous sense)” is no less machinational than world war (GA 66, 28): both are attempts to dominate and order beings, to make them available as exploitable resources. In our age, the significance of even the most “peaceful” things lies in power and overpowering.

#### “KOINON”: METAPHYSICAL COMMUNISM

The essay “*Koinon*: From the History of Be-ing” and the “Draft” of this essay (GA 69, 179–214) are noteworthy efforts to apply be-ing-historical thinking to the start of the Second World War (1939–1940). Heidegger begins “*Koinon*” with the “strange” character of the war, which at this stage did not have constantly visible effects on everyday German life. The strangeness, he suggests, is a distant echo of the worth of be-ing—a questionability that lies beyond the coming “gigantic battles of annihilation” (GA 69, 180). In this strange new form of war, the difference between war and peace

evaporates: peace becomes nothing but the domination of the means and possibilities of war (GA 69, 181).

The new war is a “world war” inasmuch as the world in the Heideggerian sense—the whole of meanings and purposes that orient Dasein—is now intelligible only in terms of power (GA 69, 180–81, cf. 50). Power has taken over the “play of the world” (GA 69, 182) or the “play of being” (GA 69, 186). Beings have been reduced to makeable, replaceable resources; everything is planned, calculated, producible. Our relation to beings has become “readiness for engagement”: we are human resources, ready for productivity (GA 69, 185). (The contrast to Heidegger’s eagerness for “engagement” in 1933 could not be clearer.)

It is impossible to resist power in the name of freedom, morality, values, or law; all such attempts are merely manifestations of power, as is the Nazi ideal of saving the race. All these efforts posit goals that coordinate powers; power is thereby empowered, and the particular goal that is supposedly served is in fact irrelevant. Power needs no ideal or goal to justify it; power makes all justification obsolete, as its Protean process of self-empowerment through subjection and annihilation keeps driving on (GA 69, 182–85, 188, 202).

From this perspective, world wars are only “interludes in a more essential process” (GA 69, 187); the essence of power far exceeds military and political categories. Heidegger’s suprapolitical perspective views totalitarian and democratic systems as essentially the same. Both are based on an “idea” to which reality must conform (such as the idea of democracy or the idea of the people); both are subject to the illusion that power rests with the people (the majority, the race), when in fact, power can belong to no one (GA 69, 188–89). The competing “interests” of the world powers, which they try to defend by launching mass wars, are epiphenomena of metaphysical power (GA 69, 206–7, 210).

It may seem that dictators have power, but in fact they themselves are dominated by the process of power. This process overwhelms the current rank of the despot, as every stage of power is only a stage to be overcome; the power process also demands a uniformity of all beings, thereby destroying the distinctive status of the so-called powerful individuals (GA 69, 190). The “only-a-few” (GA 69, 193–94) are then not so different from the “never-too-many” (GA 69, 190). The elite are bound together only by their anxiety in the face of any possible obstacle to the constant growth of power

(GA 69, 193–95). Heidegger sees this elite as anonymous, and proposes in the “Draft” that even Stalin is only their “front man” (GA 69, 203).

The meaning of the title “*Koinon*” emerges when Heidegger focuses on a metaphysical analysis of communism. As he had commented in a lecture course a few years earlier, the Platonic concept of essence as the universal or *koinon* is relatively superficial: the fact that a number of beings have a characteristic in common is only a possible *consequence* of their essence (GA 45, 60–61). (For example, what makes a tree a tree is not its similarity to other trees—it would still be a tree even if it were the only one in the world.) Yet the superficial interpretation of the essence as a universal has become dominant in Western thought, and has encouraged us to view thought itself as generalization. This metaphysical “communism” assimilates everything to the common and eliminates the incomparable. Our age is communist in this sense, and in this sense communism is the completion of metaphysics in its meaninglessness (GA 69, 37, 191, 201).

Communism, as Heidegger understands it, is not a strictly human affair (GA 69, 195). But he does relate his metaphysical communism to communism as political practice: the Soviet regime reduces everything to the average and interprets Dasein in the reductive terms of work, use, and enjoyment. The Communist Party and its ideology impose a uniformity of “proletarian” attitudes and behavior (GA 69, 191–92). Ownership disappears—not only in the legal sense, and not only in regards to material property, but in regards to the self, which is plunged into anonymity (GA 69, 195). The particular destinies of peoples are ignored; the reliability of beings is destroyed (GA 69, 196).

Soviet Communism cannot be overcome by a supposedly more spiritual understanding of the human condition. Communist “materialism” is itself thoroughly spiritual, in that it is a product of Western metaphysics (GA 69, 204). The very dichotomy between spirit and body must be called into question; we can neither affirm “spirit” in an empty, unquestioned sense nor turn the body into an article of faith for a worldview (GA 69, 206).

What could defeat communism? Heidegger now has little or no hope that National Socialism can overcome it. Race and its cultivation are just more subjectivist power-concepts determined by modernity (GA 69, 223). As for Anglo-American liberalism, Heidegger sees it as little more than a hypocritical communism wearing the masks of Christian and bourgeois morality. Liberalism must be annihilated if modernity is to be overcome (GA 69, 208–9).

Communism can be defeated only by itself: incapable of rising to the level of the history of be-ing, it will annihilate itself by mobilizing for total war (GA 69, 209–10).

Standing apart from this grim spectacle, Heidegger seeks a kind of knowledge that has no utility, but remains within the event of be-ing (GA 69, 197) and awaits the final god (GA 69, 211–14).

#### CONCLUSION: OUTSIDE THE CAVE

How should we judge Heidegger's secret resistance? It was, of course, inconsequential in its day. Heidegger's public lectures were ambiguous enough that they could hardly be considered a call to revolt, and his private writings remained private. But it is hard to blame Heidegger for not choosing the probably suicidal path of public denunciation of the Nazi regime. His resistance never pretends to be anything but philosophical, and it is on the philosophical level that it needs to be judged. How insightful are his analyses, then? Does he appropriately grasp the meaning of the situation in which he finds himself?

Heidegger's approach to political concepts and rhetoric is almost always illuminating. His metaphysical genealogies of the key elements of political worldviews help us to reflect more deeply on ideologies that tend to cover up their own historical roots. Sometimes he seems prescient: his concept of peace as the domination of the means of war anticipates the Cold War, and his insights can also be applied to the early twenty-first century with little effort. In North Korea, the concept of "total mobilization" has been applied to every aspect of life, keeping the population in a constant state of readiness for war in the name of national survival and an abstract idea (*juche* or "self-reliance"). Attempting to resist the West, Islamic radicals have borrowed Western technology and ideas, creating a religious form of this subjectivist "self-reliance." The American response has been marked by a hubristic confidence in the self-evidence of liberal principles and the irresistibility of American power, a hubris that has been punished by what it could not calculate. Meanwhile, the Earth suffers the effects of being treated as a supply of "natural resources," while the most influential discussions of our environment continue to assume that we face a technical problem—a problem about how to manage resources—and not a question about the very being of nature.

There are certainly questions about being, then, that are relevant to politics and are ignored by ordinary political analysis. But Heidegger

does not simply raise questions about the ontological meaning of political concepts; he insists that the history of be-ing, and not human action, is the root of political events. “Self-reliance” is a subjectivist illusion that ignores our dependence on be-ing. In his view, individual choice has little to do with modern politics; choices occur on the surface of the impersonal movement of being as power. Heidegger can be said to have anticipated Arendt’s insight into “the banality of evil” within the mechanisms of totalitarian regimes: murderous functionaries such as Eichmann may be driven less by personal malice or sadism than by abstractions and power relations that they leave unquestioned. Yet Arendt insists on the importance of rescuing *praxis* from its reduction to theory, work, and labor (Arendt 1998). In contrast, Heidegger puts the very concept of “the ‘active life’” in quotation marks (GA 66, 52). He comes to see the entire thematic of choice and will as fatally indebted to modern subjectivism. His entire interpretation of his times, then, is focused not on human action but on being. Current events are to be grasped not in practical terms, but in relation to the metaphysical essence of modernity (GA 66, 46–47). To the objection that “history has to go on, after all; something, after all, has to happen with man,” he replies that history will go on in any case, no matter what the philosopher does, and that “knowledge of be-ing” is a rich enough source of nobility, sacrifice, and inceptiveness (GA 70, 137–38). “To wish to struggle politically against political worldviews...is to fail to recognize that something is happening in them of which they themselves are not the masters...[i.e.] the abandonment of being” (Heidegger n.d., X, 41).

After his brief venture into the cave, Heidegger has come running back into the light. The events that the public considers significant are only a “shadow” of the history of be-ing (GA 69, 205). To vary the metaphor, we can say that be-ing casts the dice, which fall according to the “incline in which be-ing appropriates itself to beings. Only those who are climbing know the incline” (GA 69, 213). To anyone who may object that Heidegger is ascending only toward abstractions—that he is turning his back on real power relations as he focuses on the essence of power—he replies that power is not an abstraction at all, and that we will know this when the apparently concrete is revealed as fleeting and “spectral” (GA 69, 182).

There is a Hegelian flavor in this turn of phrase, which appropriately warns us that if we focus on the particular while neglecting the essence, we will lose ourselves in a domain that is ephemeral, unintelligible, and more “abstract” than any philosophical concept. But for Hegel, the essence too is abstract, until it is actualized in the concrete. In Heidegger, there is no compa-



rable mutual dependence between be-ing and beings. For all his criticisms of the traditional concept of essence as the abstract *koinon*, Heidegger directs his attention to generalities and disregards the particular. It is true that in the *Contributions* he insists on the importance of mastering the “turn back” from be-ing to beings (GA 65, 453); he speaks of the “simultaneity” of be-ing and beings (GA 65, 13, 223, 349) and the “sheltering” of the truth of be-ing in beings (GA 65, 389–92). Yet all this remains an *abstract* tribute to particular beings: the particular is not described or appreciated, and Heidegger strives almost exclusively to think be-ing *without* beings (GA 65, 75–76).

The essence of politics is itself nothing political, as Heidegger might rightly say. For this very reason, when Heidegger focuses on the essence of politics, he turns away from politics itself—the realm of actual parties, policies, lawmaking, political debate and political power. In Heidegger's view, this is no loss, because such phenomena are nothing but shadows on the wall of the cave. But this attitude prevents him from thinking about crucial practical questions. For instance, what is the proper relation of a people—his own people—to its minorities and its neighbors? (The essay “Wege zur Aussprache” in GA 13 is an unusual attempt to take some steps in this direction.)

It is not that Heidegger should be expected to have an answer to every practical problem. But to deny that such problems exist as such, to reduce them to metaphysics and the history of be-ing, is to obliterate a genuine domain of experience. Without an appreciation for this domain, it is impossible to judge events such as wars and revolutions appropriately.

Perhaps Heidegger's greatest failure is his indifference to political liberty—his inability to see that political freedom is not reducible to the sometimes crude ideologies that support it. The metaphysical basis of modern liberalism is questionable, but the liberties that it provides are crucial if individuals and peoples are to find their way into the questioning thinking that Heidegger desires, and resist the overpowering authority that he condemns (Polt 1997). Heidegger's permanent antiliberalism is a surer sign of his political confusion than is his temporary National Socialism.

Heidegger, who blames Platonism for so much, failed to learn the lesson of Plato's allegory of the cave. The philosophers must return to the cave not only in order to save the *polis*, but also in order to understand the political realm in its particularity after spending time in the light of the intelligible forms. When they first return, they are unable to see in the relative darkness (*Republic* 516e, 518a). Knowledge of essences, then, does not suffice

to understand politics; we must both ascend and descend, and take the time to adjust our understanding to both realms. (Heidegger's reading of this passage completely ignores this point, and simply presents the philosopher as an enlightened liberator who is likely to be killed by the deluded masses: GA 34, 80–94; GA 36/37, 180–85. A further flaw in Heidegger's reading is that it is far from obvious that Plato is really teaching us that we can possess knowledge of essences [Fried 2006].) In his blindness, Heidegger resembles Plato's caricature of the "philosopher": "his next-door neighbor has escaped his sight [*lelèthen*]  
—not only what his neighbor is doing, but almost whether he is a man or some other creature. Instead, the question [the philosopher] investigates is: what is man?" (*Theaetetus* 174b; the passage is sometimes read as Plato's sincere praise of the philosophical life, but a little reflection shows that it contradicts Socrates' own behavior in this very dialogue—it is actually a satire on abstract theorists such as Theodorus, the astronomer and mathematician who is Socrates' interlocutor in this passage). Heidegger laments "the annihilation of the essence of humanity" (GA 77, 207), but he fails to face up to the "complete annihilation" of particular human beings that he himself had endorsed in 1933.

To Heidegger's credit, he saw through and passed beyond Nazi ideology and the metaphysics of struggle and power. But in doing so, he also passed beyond and overlooked all concrete struggles and powers. Heidegger passed beyond the political—and never returned.

## ADDENDUM 1

“GA” will refer to Heidegger’s *Gesamtausgabe* (Heidegger 1976- ). I cite the following volumes: GA 13, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (1983 [composed 1910-1976]); GA 16, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (2000 [1910-1976]); GA 29/30, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1983 [1929-30]); GA 34, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet*, ed. Hermann Mörchén (1988 [1931-32]); GA 36/37, *Sein und Wahrheit*, ed. Hartmut Tietjen (2001 [1933-34]); GA 38, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, ed. Günter Seubold (1998 [1934]); GA 39, *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* ed. Susanne Ziegler (1980 [1934-35]); GA 40, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, ed. Petra Jaeger (1983 [1935]); GA 43, *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*, ed. Bernd Heimbüchel (1985 [1936-37]); GA 45, *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik,”* ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1984 [1937-38]); GA 55, *Heraklit*, ed. Manfred S. Frings (1987 [1943-44]); GA 64, *Der Begriff der Zeit*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (2004 [1924]); GA 65, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1989 [1936-38]); GA 66, *Besinnung*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (1997 [1938-39]); GA 67, *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, ed. Hans-Joachim Friedrich (1999 [1938-39, 1946-48]); GA 69, *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, ed. Peter Trawny (1998 [1938-40]); GA 70, *Über den Anfang*, ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando (2005 [1941]); GA 77, *Feldweg-Gespräche*, ed. Ingrid Schüßler (1995 [1944-45]); GA 87, *Nietzsche: Seminare 1937 und 1944*, ed. Peter von Ruckteschell (2004); GA 90, *Zu Ernst Jünger*, ed. Peter Trawny (2004 [1934-54]). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. For an extended interpretation and contextualization of the passage in GA 36/37 on the “annihilation” of the enemy, see Faye 2005, chapter 6.

## ADDENDUM 2

“The *talk* about the disempowerment of *physis* can be misunderstood; the expression properly means that *physis* is displaced from its essence as *arche* (inception and mastery), because this essence remains an inception only in the inceptive beginning that grounds itself back into itself more originally, and *thus* develops the essence—in particular, grounds *aletheia* as belonging to *physis*. The expression ‘disempowerment’ supports the illusion that *physis* belongs to the essence of ‘power,’ but in the sense of the ‘will to power,’ which actually comes to power precisely through the ‘disempower-

ment' of *physis*" (Heidegger ca. 1938). This marginal note refers to §96 of the GA edition (GA 65, 190). Cf. GA 66, 188, 193–94.

#### ADDENDUM 3

The range of existing interpretations of the statements on Nazism in the *Contributions* is conveniently indicated by the titles of Vietta 1989 and Rockmore 1992. The fifth chapters of both books discuss the *Beiträge*. Vietta's perspective is closer to the truth. Rockmore supports his claim that Heidegger continues to share the Nazis' "end in view" (186) only by defining this goal broadly as "the realization of the Germans as German" (189) or "the realization of the destiny of the German people" (191, cf. 201), even though Rockmore observes that Heidegger denies that the people is an end in itself (192, 196). By these standards, anyone with patriotic sentiments or concern for a community should be called a Nazi. For another interpretation of the *Contributions* as Hitlerian, see Faye 2005, 441–55.

#### ADDENDUM 4

Faye is at his weakest when he interprets such passages as a "legitimation" of "the racial foundation of Nazism" (Faye 2005, 460). Faye seems incapable of hearing the highly critical tone of Heidegger's account of racism at this point. Such flaws should not distract us from Faye's legitimate achievement in the earlier portions of his book, where he documents the depths of Heidegger's Nazism in the early and mid-thirties.

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