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The Movement of Nihilism

Heidegger's Thinking After Nietzsche

Continuum Studies in Continental Philosophy

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Continuum International Publishing Group
The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane
Suite 704
New York, NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-6809-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The movement of nihilism : Heidegger's thinking after Nietzsche / edited by Laurence Paul Hemming, Kostas Amiridis, and Bogdan Costea.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-4411-6809-2
1. Nihilism. 2. Heidegger, Martin, 1889–1976. 3. Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 1844–1900. I. Hemming, Laurence Paul. II. Amiridis, Kostas. III. Costea, Bogdan. IV. Title.

B828.3.M68 2011
149'.8–dc22 2010040737

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain

In Memoriam

Paul Fletcher

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Laurence Paul Hemming

The phrase 'the movement of nihilism' is one coined by Heidegger himself, which, although he had employed versions of it earlier in lectures and discussions, appeared in his published work with his reply, written in friendship, to an essay of Ernst Jünger's (*Over the Line*),[1] first under the title *Over 'the Line'*, later as *On the Question of Being*.[2] Ten of the contributions arise from discussions that took place under the aegis of the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) at Lancaster University in dialogue with partners from other institutions nationally and internationally over several months. We owe thanks to Professor Bob Jessop, the then Director of the IAS who gave unqualified support for the project, and to the Institute for the funds they made available to us to promote the discussions that took place. This volume represents our attempt to acknowledge and repay that indebtedness. Only one contribution has been published before, and is included here with the other ten because it is so germane to the issues raised. We are grateful to the Editors of the *European Journal of Political Theory* and to Sage Publications for giving us permission to reprint the contribution in question. Though the participants were drawn from a very wide range of disciplines, the meetings were marked by a seriousness and sense of intellectual friendship. Special thanks are due to Professor Mick Dillon of Lancaster University, who provided invaluable advice and support in the planning of this research, and to Professor Stuart Elden of Durham University, whose comments and suggestions were of great help in the course of preparing this volume. Thanks must also go to Michaela Scott and Anne-Marie Mumford, the Institute's then staff, who did much to ensure the success and smooth running of our meetings.

The title of our collection refers to Martin Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's understanding of contemporary politics as a 'movement of nihilism' and of nihilism as 'a normal state of affairs'.[3] Heidegger conceived nihilism as the unfolding of the whole history of the West from the thought of Plato to Nietzsche's claim to have inverted Platonism, and Heidegger extended this, with globalization, to the understanding of not only the West, but of the history of the world hereafter. Politically, Heidegger understands nihilism to describe

all the major ideologies of the twentieth century: Fascism and National Socialism; Socialism, Communism and Marxism; and Liberalism, or what he referred to before the Second World War as 'Americanism', and afterwards 'world democracy'. Heidegger reads Nietzsche's breathtaking vision of this movement as the common ground of all the radical attempts to define the *polis* in the last century. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, when these ideologies seem to have been brought to an end by six decades of peace (and when a final form of political organization, 'democracy', seems to have been reached, at least as a stated goal of the nations at the forefront of political decision-making and organization) – Heidegger confronts us with the question: who are we, we who stand within the *present* movement of nihilism?

We put before ourselves three research questions, which form the backdrop of the contributions here, and to which we returned each time we met for discussion. First, can the present situation be understood through Heidegger's identification of it as the 'age of technology' and an age of nihilism? Secondly, what is the connection Heidegger made between all these forms as metaphysical expressions of theism (including a-theism) and the 'event' and 'basic experience' of the death of God in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche? In a period dominated by a thinking that can broadly be categorized as materialism, can we again ever speak of the gods in relation to political life? Thirdly, if we were to accept Heidegger's insight that history brings under a single heading ('the movement of nihilism') all the globally dominant political forms of the twentieth and twenty-first century, what are the consequences for our continuing thinking?

At the centre of our deliberations was one further question, which reappeared each time we met: how are Heidegger's texts to be read? When we approach these texts, what did Heidegger himself take for granted, and so never named or made explicit; and what did he conceal or 'encrypt', given the circumstances in which he wrote – before the Nazi accession to power, during the regime, and after it? And what self-evidences do we ourselves bring to Heidegger's thinking, that are invisible to us, but that cloud our reception of his thought? We sought no 'new' reading of Heidegger, no revolution in his appropriation; on the other hand we found ourselves returning repeatedly to the way in which Heidegger's thought is distorted and bifurcated for consumption in a variety of contemporary contexts. How then could we connect the reading of Heidegger that emphasizes, let us say, his appropriation of Heraclitus and Parmenides, or Hölderlin, with the reading that has concerned itself with 'the Heidegger affair', which is to say, Heidegger's involvement with Hitlerism, National Socialism, and which all too often represents a rejection of his critique of nihilism?

Shortly after we ceased to meet, in 2009, the English translation of Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* was released, the French edition having appeared in 2005.[4] Faye's book represents the latest and the most radical in the French critiques of Heidegger's influence, one that

has been an indispensable part of the French philosophical scene, and not without significance in the United States (even if mainly outside university departments of philosophy). Emmanuel Faye belongs to the second generation of critics who have engaged in *l'affaire Heidegger*,[5] and *The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* contains a vast and impressive scholarly apparatus of research. It is lamentable, therefore, that, flying in the face of the apparatus, Faye's tone and conclusions throughout the book border on the evangelical, as he unfolds a crafted narrative of systematic denunciation of his subject, Martin Heidegger.[6] All too often, closer inspection of the sources on which he bases his argument, especially inspection of the original texts, reveals that his conclusions in the light of the matter of those texts have been exaggerated, or even fail to justify his claims.

Heidegger's public utterances especially after his adventure as Rector of Freiburg University from May 1933 until April 1934, and even after the Second World War, are often coded, carefully worded – even at times ironic – commentaries on the political situation. This, as Fred Dallmayr has shown, is in stark contrast to his private notebooks of the same period (1936–1948),[7] where Heidegger's critique of the Nazi regime was increasingly unequivocal and unrestrained. Dallmayr notes that in *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, the third volume of these notebooks, Heidegger 'critiques National Socialism directly by ridiculing its chosen terminology',[8] and by speaking repeatedly of the criminality of the leaders of the Fascist and Nazi regimes. In fact it is possible to show that what Heidegger makes explicit in *Die Geschichte des Seyns* is what he does, covertly, but with increasing frequency, in the public lecture courses from 1934 that are now in the public domain. This is why so much Nazi terminology is to be found, openly being discussed – and so not *only* because of his support for the regime. Dallmayr remarks at the beginning of this study that 'curiously and uncannily, Heidegger's work is deeply tainted by his complicity with totalitarian (fascist) oppression – despite the fact that his work, in its basic tenor, was always dedicated to "freedom" and resistance to totalising uniformity'.[9]

To know *how* to read a text, is, therefore, essential, in knowing how to let it stand for itself and speak not only of what it *literally* says, but also of the world from which it emerges. As much with the texts of the present age as with the texts of antiquity, interpretation is everything. *No* text has a literal meaning, or contains within itself the key to its own interpretation. Yet any nuanced, careful, reading – one requiring interpretation – is precisely what Faye denies Heidegger's thought. For just one example, taking the cautious, coded text *The Danger*, the third of the 1949 *Bremen Lectures* which marked Heidegger's post-war return to public life, Faye systematically forces this text to say the opposite of what it really says. *The Danger* has been, precisely because of its cryptic language, among the most controversial of Heidegger's texts.[10] This lecture, which at one point speaks of the evils of mechanized food production, contains one of the only references Heidegger ever made to the Nazi extermination camps. In the lecture this reference is again cryptic, seeming to speak of the

deaths of millions in China through hunger, it also speaks of the mechanized death of hundreds of thousands in camps. Had this lecture ever been delivered, no-one in the audience of this lecture could have doubted to what Heidegger was seeking to refer.[11] There is now a wealth of historical evidence to place it beyond doubt that even though the German population before 1945 did not know precisely *what* was happening in the camps, they knew of their existence: after 1946, and certainly by 1949, not even what went on could any longer have been in doubt, let alone been denied, by the kind of educated public who would have been the guests of the bourgeois, intellectual, Bremen Club.[12]

Faye's strategy is to force Heidegger into the posture of a holocaust denier, in order to expose him as so reprehensible a thinker that his books should no longer be published or carried in libraries. Speaking of those who perished, Heidegger three times asks the question, when they perished, 'do they die?'.[13] The rhetorical force of the question is clearly meant to enquire, not into the fact of the murder, but into the way in which it occurred, and so to try to name what is closed off to mortal life in such hideous circumstances. Yet because Heidegger draws a distinction between mechanized extermination and the death that is appropriate to, and proper for, mortals, Faye concludes: '*according to Heidegger, no-one has died in the annihilation camps, because none of those who were exterminated there bore in their essence the possibility of death itself.*'[14] The distinction is utterly tendentious, since there can be no doubt from the text itself that Heidegger understands that thousands, and millions, perished.[15] In asking 'did they die?', his question hardly begs the answer 'no, not really', nor any other trivialization or minimization of this vast and dreadful crime, but rather: 'what kind of danger lurks in the advent of the total domination of technology such that death itself (a most sacred moment in a life) can be deprived of its sacrality and transmuted into the exercise of mechanised and massified technique?' To fail to answer this question adequately is to fail to understand how technology (and not even death) prevails as the essence of our age. It is to block off a serious and solemn attempt to bring oneself before the enormity of the crime in question.

In reviewing Faye's book, Peter Gordon notes that 'it is Faye's express claim that *all* of Heidegger's philosophy is *nothing more than the theory for which Nazism is the realization*'.[16] It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that this was Faye's understanding of Heidegger even before he undertook to write the proof of it. Faye's wilful misreading of Heidegger is only the most extreme form of a practice of interpretation, becoming ever more acceptable (within, and far beyond, the study of Heidegger), that itself arises on the basis of a metaphysical outlook – the nihilism of valuation, of taking something (a text, the word of a thinker) and assigning to it the value *I* would have it have (where *I* is the expression of the subjectivity of the subject). In a marginal note to his copy of Ernst Jünger's *The Worker*, where Jünger speaks of valuation as the highest striving of the subject, a striving that signifies the drive to fulfil a lack, Heidegger's note says 'this is a false interpretation of the will to power – indeed the pure will is the highest

form of the will, that is justice.'[17] Heidegger shows that the act of valuation is not ordinarily an exercise of power (I do this because I will it, because I *can*), because such acts are easily challenged and repudiated. The question can always be asked, in the course of the naked exercise of power: 'and why should *you* exercise such power?'. The highest and most unassailable act of valuation is an act of *justification* (I do this because I can do *no other*: I do this, for justice's sake, I do it *in the name of the victims*). Such a valuation can barely, or only with the greatest difficulty be gainsaid, and yet the highest power is manifest in its unfolding. Faye dissolves himself, and us, into a moral claim whose self-evidence and force (the force of justice) denies and blocks off the possibility of genuine enquiry. Indeed, Faye's very purpose is to end all discussion – to make Heidegger and his works unspeakable, and put him and them *beyond* speech. Of *course* we should shun the holocaust-denier (and of course we should), and so because of this truth, if Faye can show you that Martin Heidegger did indeed deny the fact of the deaths of those in the extermination camps, then *of course*, without further ado, he and his books must be shunned. Except that the claim is contrived, and Heidegger does no such thing.

To rise up to genuine enquiry, to enter into what thinking demands of us, and so to be able to be addressed by our history, thoughtfully, is the task that befalls us in thinking at all. And here is the very danger which Heidegger himself expressly challenges us to address, to return again and again to the question he poses more than once across his oeuvre, which he names as our 'basic attunement' (*Grundstimmung*) and in which, he says, we need to be wakeful: the putting of ourselves into the deepest questioning – 'who then are *we*?'.[18] In learning to read Heidegger, and in coming to understand what the 'movement of nihilism' means in his thought, we not only put Heidegger into question, but we also *must* be put into question: who we are now, who we have been, and who we are to become: our whence, and our whither. In attempting to answer the question posed under the heading of this collection, it is this question which proves the most demanding of all.

6 August 2010 – Anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima

Notes

[1] Ernst Jünger, *Über die Linie* in Ernst Jünger, *Werke*, vol. 5, Stuttgart, Klett, 1960. First published in *Martin Heidegger zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1950.

[2] Cf. *Zur Seinsfrage* [*Über 'Die Linie'*] (*Wegmarken* [GA9]) pp. 386, 391–3 and 395. *Über 'die Linie'* was first published in a *Festschrift* for Ernst Jünger's sixtieth birthday in 1955, later appearing as a single text in 1956, and included in the collection *Wegmarken* in 1997.

[3] The phrase 'nihilism as a normal state of affairs' is taken from a notebook of Nietzsche's of Spring 1887. *Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 12, *Nachlaß 1885–1887*, p. 350

(=*Der Wille zur Macht*, §23). 'Der Nihilism ein *normaler* Zustand.' Heidegger takes up and comments on this phrase in several places. See esp. *Zur Seinsfrage* (GA9), p. 392. 'No one with any insight will still deny today that nihilism is in the most varied and most hidden forms the "normal state" of humanity' ('Kein Einsichtiger wird heute noch leugnen wollen, daß der Nihilismus in den verschiedensten und verstecktesten Gestalten der "Normalzustand" der Menschheit ist').

[4] Emmanuel Faye, *L'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie: Autour des séminaires inédits de 1933–1935*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2005. Translated by Michael B. Smith with a *Foreword* by Tom Rockmore as *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009.

[5] See Jean-Pierre Faye, *La raison narrative: langages totalitaires, critique de l'économie narrative, II*, Paris, Balland, 1990. A full account of Faye senior's involvement in the evaluation and criticism of Heidegger in France can be found in Peter Eli Gordon, *Hammer without a Master: French Phenomenology and the Origins of Deconstruction (or, How Derrida read Heidegger)* in Mark Bevir, Jill Hargis and Sara Rushing (eds), *Histories of Postmodernism*, London, Routledge, 2007, pp. 103–30.

[6] See, for a full discussion of the work, Taylor Carman, *In and With: Flawed Efforts to Discredit Martin Heidegger's Philosophy,* pp. 26–7.

[7] These notebooks comprise seven volumes of Heidegger's *Collected Works* (*Gesamtausgabe*). Beginning with the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), the other six volumes are *Besinnung* (GA66); *Metaphysik und Nihilismus. 1. Die Überwindung der Metaphysik (1938/39), 2. Das Wesen des Nihilismus (1946–1948)* (GA67); *Die Geschichte des Seyns. 1. Die Geschichte des Seyns (1938/40). 2. Koinovn. Aus der Geschichte des Seyns (1939)* (GA69), 1998; *Über den Anfang (1941)* (GA70) 2005; *Das Ereignis (1941/42)* (GA71) (2009); and the (to date) unpublished *Die Stege des Anfangs (1944)*, scheduled to appear as vol. 72.

[8] Fred Dallmayr, *Heidegger on Macht and Machenschaft*, pp. 257f., citing *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (GA69). Heidegger comments that 'the consequence of this subjectivity is the "nationalism" of nations and the "socialism" of the *Volk*.'

[9] Fred Dallmayr, *Heidegger on Macht and Machenschaft*, p. 247.

[10] M. Heidegger, *Die Gefahr* in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (GA79), pp. 46–67.

[11] The lecture *Die Gefahr* was to have been the third of four, given under the title *Einblick in das was ist*, initially arranged through a former student of Heidegger's, Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, for the Bremen Club in December 1949, repeated in Bühlerhöhe in March 1950. Faye claims that so sensitive was *Die Gefahr*, it was held back from publication until 1994 and that it was in fact *never* delivered. Although the text was not published until 1994, transcripts and reports of it had circulated for years (rather falsifying the claim it was never delivered). Richard Wolin provides an English quotation from one of this transcripts in 1991 (in the *Introduction* to Richard Wolin [ed.], *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1991, p. 15), taken from a 1983 text published by Wolfgang Schirmacher (*Technik und Gelassenheit*, Freiburg and Munich, Albers Verlag, 1983). Berel Lang also cites a transcript of the passage to which I refer here in *Heidegger's Silence and the Jewish Question* (in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg [eds], *Martin Heidegger and the Holocaust*, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1996, p. 8). Lang's contribution clearly dates from before publication of the 'official' *Gesamtausgabe* text in 1994, stating (p. 8) 'the lecture in which [this] statement appears . . . has not been published at all.'

[12] Cf., for accounts of this, Eric A. Johnston, *Nazi Terror: Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans*, London, Basic Books, 2000; Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, London, Hodder Education, 2000; Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

[13] M. Heidegger, *Die Gefahr* (GA79), p. 56. 'Sterben sie?'

[14] Emmanuel Faye, *L'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie*, p. 493. '*Selon Heidegger, personne n'est mort dans les camps d'anéantissement, parce que personne de ceux qui y furent exterminés ne portait dans son essence la possibilité de la mort*' (Faye's emphasis).

[15] Faye even tries to make capital out of the fact that Heidegger speaks only of 'thousands' who died in the camps, when in fact the total is millions, as evidence of his attempt to reduce and limit the magnitude of the crime. Again, the argument is forced into a shape it does not deserve: Heidegger specifically brings the questions of millions of deaths into play – this is the very force of the coded reference to 'millions' of deaths in China. What is in fact a courageous early attempt to bring into public discussion a crime which has hitherto been suspected, hinted at, and finally come out into the open, but as so dreadful as to be unspeakable, becomes in Faye's hands the very pretext for an accusation of silence.

[16] Peter E. Gordon, review of *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, December 2010, http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=19228 (Gordon's emphases).

[17] M. Heidegger, *Zu Ernst Jünger* (GA90), p. 345. 'das ist eine Fehlauslegung d[er] W[ille]z[ur]M[acht] gerade der reine W[ille] ist d. höchste Form d[es] W[illens] = Gerechtigkeit.'

[18] M. Heidegger, Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit (GA29/30), p. 103. 'Wer sind wir denn?'

Chapter 2

The Movement of Nihilism as Self-Assertion

Bogdan Costea and Kostas Amiridis

This chapter poses a very simple question: 'who' is the subject of the 'movement of nihilism'? More precisely, are there hints of such a character (*ethos*), of a 'who' of 'European nihilism', that might be deciphered in Heidegger's often tantalizing engagement with Nietzsche? However, formulated in this way, both title and question suffer from a lack of direction. The title lacks, for its part, a grounding indication: in what way is the word 'nihilism' to be read? Heidegger, in *The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'*,[1] as well as in the *Nietzsche* volumes,[2] makes clear the double sense of nihilism as Nietzsche understands it: on the one hand, destruction, annihilation and decay; on the other hand, 'classical nihilism' as the condition of a '*new* valuation', a 'perfected' nihilism.[3] In this chapter, we discuss the first kind, the nihilism Nietzsche refers to in Aphorism 28 of *The Will To Power*: 'Incomplete nihilism; its forms: we live in the midst of it.'[4] It is the nihilism which, for Heidegger, 'shows such great profundity that its unfolding can have nothing but world catastrophe as its consequence'.[5]

Equally insufficient is the determination of the question of a 'who' of nihilism, or, even more pointedly, of 'European Nihilism'[6]: what are we looking for when we say we seek this 'who', this one? Are we entering a metaphysical debate, perhaps in terms of the point at which Heidegger seeks to separate his understanding of the movement of nihilism from Nietzsche's? Or are we engaging in a search for the elusive historical threshold of modernity, for that 'moment' beyond which nihilism acquired the full force that Nietzsche is made (by the editors) to announce in the Preface of *The Will To Power* and which might be intimated from references to 'modern man' or 'modernity' in both Nietzsche's works as well as Heidegger's?[7] Or might the question prompt a search for an empirical determination of this 'who', a way of pointing the finger at a concrete character (in Heidegger's words, 'the man of Western history'),[8] that one who might be culpable for the radical degradation, even the corrosion, of Europe's very 'core'?

We are not writing from the viewpoint of a 'Heideggerian' scholarship. Nor is this a chapter that seeks to improvise a novel philosophical reading of

otherwise well-known material. What we are trying to understand is whether there is a way of addressing the concerns of the two formulations (of 'destruction' over against 'a revaluation of all values hitherto'), concerns which have formed a central impetus for the investigations of cultural and social theory from their inception, about a century and a half ago. Hence, we position ourselves as researchers interested in the cultural history of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the 'next two centuries' that Nietzsche refers to in the Preface to *The Will To Power*.[9] From this standpoint, we seek to present some of the difficulties in our attempt to understand Heidegger's readings of Nietzsche and his own conception of nihilism from the viewpoint of a concrete history of European culture. Are we to read Nietzsche's indication of 'the next two centuries' literally, chronologically? Did he provide us with the means to decipher them and for how to look for the 'subject' of nihilism? And if he did, how are we to understand Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's thought, in light of the way in which the twentieth century actually and historically unfolded? Or would we be seeking a ghost, at which to point a rather vulgar finger?

Formulated in this way, these questions are not original. Rather, they are meant to give an indication of the path we are treading and the figures we are following on this path. The thinkers in whose shadow we pursue this commentary are Hans Blumenberg, Louis Dupré and Charles Taylor.[10] They are not associated here by accident. All three identified, in not dissimilar manner, the modern age with the emergence of a new figure in the horizon of the history of the West: the self-assertive subject as central principle of the cultural synthesis of modernity. All, in one way or another, also point out that something crucial in this movement marks this subject out: its emptiness, its indigence and its continuous inability to cope with the central position it comes to occupy in the cultural order it sets up. Moreover, all, as historians of *ideas*, are very careful to steer clear of any crude finger-pointing to one or another social category or 'type' as being culpable of some sort of unreflective demise of a (ostensibly 'positive') monolith called 'European culture'. They are not, in other words, facile commentators who see unity in historical movement in order to make their theses more popular. They do not see modernity as a unit of historical analysis just to make things simpler; quite the opposite. Their attempts to understand the historical movement of something called 'Europe' in the most profound *metaphysical* terms as a cultural synthesis of 'planetary'[11] significance are all akin to, or in fact, in all three cases, informed by, Heidegger's own understanding of the place of Europe in the history of the world. However, this chapter differs from these approaches in one respect. Even though all these scholars point to the fundamental vacuousness of the extended and intensified subjectivity of the modern subject, none explicitly links this phenomenon to the essence of the movement of nihilism as Nietzsche and Heidegger addressed it. This chapter can be read in light of the works of these three authors, as an attempt to make explicit ideas which can undoubtedly be heard in their approaches to the question of the 'who' of modernity's cultural history.

How does concrete history bear the marks of what Nietzsche announces as 'European nihilism', the marks of 'headlong and arbitrary *experimentation*'? There are various possibilities, radically different, of interpreting Nietzsche's hint with the word '*experimentation*' as well as the further qualification he offers: '. . . and it is probable that a superabundance of bungled experiments should create an overall impression as of decay – and perhaps even decay itself.'[12] As already implied, we will take in this chapter one element in a possible reading of the 'superabundance' that Nietzsche announces: the determined institution of human potentiality as the most important domain of 'headlong' experimentation, and the emphatic affirmation of an endless horizon of possibilities that seem to lie in store for liberated man – in other words, what 'self-assertion' in the title of this chapter is taken to mean.

It is not hard perhaps to assume, after more than a century since his announcement, and considering the evidence provided by the history of the twentieth century that Nietzsche's vision was inspired. But how is this statement, made about cultural history, to be justified and how is this evidence to be produced and mobilized? What, more precisely, has the specific history of the twentieth century made manifest to confirm Nietzsche's thoughts?

It is at this point that Heidegger's profound reading of Nietzsche, as well as some of his texts which address the modern condition most directly, become the most powerful resources for thinking through the question of the 'who' of the movement of nihilism. As a preliminary move, however, let us lay the minimal ground necessary to understand how a cultural historian might seek to arrive at what Heidegger himself asks about the 'movement of nihilism' when he addresses Ernst Jünger in his response to *Über die Linie*: 'You know that an estimation of the situation of man in respect to the movement of nihilism and within it demands an adequate determination of essence.'[13] For a cultural history of the movement of nihilism, the determination of its character depends upon three interrelated questions: who is the 'man', the subject for whom this movement takes place? When does the movement occur, to what historical period might it correspond? Finally, where does such a movement occur in relation to the cultural geographical world as we know it? The 'who', 'when' and 'where' of the movement of nihilism are the crucial dimensions we seek to explore in this chapter in order to be able to understand more adequately the inquiry itself: how does the movement of nihilism unfold?

Once the question is asked in this way, we find that in Heidegger's work on nihilism the clues are neither hidden, nor rare. Although Heidegger himself never intended his philosophical works to be read as histories of ideas, it is nonetheless possible for any cultural historian to find the answers Heidegger himself gives to the specific questions of history. Although his answers are not hard to summarize in the terms set above, it is important to arrive at them by a sufficiently systematic path in order to allow them to speak with the force with which they actually do.

First, let us address the main difficulty that arises from any superficial reading of the words 'movement of nihilism'. If the word 'nothing' is to be taken in its

customary, everyday meaning, then any reader whose logical faculty operates in the usual terms would immediately ask whether there can be a concrete historical movement of that which is not, indeed if this can be even considered as a proper object for reflection on the cultural conditions of a time and a place. Heidegger himself helps us directly in this respect in chapter 3 of the fourth volume of his work on *Nietzsche*:

> The nothing of negation or no-saying is purely and simply 'nothing', what is most null, and so unworthy of any further attention or respect. If the nothing is nothing, if it is not, then neither can beings ever founder in the nothing nor can all things dissolve in it. Hence there can be no process of becoming-nothing. Hence nihilism is an illusion.[14]

Indeed that is what logic would demonstrate – Heidegger himself remarks ironically: 'Who would wish to repudiate such compelling "logic"? All due respect to logic!'.[15] Of course, however, that is not at all what is indicated by Nietzsche's nihilism. Quite the contrary, for both Nietzsche and Heidegger, nihilism does not indicate 'nothingness' in the common sense of the word; rather Heidegger wants us to see in nihilism precisely a content, a specific historical relationship between men and 'nothing':

> The question arises whether the innermost essence of nihilism and the power of its dominion do not consist precisely in considering the nothing merely as a nullity, considering nihilism as an apotheosis of the merely vacuous, as a negation that can be set to rights at once by energetic affirmation. Perhaps the essence of nihilism consists in *not* taking the question of the nothing seriously.[16]

In this statement something important occurs: the idea that nihilism is a historical movement takes it out of the sphere of mere logical games and gives it a content, a difficult one to understand to be sure, but a content defined along an essential clue that will prove to be revealing in our discussion below of the 'who' of nihilism. The clue lies in the remark Heidegger makes about the attitude to nihilism that seeks to 'set [it] to rights at once by energetic affirmation'. For whom does this need to affirm itself energetically against the nothing arise? And in what way? For Heidegger, the answer is clear: it is the West (or Europe) in its metaphysics that can not think or 'adequately formulate' 'the essence of the nothing', and is thus 'heading toward a fundamental metaphysical position in which the essence of the nothing not only *cannot* be understood but also *will* no longer be understood'.[17] The 'who' of nihilism is thus the West or Europe, and the content of the movement is metaphysical. Heidegger establishes clearly for us that the phrase 'movement of nihilism' is no mere nonsense, but rather the profound destiny of the Western way of thinking and relating to being.

As can be seen straight from the first element of our analysis, in establishing whether the question of a movement of nihilism makes sense at all, Heidegger

also indicates quite clearly how we might answer the question of the 'who' of nihilism, as well as the manner in which this historical relationship unfolds. Something even more important emerges if we turn to some of the texts in which Heidegger gives even more complete formulations of these ideas. In his essay *The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'*, he writes:

> Nihilism is a historical movement, not just any view or doctrine advocated by someone or other. Nihilism moves history after the manner of a fundamental ongoing event that is scarcely recognised in the destining of the Western peoples. Hence nihilism is not simply one historical phenomenon among others – not simply one intellectual current that, along with others, with Christendom, with humanism, and with the Enlightenment – also comes to the fore within Western history.
>
> Nihilism, thought in its essence, is, rather, the fundamental movement of the history of the West. It shows such great profundity that its unfolding can have nothing but world catastrophes as its consequence. Nihilism is the world-historical movement of the peoples of the earth who have been drawn into the power realm of the modern age.[18]

This passage is fundamentally significant for the argument we are trying to make here. Heidegger appears to spell out with the utmost clarity not only that which we have been seeking – a 'who', 'where' and 'when' of nihilism – but also to juxtapose them in a most unsettling move. If one were seeking a way of thinking about nihilism in terms of a subject, of place and extension, then in this passage all seems elucidated: nihilism's place of origin is the 'West' (in which Heidegger probably included both Europe and America), and its period of unfolding corresponds to modernity (which, as we will see, means indeed the modernity that we have become accustomed to, namely, the last five centuries more or less). But more than a place and a time, the 'West' in modernity is a 'who', a cultural type, 'modern man', in whom coincide all dimensions of nihilism as a movement of history. It is this critique of *type*, as it were, that becomes central to any understanding of nihilism.

But it is also clear from this fragment that Heidegger's cultural geography of nihilism is not that simple: at once, he confounds us with homogenizing references to 'Western peoples'. How are we to take this general assembling of the subject of nihilism under such a totalizing manner of categorization? Might Heidegger mean something deeper with this gesture? That is one question; the other that immediately strikes us, especially if we are minded to place nihilism in the history of thought, is that Heidegger places it above other currents and outside the specific dynamic of such currents in what we take to be the usual history of ideas. Other than Christianity, humanism or the Enlightenment, nihilism is a historical movement and yet of a different kind, a fundamental kind, and one which goes so deep as to be 'scarcely recognised' although it is no less than the very destiny of the West. At this point, the passage about the

nature of nihilism used above comes back with its mysterious indication of a gesture of derecognition which accompanies the way in which nihilism moves. It is this derecognition that will later provide a clue to understanding how nihilism moves through the essence of modern man. But before that, it is important to note how Heidegger specifies further – and thus makes more difficult to grasp – the *unspecificity*, as it were, of the movement of nihilism in historical terms; he writes:

> Hence it is not only a phenomenon of the present age, nor is it primarily the product of the nineteenth century, in which to be sure a perspicacious eye for nihilism awoke, and the name also became current. No more is nihilism the exclusive product of particular nations whose thinkers and writers speak expressly of it. Those who fancy themselves free of nihilism perhaps push forward its development most fundamentally. It belongs to the uncanniness of this uncanny guest that it cannot name its own origin.[19]

Nihilism appears to be indicated here almost as standing outside of, over and above, history itself. So how can it still be a 'world-historical movement'? The text seems at once clear yet obstinately perplexing. Indications are that nihilism both moves somehow above the concrete particularities or localities of 'human agency' (as certain social theories think of it), yet the text names 'those who' might paradoxically carry nihilism's 'development most fundamentally'. Are there no anchors for us to grasp the content of this movement which seems always tantalizingly close and intuitive, and yet always withheld from the grasp by Heidegger himself? In some respects, it is perhaps what Heidegger intended with these comments. He never let himself, it seems, descend to the level of cultural pessimism of a particular kind, he could not suffer of course to let himself be a 'nihilist' in commentary. He, of course, treats Nietzsche as a thinker who could not overcome a certain philosophical position in the history of metaphysics and who remained, in Heidegger's view, the one who 'knew and experienced nihilism because he himself thought nihilistically'.[20] Heidegger certainly wants to be apart from that position. So he avoids systematically any possibility of identifying his thinking and elaboration of nihilism as a value judgement upon a specific place and time in the common sense of such a gesture. But that is not the only reason why his references to the 'location' in time and space of the movement of nihilism appear to be hard to decipher.

Heidegger, despite appearances, is actually very clear although what he has to say has long been hard to accept for cultural and intellectual historians over the last five decades. Heidegger indicates nihilism as a movement of planetary proportions both in space and in epochal terms. Nihilism is not a 'here' and a 'now'; it seems to be an 'everywhere' and an 'aeon' of the world. This nuance is important because it at once clarifies as well as confounds all attempts at a concrete historical interpretation of the dynamic by which the movement Heidegger describes unfolds. In this respect, it may be useful to introduce here

a passage from one of the historians mentioned in the beginning, Louis Dupré. In the concluding chapter of his *Passage to Modernity*, he writes:

> Modernity is an event that has transformed the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent source, and its human interpreter. To explain this as the outcome of historical precedents is to ignore its most significant quality – namely, its success in rendering all rival views of the real obsolete. Its innovative power made modernity, which began as a local Western phenomenon, a universal project capable of forcing its theoretical and practical principles on all but the most isolated civilisations. 'Modern' has become the predicate of a unified world culture.[21]

What Dupré is seeking here is not dissimilar to Heidegger's own positing of the planetary nature of the movement of nihilism in relation to the West and its inevitable expansion. But Dupré does not speak of nihilism; he speaks of modernity and yet the substance seems to be the same in respect to this total reach of the expansion of Western culture in the guise of the 'modern' as a manner of being in history. In this sense, Dupré speaks, like Blumenberg or Taylor, in the wake of Heidegger's thinking and with the means that Heidegger and Nietzsche made available to the understanding of European culture and its destiny.

The question that still remains unanswered is how are we to understand Heidegger's affirmation of the totalizing meaning of the movement of nihilism? He himself explains it in the same essay:

> The realm for the essence and event of nihilism is metaphysics itself, always assuming that by 'metaphysics' we are not thinking of a doctrine or only of a specialized discipline of philosophy but of the fundamental structure of beings in their entirety, so far as this entirety is differentiated into a sensory and a suprasensory world, the former of which is supported and determined by the latter. Metaphysics is the space of history in which it becomes destiny for the suprasensory world, ideas, God, moral law, the authority of reason, progress, the happiness of the greatest number, culture, and civilization to forfeit their constructive power and to become void.[22]

In the second sentence of this passage, Heidegger describes fully the content of the movement of nihilism and provides the key to understand both nihilism itself, its relation to the concrete history of modernity and the concrete world in which it unfolds, as well as the fundamental indication of *who* the subject of this history is.

But let us not move beyond the first sentence in the text which indicates something essential in how Heidegger wants us to think what he understands nihilism to be. Nihilism occurs in the realm of metaphysics and following a specific manner. This manner requires us to think of the relationship between

the 'suprasensory world', the world of ideas as a cultural historian would understand it, as grounding and determining the other, 'sensory world', the social contingent world of the 'everyday'. For Heidegger, this way of thinking about the relationship between contingent history and the fundamental ground to which the movement of nihilism belongs can never be sidestepped. In this respect, Heidegger's thought is, of course, always uncomfortable for the historians of contemporary culture. This is because he asks us to renounce one of the most fundamental values of historical interpretation: the 'agency' of man in the making of his or her own destiny. For all the dominant approaches to the analysis of modern culture are bound up with this sense of 'agency' as the principle from which history can be understood at all in the sense of modernity being the historical realm of 'free expression' of 'conscience' itself, of subjectivity. Heidegger explains why he does not see history in this way but rather in quite opposite terms:

> Into the position of the vanished authority of the God and of the teaching of the office of the Church steps the authority of conscience, obtrudes the authority of reason. Against these the social instinct rises up. The flight from the world into the suprasensory is replaced by historical progress. The otherworldly goal of everlasting bliss is transformed into the earthly happiness of the greatest number. The careful maintenance of the cult of religion is relaxed through the enthusiasm for the creating of a culture or the spreading of civilisation. Creativity, previously the unique property of the biblical god, becomes the distinctive mark of human activity. Human creativity finally passes over into business enterprise.[23]

Perhaps there is no clearer statement than this (although Heidegger explains this phenomenon in other texts) of the essence of the rise of modernity as a manifestation of the movement of nihilism. And perhaps it will now have become sufficiently clear, how the idea that contemporary history is the unfolding of 'incomplete nihilism'[24] is most uncomfortable for contemporary cultural history scholars – while, like Dupré, all see the destiny of modernity as being one of an uncertain subject, grown too big while being left too empty to carry the burden of the new position it occupies in the order of being.

Is it therefore now time to turn to the apparently paradoxical statement of the title of this contribution: a title that suggests that the movement of nihilism can be identified with the historical substance of modern man *as* self-assertion, with the occupation by a specific human form of the position described by Heidegger in his explanation of Nietzsche's thought 'God is dead'. What we propose here is quite simple: that the core of the movement of destructive nihilism is precisely the 'energetic affirmation' of the modern counter-reaction to the thinking of the nothing as essential in the thinking of being. As mentioned above,[25] Heidegger's pointing out in precisely these terms ('energetic affirmation' of the need to set to rights the 'nothing' as being

unworthy of serious attention) of the essence of the movement of nihilism points decisively, at the same time, towards the 'who' and the 'how' of this movement. The answer is startling: the 'who' of the movement of nihilism is not an isolated group, or a nation, or an individual thinking in nihilistic terms; the 'who' is 'modern man' in the most *popular* sense, as *bourgeois man*. Or, as Nietzsche and Heidegger present it, it is Descartes' man who thinks of himself as the measure of all things – but not in Protagoras' Greek sense (a reading against which Heidegger warns us explicitly in two chapters, 14 and 15, of Volume IV of the *Nietzsche* lectures) – rather it is modern man who thinks in the way Heidegger interprets Descartes for us:

> We have gathered from these introductory remarks on the distinction between Protagoras' saying and Descartes' principle that man's claim to a ground of truth found and secured by man himself arises from that 'liberation' in which he disengages himself from the constraints of biblical Christian revealed truth and church doctrine. . . . To be free now means that, in place of certitude of salvation, which was the standard for all truth, man posits the kind of certitude by virtue of which and in which he becomes certain of himself as the being that thus founds itself on itself.[26]

Herein lies the difficulty of both thought and affect with which we are faced in Heidegger's thinking of the movement of nihilism as a movement of modern man's assertion of himself as 'free' in the sense of being world-founding for himself. That which seems to be the fullest, most meaningful period in human history, modernity as the period in which the expression of the self, of the subjectivity of the subject, as a continuous affirmation of human potentialities, the period of what appears as man's fullest emancipation yet, comes to us in Heidegger's thinking as the intensified manifestation of nihilism. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this manner of thinking is not entirely secure for the cultural self-interpretation of modernity. Heidegger describes fully the self-positing of modern man as origin and measure of the new cultural synthesis:

> Viewed metaphysically, the new freedom is the opening up of a manifold of what in the future can and will be consciously posited by man himself as necessary and binding. The essence of the history of the modern age consists in the full development of these manifold modes of modern freedom.[27]

Not only freedom now appears to modern man as 'new', but it also appears as the possibility of it being in each case 'his' or 'her' own freedom – 'mine' as if it were mine only and unlike any other's. These words mark the insight with which Heidegger will have probably looked upon the culture which now exalts 'diversity' and 'uniqueness' as its highest values, the highest expression of 'the freedom to be what one truly is'. The sense of empowerment that comes

from the continuously repeated affirmation of the self-certainty that 'I', this particular 'I', may truly decide for itself what it is that 'I' can and will be, is, for Heidegger, 'possible only in and *as* the history of the modern age'.[28] The 'manifold' manifests in precisely this apparent liberation of the self for the self, in each individual case, and as the desirability – political, cultural, economic – of this metaphysical individualism taken as *the* principle of the cultural body of the modern synthesis. Heidegger calls this the 'empowering of the essence of power' and we ought perhaps to be able to read in this statement not simply an interpretation of Nietzsche but also a horizon of interpretation for what Heidegger calls elsewhere the 'self-assertion' of modern man. Let us ponder Heidegger's characterization of 'self-assertion' (although he does not explicitly call it so in this specific source) in an arresting paragraph in chapter 15 of *Nietzsche – Volume IV*, entitled *The Subject in the Modern Age*:

> The securing of supreme and absolute self-development of all the capacities of mankind for the absolute dominion over the entire earth is the secret goad that prods modern man again and again to new resurgences, a goad that forces him into commitments that secure for him the surety of his actions and the certainty of his aims.[29]

Immediately he proceeds to describe with clarity and brevity the essence of the various epochs, or currents, of the modern normative horizon of interpretation. It is the last comment he makes about modern man's founding norm that is important here. Heidegger says that this common ground is, in our time, as follows:

> Finally, it can be the creation of a mankind that finds the shape of its essence neither in 'individuality' nor in the 'mass', but in the 'type'. The type unites in itself in a transformed way the uniqueness that was previously claimed for individuality *and* the similarity and universality that the community demands. But the uniqueness of the 'type' consists in an unmistakable prevalence of the same coinage, which nonetheless will not suffer any dreary egalitarianism, but rather requires a distinctive hierarchy.[30]

The introduction of the category of 'type' in the analysis of the modern age helps us break through the conundrum that the setting up of the 'I', my own 'I' as reference point of valuation, leaves us with: modern man is not entangled in a war of all against all, the modern age is, as Nietzsche tells us, 'the most decent and compassionate age'.[31] The decency of the modern age lies in the bind of the modern 'type' that Heidegger defines: self-assertive modern man who understands all too well that self-assertion is at once individual but also the highest value that posits or grounds the community. 'Modern man' is thus a *form* that results from the specific moment of highest valuation that characterizes our epoch.

The answer to the question 'who is the subject of nihilism?' appears in this way: in manifold ways, a particular typical figure, or form, that functions as the vector of the historical movement which both Nietzsche and Heidegger call 'Nihilism', appears. If we are to understand nihilism historically, Heidegger tells us how: 'First, it is necessary to understand nihilism in a unified way as the history of valuations.'[32] If it is a history of valuations, then the present time is marked by modern man's self-assertive relation to Being.

This type, or form, in this specific relation, is described more fully by Heidegger in another key text that we will use in the final part of this chapter. Heidegger provides us with a sharply and powerfully developed picture of modern man's self-assertion, and of the way in which it is bound up with the unfolding of nihilism. The essay we are referring to is *Wozu Dichter*[33] – occasioned by the twentieth anniversary of Rainer Maria Rilke's death in 1946. The text synthesizes a series of Heidegger's ideas and interpretations that can be found in many other texts, but in this form we find an essential excursus that can help the analysis we tried to unfold here.

Heidegger compares in this essay modern man with the poets: 'Modern man, however, is the one who wills.'[34] He wills in the mode of 'purposeful self-assertion of the objectifying of the world'.[35] This is the ground that Heidegger sets out for his analysis of modern man. In this essay, he describes the mode of self-assertion at length and relates it to the category of will.

> The willing of which we speak here is the putting-through, the self-assertion, whose purpose *has already* posited the world as the whole of producible objects. This willing determines the nature of modern man, though at first he is not aware of its far-reaching implications, though he could not already know today by what will, as the Being of beings, this willing is willed. By such willing, modern man turns out to be the being who, in all relations to all that is, and thus in his relation to himself as well, rises up as the producer who puts through, carries out, his own self and establishes this uprising as the absolute rule. The whole objective inventory in terms of which the world appears is given over to, commended to, and thus subjected to the command of self-assertive production. Willing has in it the character of command; for purposeful self-assertion is a mode in which the attitude of the producing, and the objective character of the world, concentrate into an unconditional and therefore complete unity.[36]

The key point in this fragment is to understand how *production* is meant by Heidegger. Throughout the text, he deals with modern man's essence as a *producer* in the sense that the word acquires from its Latin root: *pro-ducere*, to bring forth, that denotes the form of *objectification* in which all modern positioning in the world takes place. The consequences of this mode of positioning in the world are taken by Heidegger to their logical conclusion, a conclusion which allows us to see clearly how intensely concrete the movement of nihilism is in

that it consists of the annihilation of all beings as such in their being, and their transformation into *objects*, things that stand-over-against man which are then used for man's dealings with the world as standing reserve (a category Heidegger does not mention explicitly in this text but which is alluded to permanently).

> The objectness, the standing-over-against, of production stands in the assertion of calculating propositions and of the theorems of the reason that proceeds from proposition to proposition. . . . Not only has reason established a special system of rules for its saying, for the *logos* as declarative prediction; the logic of reason is itself the organisation of the dominion of purposeful self-assertion in the objective.[37]

Reason is here the expression of the relationship that man has with being through *representation*. Heidegger emphasizes time and again that 'What stands as object in the world becomes *standing* in representational production. Such representation presents. But what is present is present in a representation that has the character of calculation.'[38] This is the specific relationship in which modern man can only exist as the subject who lives exclusively through subjectivity, that is, through the interior of consciousness as the site where presence can only appear as re-presentation. The subjectivity of the subject becomes the ground for modern man's existence and to this form Heidegger attributes the greatest danger, namely, man's relationship with *technology* as the frame through which the world might be put in order so that it ceases to present any danger and that it stands as a continuous possibility, a permanent potentiality for man's self-assertion of his *will*.

> What has long since been threatening man with death, and indeed with the death of his own nature, is the unconditional character of mere willing in the sense of purposeful self-assertion in everything. . . . What threatens man in his very nature is the view that technological production puts the world in order, while in fact this ordering is precisely what levels every *ordo*, every rank, down to the uniformity of production, and thus from the outset destroys the realm from which any rank and recognition could possibly arise.[39]

In this elaboration of the relationship that technology sets up for modern man with the world, Heidegger elucidates the nature of the modern economy as a levelling of all values in the name of the positing of values, as a pseudo-valuation. The transformation that the modern age effects in the way in which man stands with beings leads to a transformation of the world into an empty traffic with merchandise without weight or value.

> Self-willing man everywhere reckons with things and men as with objects. What is so reckoned becomes merchandise. Everything is constantly changed

> about into new orders. . . . Thus ventured into the unshielded, man moves within the medium of 'businesses' and 'exchanges'. Self-assertive man lives by staking his will. He lives essentially by risking his nature in the vibration of money and the currency of values. As this constant trader and middleman, man is the 'merchant'. He weighs and measures constantly, yet does not know the real weight of things.[40]

This is the essence of self-assertion: constant trade, constant objectification of things that only exist in exchanges without value. Nothing escapes this traffic of objects and nothing can thus be held as valuable. Yet this total movement of markets now encircles the planet and has become the highest value in itself to the extent that it represents the essential manifestation of modern man's nature as self-assertion – the self-assertion of that which is *valueless*.

> It is not only the totality of this willing that is dangerous, but willing itself, in the form of self-assertion within a world that is admitted only as will. The willing that is willed by this will is already resolved to take unconditional command. By that resolve, it is even now delivered into the hands of total organisation.[41]

Concluding Remarks

What we have attempted in this chapter is to explicate what the cultural content of the movement of nihilism in Heidegger's understanding might mean. We examined what he may have indicated to us in various texts by trying to interpret some of their key terms: 'self-assertion', 'willing' and 'will', 'unconditional command', and 'total organisation'. The aim was to understand what Heidegger, as a philosopher, may have to tell a cultural historian about our own age. Can we grasp how Heidegger articulates, from a philosophical standpoint, a historically particular manifestation of *humanitas* – that is, what is 'modern man' and his relationship to the world? What is essential to note when formulating such a question is that it operates with a thought that Heidegger himself did not have: namely, he never sought a concrete sociocultural type that might count as 'modern man', but rather understood 'humanity' as a thought that had been entirely *metaphysically* determined. Thus the question might be better asked: if the modern age is a historical synthesis in the movement of nihilism, how does its subject intensify its metaphysical process? The chapter investigated the simple but central question: what might be the content of this epoch's (modernity's) 'unity'? How does this 'unity' of the most unconditional epoch of *production* relate to the 'nihil' of the 'movement of nihilism'? The aim has been to establish, by way of a *cultural-historical critique*, how Heidegger's thought can help us understand our own concrete historical condition.

The result may, in fact, be simple: modernity – as the ultimate age of production and total organization, and as the epoch of self-assertion – appears to be a sign of the movement of 'nothingness', of 'the advent of nihilism', as Nietzsche put it, in a very specific way. This way is paradoxical: incomplete, or destructive, nihilism occurs through the self-assertion of modern man. Modern man, in his/her unlimited self-assertion, could be seen as being at once the subject, the site, and the historical event of nihilism's world catastrophes. This thought is bound to confound cultural analysis as we know it today. The movement of nihilism, as history, is, in Heidegger's conception, quite the contrary of what is taken for granted to be contemporary culture. For Heidegger, it is a planetary movement, a homogenizing feature of contemporary life. For cultural studies, the contemporary situation is characterized by opposites: it posits the 'good' of the 'diversity' of cultures, identities, political and social systems, and of economies. For Heidegger, modern man is 'empty' and estranged from the world, incapable of valuing, moved only by the restlessness of his 'will to will', by his sense of some endless possibility to enhance his subjectivity. Perhaps it would seem logical to conclude that, for Heidegger, modern man embodies the *nihil*, that modern man is the 'nothing' – yet, at precisely this point we would be wrong. Heidegger's extensive and nuanced commentary (throughout his oeuvre) of what the thought of the 'Nothing', 'in itself' and as such, entails, would most certainly not warrant such a crude conclusion. That nihilism which 'can have nothing but world catastrophe as its consequence'[42] is not a warrant to see Heidegger sentencing 'the history of the West'[43] for its purported nothingness. Heidegger warned against such interpretations of nihilism with great determination; we should not 'succumb to the ruinous passion for holding phenomena that are already and simply consequences of nihilism for the latter itself, or we set forth the consequences and effects as the causes of nihilism'.[44]

Still, the texts we have brought together in this chapter seem to indicate Heidegger's explicit condemnation of modern man in relation to nihilism; but how is this to be read? Perhaps a clue may come from re-reading the well-known second aphorism in *The Will To Power:* 'What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devaluate themselves.* The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer.'[45] One way to read the incapacity of modern man to see his own centrality in the intensification of destructive nihilism is that modern culture is precisely the unprecedented amplification of a sense of purposefulness. Modern everydayness is lived with the sentiment of having arrived at a point where ultimate purposefulness shines. The singular sense of self-certainty and self-possession engendered in self-assertion, appears as the ultimate moment of emancipation. To have relegated all gods to the condition of unnecessary ghosts, to have overcome all restraint in relation to being, to be in a daily rush to push away all hints of annihilation (through the proliferation of images of 'emergencies' generating new aims of conquest) – all these are 'aims', fully fledged, imperious, urgent. They are the aims that serve the central value of modernity: the self. It is at this point that the image of nihilism as the absence of aims is confounding: how can

that be? Aims are not lacking; they are, for modern man, everywhere and always bound up with the most important being – the self, *my* self, this one and no other, *me*.

But is it not in this that, for Heidegger, a historically intensified forgetfulness of Being might lie? In other words, is modern man not the historical embodiment of near-absolute forgetfulness in which what Heidegger calls 'everydayness'[46] becomes the only horizon of self- and world-understanding? And, in this sense, is modern man not *the* central character of destructive nihilism? Heidegger seems to name this condition when he draws attention to the fact that:

> Those who fancy themselves free of nihilism perhaps push forward its development most fundamentally.[47]

For cultural analysts this is, in the majority of cases, an unthinkable thought, a thought which can only dehumanize an otherwise primordial entity whose essence is not in doubt as such, whose humanity they posit as the highest value. This contrast is highly speculative and inferential but it may be a useful trigger for further thought on the modern age in that it asks the question of the essence of this age from a different viewpoint albeit with a degree of discomfort which seeks to be a source of debate rather than an endpoint, a resolution.

Notes

[1] We will refer in this chapter to the English translation published in the volume *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* pp. 53–112 (GA5). Specific comments are to be found, for instance, on pp. 67–70.

[2] We will be referring in this chapter to the English version produced by David Farrell Krell between 1979 and 1987 with Harper & Row, San Francisco (GA6.1 and GA6.2). Specific comments are to be found, for instance, in Vol. IV, p. 5 (1982, available in the 1991 paperback edition published by HarperCollins Publishers, New York) (GA6.2).

[3] Heidegger's *Nietzsche,* Vol. IV, p. 5 (GA6.2).

[4] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §28, p. 19 (we will be referring in this chapter to the English version produced by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Random House, 1967). To this aphorism Heidegger makes recourse in *The Word of Nietzsche: 'God Is Dead'* (Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 69, GA5).

[5] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 62 (GA5).

[6] The title of part one of Heidegger's *Nietzsche,* Vol. IV (GA6.2).

[7] For example, Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* §74 and §75, p. 48; Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV (GA6.2), pp. 98–100, or in his essay 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God Is Dead"', in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, pp. 53–112 (GA5).

[8] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, pp. 43ff. (GA6.2).

[9] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 3: 'What I relate is the history of the next two centuries.'

[10] All are historians of culture, or more accurately put, historians of *ideas*. All have been interested in systematic accounts of the self- and world-understanding of Europe in the modern age. The central texts that capture their positions are Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Dupré's *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, and Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. There are many other important authors in this line of research, of course, but we are not addressing them here.

[11] 'Planetary' is a reference to what Heidegger may be indicating with the word 'Erde', as it appears, for example, in his essay 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God Is Dead"' (in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* – GA5) on p. 63 or 101, to mention but two.

[12] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, §58, p. 40.

[13] Heidegger, *The Question of Being*, p. 36 (GA9).

[14] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 21 (GA6.2).

[15] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 22 (GA6.2).

[16] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 21 (GA6.2).

[17] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 22 (GA6.2).

[18] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, pp. 62–3 (GA5).

[19] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 63 (GA5).

[20] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 22 (GA6.2).

[21] Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, p. 249.

[22] 'The Word of Nietzsche: "God Is Dead"', in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 65 (GA5).

[23] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 64 (GA5).

[24] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, aphorism 28, p. 19.

[25] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 21 (GA6.2).

[26] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 97 (GA6.2).

[27] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 98 (GA6.2).

[28] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 98 (GA6.2).

[29] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 99 (GA6.2).

[30] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, pp. 99–100 (GA6.2).

[31] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, p. 7.

[32] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. IV, p. 53 (GA6.2).

[33] Translated as *What Are Poets For?,* in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 87–139 (GA5).

[34] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 138 (GA5).

[35] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 138 (GA5).

[36] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 108–9 (GA5).

[37] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 130 (GA5).

[38] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 124 (GA5).

[39] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 114 (GA5).

[40] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, pp. 132–3 (GA5).

[41] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 114 (GA5).

[42] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 62 (GA5).

[43] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 62 (GA5).

[44] Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 65 (GA5).

[45] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power,* p. 9.

[46] Heidegger, *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics,* §43, p. 164 (GA3): 'Dasein in man is first made visible precisely within that mode of human Being which it established, according to its essence, to suppress Dasein and the understanding of Being which pertains to it (i.e., original finitude) in forgetfulness. This decisive mode of the Being of Dasein – seen solely from the standpoint of Fundamental Ontology – we call everydayness.'

[47] Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, p. 63 (GA5).

Chapter 3

Heidegger's 'Movement of Nihilism' as Political and Metaphysical Critique

Laurence Paul Hemming

The phrase 'movement of nihilism' (*Bewegung des Nihilismus*) is Heidegger's cryptic reference in the 1950s essay *Zur Seinsfrage* to the ferment of the Germany of 1933–1945 and specifically to the Nazi Party itself.[1] However the phrase is not confined to this: the phrase appears much earlier, in his *Nietzsche* lectures specifically, where nihilism itself is referred to as a 'movement'.[2] Heidegger argues that:

> If European nihilism is not simply *one* historical movement among others, but *the* fundamental groundmovement (*Grundbewegung*) of our history, then the interpretation of nihilism and our viewpoint with respect to it from our relation to history in general, depends on whether and how the history of our humanity and being-human determines itself.[3]

The 1961 edition of these lectures alters these words to intensify their significance within Heidegger's own thought. The last sentence changed 'humanity and being-human' for 'human *Dasein*', so that the whole reads 'then the interpretation of nihilism and our stance with respect to it depend on how and whence the historicity of human *Dasein* determines itself for us'.[4]

Something determines itself for us which obviates the force of every view- and standpoint we might take up, and at the same time determines that very standpoint and relation for us. In interpreting every place we might take up, its possibilities are already laid out in advance and are emplacing us. This double-determining, of ourselves *with respect to* (the standpoint of the modern subject) and *being determined from out of* (which we instinctively resist and shrink from), names and lays out *place* in Heidegger's understanding. For the *movement of Nihilism* certainly named for Heidegger, already by 1940 and certainly by 1935, the triad of Fascism (Nazism), Bolshevism and World Democracy. We would like to say only one of these remains as a genuine possibility in the present situation, and yet even the anchors holding this one in place seem daily to spring from their fastenings to displace us into – what? Or is it that even in claiming that

'only one of these remains' we have already overlooked and failed to see in any serious way the essence, the inner unity, of the triad – no necessary triad in itself, and to which other determinations could be added. Even if we were to bring each of them under the heading of 'nationalism', Heidegger confounds any security of interpretation we might gain here by adding in the inversion of every nationalism, so that (in *Le Thor* in 1969) Heidegger observed the development of 'the transformation of biology into *biophysics*',[5] such that the human being can be produced according to a definite plan like any other technological object. His observation in response to this is intriguing in the greatest degree: 'in this regard, the emergence of a new form of nationalism must be thought through, one which is grounded upon technological power and no longer (in order to give an example) on the characteristics of a people.'[6]

Zeus and the πόλις

We should, perhaps, begin, not in this most arid abyss of the entire self-consumption of the self with itself as self-producing object to itself – no less explained by the phenomenon of the advertising of commodities in the mass media as by biophysics, which means both that the art of consumption has supplanted any consumption or understanding of art and that the human being as a work of science is at one and the same time a work of art, where world and the gods disappear because the self has supplanted the place of the divine and at the same time is sufficient unto itself as a world for itself (this says the same thing as 'you have your truth and I have mine: we are gods, and all of us men, masters of the universe') for this still begs the question: *which self*, 'who?', who attains to this?

If we begin at the beginning of Western thinking, we begin to think how the movement of nihilism takes off, this groundswell of the whole of human history, and in what way. For Heidegger, the Greek gods 'jut' (the verb is *ragen*) into being, in a way that is already (he claims) in decline in the inception of metaphysics, in Aristotle and Plato. Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus' *Fragment 32* reveals how Zeus (in this fragment) does indeed jut into being,[7] and takes away from mortal men their mere preoccupation with themselves, letting something else come to presence even as Zeus himself presences. It is easy to see, in a manner, how the one, the *en* (ἕν), presences as the all, *panta* (πάντα), with regard to the presencing of Zeus as one higher than the merely mortal and so opening out the field of the one so that mortals may, under Zeus' aegis, appear within it.

Heidegger's interpretation with respect to Zeus' presencing turns upon the meaning of the verb *legein* (λέγειν) as saying, talking, naming. Heidegger argues however that Heraclitus' use of the verb must also be understood in its older, and more originary, sense of laying and gathering. *Legein* is the laying that gathers. The fragment as a whole says:

Ἕν τὸ Σοφὸν μοῦνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει
καὶ ἐθέλει Ζηνὸς ὄνομα
the One, the singularly wise, is not wont
and yet wants to be called Zeus by name

Heidegger considers carefully the apparent ambiguity of the fragment: 'the carrying word of the saying, *ethelō* (ἐθέλω), does not indicate "wanting", but: of itself from here to be ready for . . . ; *ethelō* means not a mere demanding, but: to allow something a relating-back to itself'.[8] The one, the all, is not ready to be assembled under the name Zeus, 'for were the *En* to come to appearance as Zeus through such an assembling, then perhaps it would always have to remain as a semblance'.[9] The *ethelō* therefore names a reserve, a holding back that, inasmuch as Zeus does come to presence, at the same time ensures that our attention remains fixed also with the 'wherein', the 'how' of Zeus' presencing. Inasmuch as Zeus presences, the being of beings also comes to pass.

Heidegger places Zeus in relation to the One-All (Ἕν Πάντα) not as merely what is given in naming and saying, but as Λόγος, *Logos* as such: 'Ἕν Πάντα says what the Λόγος is. Λόγος says, how Ἕν Πάντα essentially occurs. Both are the same.'[10] The *Logos*, as the unifying gathering, discloses all that is in presencing. Disclosure here is *alētheia* (ἀλήθεια), the drawing out from concealment, *lēthē* (λήθη), of whatever is to come to presencing. Heidegger says that 'the Ἀ-λήθεια rests in the Λήθη, summoning out of, laying before, what through it remains lying within. The Λόγος is *in itself and at once* a revealing and concealing. It is the Ἀλήθεια.'[11]

The interpretation turns on the second half of the fragment Heidegger comments: 'naming means calling forth. That which in name is gathered and laid down, comes through such a laying to lie before, and to appear.'[12]

This is perhaps one of the clearest places in which Heidegger lays out the intrinsic connection upon which so much of his work draws, between ἀλήθεια as disclosure, speaking as *logos*, and *lēthē* as concealment. What is of particular significance here is that each of the terms: *Alētheia*, *Logos*, *Lēthē*, *En Panta*, is capitalized in the text. Not only are we dealing with the intrinsic connections, as Heidegger interprets Heraclitus, but at the same time we are dealing with the very being of these beings – with how they come to pass in being: our attention is being drawn to the 'how' of being bringing beings to be. The verb here is *west*, 'essences', 'occurs essentially'. In leading us into these fundamental connections, Heidegger shows us the presencing in its most originary presencing (in the fragment of Heraclitus), of being as a whole, the being of beings as the 'all'. This connection is made more explicit (although in essentially the same way, and in the same terms with the same capitalization) where elsewhere Heidegger comments on Heraclitus, when he argues that what occurs in the *en* is such that 'the uniting and unifying as referring to being as a whole and therefore at the same time referring to the being as such, must then also be the basis of the Λόγος.'[13]

The appearing of Zeus, and the naming of the one–all in him, first appears in reserve, as a holding back, and only then is said *as* Zeus. This holding reservedly allows the One–All, the Ἕν–Πάντα to be 'seen', or rather to be understood. Heidegger says of how we are to understand this:

> The Ἕν does not, according to the fragment, admit of being named Zeus. In what way? . . . The Ἕν is not attained from itself here as the Λόγος, rather it appears as the Πάντα, *then* and only then does the whole of presencing under the direction of the highest presencing show itself as the single whole under this particular one. The whole of presencing is under its highest the Ἕν as Zeus. The Ἕν itself, however, as Ἕν Πάντα is the Λόγος, the gathering that lays out. As the Λόγος, the Ἕν alone is τὸ Σοφόν, the Fatefully as fate itself: the gathering of destiny into presencing.[14]

Inasmuch as Zeus genuinely appears, and inasmuch as there is a reserve in his appearing, a withholding in his appearing, Zeus, in the letting-appear of the all (the Πάντα), the character, the very 'how' of the appearing of the *En* can be understood as the presencing of presences; not merely the extantness of whatever is (this being, that being – what Heidegger calls *das Seiende*), but beings in their being (*das Seiendeim Ganzen*). The presencing of presence is both fateful – it is binding, for mortals and for Zeus – and is being in its unfolding. Heidegger says of this: 'The presencing of presences the Greeks call τὸ ἐόν, which means τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὄντων, Latin *esse entium*; we say: the being of beings. Since the beginning of Western thinking the being of beings has unfolded itself as the singular thoughtworthyness.'[15]

In speaking of the being of beings, *Sein des Seienden*, why does Heidegger not employ the archaic *Seyn* rather than *Sein*? In the unfolding of the fateful, of *Logos* as such, the presence of presencing gives itself to be thought, because *Logos*, in becoming the 'guiding word' for Heraclitus, was not actually thematized and brought to the fore as the being of beings as such.[16] The name *Logos* becomes the essential determining of language, of saying and speaking as such in Heraclitus and even in what succeeds him, and inasmuch as Heraclitus – even if not well understood by those around him – in naming and summoning Zeus in *Fragment 32* speaks for Greek thinking in all that follows. Yet, Heidegger adds (we might say 'if') 'in fact, the Greeks *dwelt* in this essence of Language. However, they have never *thought* this essence of language, not even Heraclitus.'[17] If in Heraclitus and Parmenides we are being led into *Alētheia*, *Logos*, *Lēthē*, *En*, *Panta*, in their originary sense (corresponding to what Plato sought to name in naming *anamnesis*), however, as Heidegger frequently points out, 'beginning in Sophistry and with Plato appearance is explained as mere appearance and thereby degraded. At one and the same time being as ἰδέα came to be exalted in a supersensory place.'[18] We see from this what, for Heidegger, threatens the appearance of Zeus in Heraclitus' *Fragment 32*. For Zeus is destined ever to remain a mere semblance and so not lie genuinely and originarily before us in

the emergence and exaltation of the *idea* as such in Plato. As such disclosure, *logos*, the one and the all, the names we may give being as a whole, cease to name what is *also* called forth in the calling forth of Zeus, but rather name something now 'over' Zeus, 'more real', yet nevertheless inaccessible, in a supersensory place or realm.

The word Plato uses to place the ideas or rather to deprive them of presencing place, is *epekeina* (ἐπέκεινα), 'over there', 'beyond'.[19] The ideas are the 'beyond' to beings, such that they are, strictly speaking, more real than the beings which are in presencing.[20] Heidegger speaks of what is in presencing (*anwesend*) as a counter-term to presence as such (*Anwesenheit*). For Heraclitus, as Heidegger interprets him, presence, as the 'being as such' appears in presencing, as being as a whole. For Plato, pure presence is the idea, which deprives the merely present of its presence, and makes of it mere semblance.

It is clear, therefore, that Heidegger, in speaking of Zeus having to remain a mere semblance, is directly opposing Heraclitus' laying out of the meaning of *logos* to Plato's understanding of *idea* not because the *logos* is something strictly speaking present, but rather because it is through the presencing of what presences that the whole of being as the being of beings is to be understood.

Plato speaks of the divine in connection with the 'idea of the good', first, however, by speaking only of the coming of the 'likeness of a man' that 'Homer also called the appearance and likeness of the divine in and among men'.[21] It is this understanding – the understanding of divinity appearing and unfolding itself in and among men – in and as the *En* – that Plato presses out such that 'among the heavens that one of the gods' the *agathon* (ἀγαθόν) becomes the divinely thought *idea* that is, Plato says – *kyrion* (κύριον) – ruling, for all the rest.[22]

Inasmuch as every word that names the being of beings becomes an idea referred to a supersensory realm, then, Heidegger says 'that thinking goes μετ'ἐκεῖνα, "over" the former, that which is only experienced as shadowy and copied, out εἰς ταῦτα, "away to" the latter, namely to the "ideas"'.[23] In this, being as a whole withdraws, to be resolved in an entirely other direction. Plato resolves being as a whole through ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, the idea of 'the good',[24] as that highest idea which lets everything else be seen and yet remains most difficult to see of all.[25] The absolutely 'beyond' of all beings is what makes possible the being of every being, the idea *of* the ideas, the *agathon*, typically translated as the 'good beyond being'. Heidegger explains the coming to the fore of what comes to be known as the idea of the good in the following way. If the seeable is disclosed through the *idea*, then, he says, 'every ἰδέα, the appearance of something, provides a look at what each being is. Thought in a Greek way the ideas make something suitable to appear as what it is and thus be present in its constancy. The ideas are the being (*Seiende*) of each being (*Seiende*).'[26] Heidegger argues that Plato thinks the original meaning of *to agathon* as the suitable, or the making-suitable, what makes beings fit to be beings.[27] This making suitable, insofar as any being is in fact an idea, is the making suitable of ideas in general,

the idea of ideas: 'The essence of every idea certainly consists in the making possible and making suitable of the appearing which grants a look of its outward appearance. Therefore the idea of ideas is the purely making-suitable, τὸ ἀγαθόν.'[28] In other remarks about *to agathon*, Heidegger traces its relation to transcendence. As the making suitable of all beings, *to agathon* is in a sense being itself, but being as constant presence, the always-extantness of everything that is extant, what is 'most beingful' about them. It is what lies beyond the changeableness of all *apparent* beings, which as most stable, makes their changeableness possible. Here, immediately, not only Plato's idea of ideas, but the origin and ontological root and necessity of Aristotle's 'first mover' or the unmoved in all that is moved, *to akinēton* (τὸ ἀκίνητον), becomes obvious. Heidegger cites Plato: 'Thus it is said of ἀγαθόν, ἔστι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσιας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει. "The good is above and beyond even being in worth and power; that is to say, in βασιλεία, dominion" – not merely above and beyond unconcealment.'[29] This transcendence is, Heidegger says: 'that which one must consider the most original, insofar as the ideas are already transcendent with regard to changeable beings'.[30] However, if Heidegger does not speak of *Seyn* in connection with Heraclitus, but only the being of beings as *Sein des Seienden*, still he further speaks of the *esse entium*, the being of beings. The being of beings thought as *esse entium* is that Latin phrase which marks the high-point of metaphysical thinking, of being as a whole (*das Seiende im Ganzen*) as being overall, or being in general (*das Seiende überhaupt*), and therefore as God as such. I have discussed at length elsewhere how both being overall and the idea of the good are resolved as divine names, and how Heidegger resolves being overall as the metaphysical name for God.[31]

What is essential here, however, is that the highest value, the 'idea of the good' as valuation *as such* is itself detached by Nietzsche from divinity (the divinity that Plato himself explicitly names), such that value itself and the capacity and will to valuation supplants and occupies the divine place. It is in this sense that one must interpret Nietzsche's claim that 'at bottom indeed only the moral God has been overcome'.[32] Heidegger says: 'this God understood morally – and only this – is meant, in so far as Nietzsche says "God is dead".'[33] Heidegger resists in several places the identification of the *agathon* with the (moral) good,[34] which occurs precisely because of the identification of the 'idea of the good' with the 'highest good', *summum bonum*, of metaphysics. For Heidegger 'Nietzsche, because for him all knowledge is derived from the metaphysical origin of "value", is the most unrestrained Platonist in the history of Western Metaphysics' and yet 'has less prejudicially held fast to the essence of the ἀγαθόν' than anyone else in present thought.[35]

Aristotle and Heidegger

It is in Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle that we can see most clearly the way in which a transformation with respect to *Dasein* is undertaken as a political

transformation. Heidegger's most intense engagement with Aristotle took place in the years before the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, first in lectures in Marburg as a *Privatdozent* but then even more intensely in lectures given in Marburg between 1923 and 1925. In lectures in 1924 on Aristotle, central to the working out of the thought of *Sein und Zeit* itself, Heidegger remarked 'ethics concerns itself with the ἦθος, the being of man'.[36] Heidegger means here the being of man taken not ontically – as in the being of an object, but the being of being human in its respective being, '*that* being to whose being constituted the understanding of being belongs, *Dasein*'.[37] To what extent does the very term *ēthos* (ἦθος), *ta ēthikēn* (τὰ ἠθικήν – the ethical), function as another way of saying *Dasein*?

The conventional interpretation of the relationship between Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (taking aside the problematic character of the connection between the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* and their overlapping contents), is that the *Nicomachean Ethics* deals with the 'ethics' of the human subject by considering the means by which the individual achieves happiness (for his own sake) and then in the *Politics* we proceed to considering the social and institutional forms within which that happiness can unfold. The distinction is secured on the basis of a particular interpretation of a sentence early on in the *Ethics*, which appears to set the individual over against the nation or state, the *polis* (πόλις). Aristotle speaks here of the *agathon* as the 'end' of the questions at hand. The *agathon* is usually translated as 'the good', and Aristotle says that 'even if [the ἀγαθόν] is as much the same for the individual as it is for the πόλις,' adding 'to attain and preserve that of the πόλις is greater indeed and most complete'.[38] This is then taken together with a statement immediately following that appears to set the individual *over against* the πόλις: 'this is desirable indeed for that one, but yet more perfect and divine for the nation or the race of men.' This is, however, an entirely modern interpretation. The Greek sets up not an opposition but a comparative – because if the *agathon* is the same for the individual and the *polis* as a whole, then the individual's *agathon* is most completed in the fulfilment of that of the entire *polis*. The individual is not set up over the πόλις, but rather taken as one *out of* the *polis*. The *agathon* in each case is the same *agathon*.

So far we have left the word *agathon* untranslated. The translations usually offer 'the good', 'the good as such' as the meaning of the term *agathon*, *tagathon*. Thus they speak of the *Ethics* as setting out the science of the 'highest good', 'supreme Good',[39] taking as their license the opening statement of the *Ethics* that 'the ἀγαθόν is that on which all things are set'.[40] Aristotle does indeed open the *Nicomachean Ethics* with an enquiry into the 'science' (ἐπιστήμη) with which the work is concerned. However, Aristotle asserts that the material we know as the *Ethics* (within which the words *ēthikē*, *ethos* are notably absent) in fact aim for the character of what politics is.[41] Classically, this character is taken off from the translation of the *agathon* as 'the good'. However, the *Ethics* does not say this, rather it says that it is set on the knowledge, not of the *agathon* 'in itself', but of some 'what' (τις) that is *politikē* (πολιτική),

therefore the 'what' of the political, '*politics*'. This has been resolved in subsequent interpretation, especially in what Heidegger calls 'metaphysics' by an appeal to the 'highest' good, the *summum ens*, which in Mediæval and later thought is a name for God, and in contemporary discourse is named simply as the 'end' of ethics itself (we all, after all, know what 'the good' is, don't we?).

Heidegger discusses the meaning of the actual term *agathon* with respect to Aristotle, not in connection with the *Ethics*, but Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, in another lecture course of 1924. He begins first, however, by clarifying the meaning of what brings anything to light at all, namely what allows us to understand 'the aristotelian determining of the *Dasein* of men as ζωὴ πρακτική'.[42] Heidegger argues that 'Aristotle determines the being of men as a ζωὴ πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγου ἔχοντος, "a life, and as such πρακτικήν, of the being as such that has language".'[43] The word *praktikē* (πρακτική) does not merely mean 'practical' but 'fundamentally concerned with movement'. The very being of human *Dasein* is *as changing and subject to change*. Heidegger then enquires into the meaning of language as *logos* in Aristotle. Heidegger says of the *logos* that 'in speaking about something I make it present, I bring it into the here'.[44]

Heidegger then cites Aristotle's *Politics* in a way that recapitulates the basis for my earlier refusal of the distinction between the individual and the *polis*, noting that 'being-in-the-world' means for Aristotle '*In the being of man itself lies the basic possibility of being-in-the-*πόλις. In being-in-the-πόλις Aristotle sees the particular being of man,'[45] which Heidegger characterizes as being-with-one-another '"*Miteinandersein*", κοινωνία'.[46] We should hear the word 'possibility' with a far stronger sense than we are used to taking it in ordinary English. It does not denote mere choice, but the 'energy' of as yet unactivated potentialities. Every individual is thereby taken off from out of his or her already basic being-in-the-world as being-in-the-polis. It is from this basic understanding that Aristotle seeks the being of human being as a self-understanding. As a self-understanding, it has as its intrinsic possibility (this denotes a kind of necessity, it *must* be like this) of being expressed, that is, spoken. Heidegger notes that 'inasmuch as Λόγος produces the having-here of the with-one-another (*Miteinander-Dahaben*) of the world: in itself it [i.e. Λόγος] constitutes it as the determining of being-with-one-another'.[47] What we are in pursuit of, therefore, is the *logos*, the actual speaking, that brings to light the *da* of *Dasein*. This speaking arises on the basis of being-in-the-world as being-in-the-polis. Those familiar with *Sein und Zeit* will be immediately familiar with the connection between *Miteinandersein* and speaking: what will perhaps be new is the characterization of *Miteinandersein* as the *polis* as understood by Aristotle.

From having established the basis of this kind of speech, Heidegger raises the question of what would happen if we attempted to bring to light how 'the world in a determinate "aspect" is here (*da*), in an aspect relative to the "subject", which means the world encountered only in a "subjective aspect" not properly in itself'.[48] He adds that this subject/object distinction must be cut off, because not only can it not be found in Greek philosophy, but its meaninglessness there

disbars us from any understanding of what is meant by 'being' in the Greeks. For our purposes, any attempt to understand the meaning of the 'political' (πολιτική) by an appeal to either the (Cartesian) subject or the object of contemporary philosophical discourse will fail.

It is in this context that we pursue the meaning of the *agathon*. Heidegger draws our attention to Aristotle's definition in the *Rhetoric* of the *agathon* as 'αὐτὸ ἑαυτοῦ αἱρετόν, that, which is "in itself concerning itself graspable for the sake of itself" – here we therefore have the determining of the ἀγαθόν as οὗ Ἕνεκα, "for the sake of itself", "concerning its own for-the-sake-of".'[49] You will recognize the phrase οὗ Ἕνεκα as one of the 'four causes' of the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Heidegger concludes 'that the ἀγαθόν primarily is an end, τέλος, more exactly, πέρας'.[50] Limit, *peras* (πέρας), is 'a fundamental determination of being',[51] it is the way an end manifests itself in an 'orientation towards'. We might say, following Heidegger, 'being towards death' is precisely the manifestation of the *peras* of death in the life of an individual human being or *Dasein*, although this is to run ahead from 1924 to 1927.

The *agathon*, normally translated as 'the good' turns out to be 'that which is for the sake of itself *as* itself', but in its fulfilment, and as the completion of something. As an ontological determination, and therefore with respect to *Dasein*, it is the sense of the end towards which I am directed *from within the pursuit of that end*.

Inasmuch as we have secured this understanding of the *agathon* in Aristotle, this necessarily transforms the way in which we read the opening sections of the *Ethics*. Translated within the history of metaphysics, the *Ethics* is a book about that most ethical of objects, 'the Good' as 'the highest' and the 'Supreme' Good. But the text does not actually say this. It says that it seeks the character of a particular kind of *agathon*. Thought like this, it says that the book lays out the means by which the *agathon* as the 'end' of a particular 'science' can be sought and identified within the being of man himself, as he *is* that being.

In the first instance, we note that now the *agathon* is no longer an 'end' in itself – 'the Good', but rather, the *sense and understanding of* the end, the 'for the sake of which' which discloses *an* end-in-itself, so that there could be many ἀγαθοί, and we are looking for the end of a *particular* one. We have already seen, however, what the *Ethics* is really about: *politikē*, the political. The *Ethics* is about bringing to light, and so to *logos*, (speech) the political as a kind of science. Let us note at this stage, therefore, that the political is contrasted with another science which has another end, the 'science' of the theoretical, *theēria* (θεωρία). This is the highest of the three possible lives for man, each representing an *agathon*: the (merely) pleasurable (ἡδονικός), the political (πολιτικός), and the theoretical (θεωρητικός).[52] The theoretical is dealt with elsewhere: we are concerned with the *agathon* of the political. This is because the *agathon* of the political is distinguished from that of the merely pleasurable because it is more basic to the being of being human. As so often with Aristotle, what leads us into the basis of something is more immediate – the distinction

between pleasure and pain (λύπη), the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake, but this is insufficiently determinative *in itself*, it is only the passageway-in to what is to be grasped.

What, therefore, is distinctive about the *agathon* of the political? The 'for its own sake' of the political shows itself up through *praxis* (πρᾶξις), as that being which is proper to man's own being – *Dasein*. Every *praxis* of man has a *telos* (τέλος), an 'end in itself', which is at the same time a limit, *peras*. Heidegger concludes 'insofar as the being of man is determined through πρᾶξις, every πρᾶξις has a τέλος; insofar as the τέλος of each πρᾶξις as πέρας is the ἀγαθόν, ἀγαθόν *is the specific being-character of man*. The ἀγαθόν is a determining of the being of man in the world . . . the being-character of concern, and thereby of *Dasein* itself.'[53] We may conclude, from the perspective of Heidegger's statement of 1969 at Le Thor, that, strictly speaking, what Aristotle denotes with the word *agathon*, routinely now translated as 'the' good, in fact for the Heidegger of 1925 and of *Sein und Zeit* is the meaning of being, *Sinn des Seins*, as such. As the meaning of being it arises on the basis of what Heidegger calls *Miteinandersein*, being-with-one-another, being-in-the-polis. Inasmuch as Heidegger's lectures of 1925, as the working out of the meaning of the *Da* of *Dasein* and the meaning of *Miteinandersein* and *In-der-Welt-Sein*, it becomes clear that, strictly speaking, *Sein und Zeit* and in particular the structural analytic of *Dasein* which it contains, is only possible on the basis of an interpretation of the being of man as φύσει πολιτικόν ζῶον,[54] 'by nature the political animal' and 'the political' as such. As an interpretation of *Sein und Zeit* this however, must be tempered by Heidegger's sharp characterization that insofar as there is a connection between the *epistēmē politikēn* (the human being as ζῶον πολιτικόν) and Aristotle's characterization of man as the *zōon logon echon*,[55] nevertheless at one and the same time 'the Aristotelian statement that man ζῶον πολιτικόν, states that man is that very being (*Wesen*) that is capable of belonging to the πόλις; but this entails precisely that he is not, without further ado, "political" '.[56] This is a reinforcement of his claim that '*the* πόλις *does not admit of being determined politically*'.[57]

Nietzsche Again

We conclude, therefore with Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. For if we might have begun to see what is at issue with Heidegger's statement that 'the interpretation of nihilism and our viewpoint with respect to it from our relation to history in general', we should have ringing in our ears all the way through, Heidegger's other claim about Nietzsche, that:

> what Nietzsche here undertakes with regard to the world entirety is a kind of 'negative theology', which tries to grasp the absolute as purely as possible which holds at bay all relative, which means all those that relate to human,

determinations. In this sense Nietzsche's determination of the world totality is a negative theology without the Christian God.[58]

Notes

[1] Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage* [*Über 'Die Linie'*] (*Wegmarken* [GA9]), pp. 386, 391–3 and 395.

[2] Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus* (GA48 =*Nietzsche* [GA6.2]), p. 61 (=59).

[3] Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus* (GA48 =*Nietzsche* [GA6.2]), p. 61 (=101): 'Wenn nun aber der europäische Nihilismus nicht nur *eine* geschichtliche Bewegung unter anderen ist, sondern *die* Grundbewegung unserer Geschichte, dann hängt die Deutung des Nihilismus und die Stellungnahme zu ihm von unserem Verhältnis zur Geschichte überhaupt ab und d.h. davon, ob und wie die Geschichte unser Menschentum und Menschsein selbst bestimmt.'

[4] Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus* in *Nietzsche* (GA6.2), pp. 101: 'wie und von woher sich uns die Geschichtlichkeit des menschlichen Daseins bestimmt.'

[5] Heidegger, *Seminare* (GA15), p. 358: 'Die Verwandlung der Biologie in *Biophysik*.'

[6] Heidegger, *Seminare* (GA15), p. 358: 'Im Hinblick darauf müßte hier das Auftreten einer neuer Form von Nationalismus durchdacht werden, der auf technische Macht und nicht mehr (um ein Beispiel zu nennen) auf Eigentümlichkeiten der Völker gegründet ist.'

[7] See Heraclitus, Fragment 32 in H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, p. 85. The relevant part of the fragment says 'the one, the singularly wise, is not wont and yet wants to be called Zeus by name.' (ἕν τὸ σοφὸν μοῦνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλαι Ζηνὸς ὄνομα.)

[8] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), pp. 227f.: 'Das tragende Wort des Spruches, ἐθέλω, bedeutet nicht "wollen", sondern: von sich her bereit sein für . . .; ἐθέλω meint nicht ein bloßes Fordern, sondern: in der Rückbeziehung auf sich selber etwas zulassen.'

[9] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 228: 'Denn durch solche Versammlung käme das {En als Zeus, der vielleicht immer nur ein Anschein bleiben müßte.'

[10] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 226: '῾ΕνΠάντα sagt, was der Λόγος ist. Λόγος sagt, wie ῾Εν Πάντα west. Beide sind das Selbe.'

[11] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), pp. 225f.: 'Die Ἀ-λήθεια ruht der Λήθη, schöpft aus dieser, legt vor, was durch diese hinterlegt bleibt. Der Λόγος "ist *in sich zumal* ein Entbergen und Verbergen. Er ist die Ἀ-λήθεια' (original italics).

[12] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 228: 'Nennen heißt: hervorrufen. Das im Namen gesammelt Neidergelegte kommt durch solches Legen zum Vorliegen und Vorschein.'

[13] Heidegger, *Heraklit* (GA55), p. 266: 'Das Einen und Vereinen in Bezug auf das Seiende im Ganzen und d.h. zugleich in Bezug auf das Seiende als solches muß dann auch der Grundzug des Λόγος sein.'

[14] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 229: 'Läßt jedoch das ῞Εν nach dem Spruch die Benennung als Zeus auch wieder zu. Inwiefern? [. . .] Wird das

Ἕν nicht von ihm selbst her als der Λόγος vernommen, erscheint es vielmehr als das Πάντα, *dann*, und nur dann zeigt sich das All des Anwesenden unter dem Steuer des höchsten Anwesenden als das eine Ganze unter diesem Einen. Das Ganze des Anwesenden ist unter seinem Höchsten das Ἕν als Zeus. Das Ἕν selbst jedoch als ἝνΠάντα ist der Λόγος, die lesende Lege. Als der Λόγος ist das Ἕν allein τὸ Σοφόν, das Geschickliche als das Geschick selber: die Versammlung des Schickens ins Anwesen.'

[15] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 232: 'Das Anwesen des Anwesenden heißt bei den Griechen τὸ ἐόν, d.h. τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὄντων, römisch: esse entium; wir sagen: das Sein des Seienden. Seit dem Beginn des abendländischen Denkens entfaltet sich das Sein des Seienden als das einzig Denkwürdige.'

[16] Cf. Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 233. Heidegger speaks here of ὁ Λόγος as the 'Leitwort'.

[17] Heidegger, *Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)* (GA7), p. 233: 'In der Tat: die Griechen *wohnten* in diesem Wesen der Sprache. Allein, sie haben dieses Wesen der Sprache niemals *gedacht*, auch Heraklit nicht' (original italics).

[18] Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (GA40), p. 113: 'Erst in der Sophistik und bei *Platon* wird der Schein zum bloßen Schein erklärt und dadurch herabgesetzt. In einem damit wird das Sein als ἰδέα an einem übersinnlichen Ort hinaufgesetzt.'

[19] Plato does indeed speak of 'τὸν νοη τὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς', the place intelligible for the soul (Plato, *Republic*, 517 B).

[20] For Heidegger's discussion of this, see in particular M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (GA34), pp. 106–12, as well as *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (GA9), pp. 203–38.

[21] Plato, *Republic*, 501 B: 'τὸἀνδρείκελον . . . Ὅμηρος ἐκάλεσεν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθώποις ἐγγιγνόμενον θεοειδές τε καὶ θεοείκελον'.

[22] Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 508 A–B: 'τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ θεῶν τούτον κύριον . . . τἀγαθὸν'.

[23] Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (GA9), p. 235: 'Das Denken geht μετ'ἐκεῖνα "über" jenes, was nur schattenschaft und abbildmäßig erfahren wird, hinaus, εἰςταῦτα "hin zu" diesen, nämlich den "Ideen".'

[24] For a full discussion of the formation of the ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ as the idea of ideas and being as such in Plato, and Heidegger's commentary on that, see L. P. Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism*, pp. 135–49.

[25] Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 517 Bf.

[26] Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (GA9), pp. 227f.: 'Jede ἰδέα, das Aussehen von etwas, gibt die Sicht auf das, was je ein Seiendes ist. Die "Ideen" machen daher, griechisch gedacht, dazu tauglich, daß etwas in dem, was es ist, erscheinen und so in seinem Beständigen anwesen kann. Die Ideen sind das Seiende jedes Seienden.'

[27] Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus* (GA48) pp. 301–2 (= [GA6.2], pp. 201f.) 'Das Taugliche', as 'das Tauglichmachende'; Cf. *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (*Wegmarken* [GA9]) p. 227. 'Τὸ ἀγαθόν bedeutet, griechisch gedacht, das, was zu etwas taugt und zu etwas tauglich macht.'

[28] Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (GA9), p. 228: 'Das Wesen jeder Idee liegt schon in einem Ermöglichen und Tauglichmachen zum Scheinen, das eine Sicht des Aussehens gewährt. Daher ist die Idee der Ideen das Tauglichmachende schlechthin, τὸἀγαθόν.'

[29] Heidegger, *Der europäische Nihilismus* (GA48), p. 301 (= [GA6.2], pp. 200f.): 'Daher wird vom ἀγαθόν gesagt: ἔστι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσιας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει. "Das Gute ist noch an Würde und Vermögen, d.h. an βασιλεία, an Herrschaft, hinaus sogar über das Sein" – nicht nur über die Unverborgenheit.' Cf. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik* (GA26), pp. 237, 284.

[30] Heidegger, *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik* (GA26), p. 237: 'Die man, sofern schon die Ideen transzendent sind gegenüber dem wechselnden Seienden, als die ursprünglichste in Anspruch nehmen muß.'

[31] See Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism*, pp. 111–17 and 135–49.

[32] Nietzsche, *Nachlaß 1884 – 1885*, 1988, vol. 12, p. 213 (= *Wille zur Macht*, p. 44): 'Im Grunde ist ja nur der moralische Gott überwunden.' Cf. *Nachlaß 1884 – 1885*, vol. 11, p. 624.

[33] Heidegger, *Die ewige Wiederkehr des* Gleichen (GA44), p. 69 (= *Dieewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* [GA6.1], p. 286): 'Dieser "moralisch" gesehene Gott – und nur dieser – ist gemeint, wenn Nietzsche sagt: "Gott ist tot".'

[34] Cf. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (GA34), pp. 105 *et passim*; *Der europäische Nihilismus* (GA48), p. 301 (=[GA6.2], p. 201); cf. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik* (GA26), p. 211, n. 3.

[35] Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (GA9), p. 227: 'Nietzsche [ist] auch, weil ihm jedes Wissen vom metaphysischen Ursprung des "Wertes" abgeht, der zügelloseste Platoniker innerhalb der Geschichte der abendländischen Metaphysik. . . . Nietzsche [hat] das Wesen der ἀγαθὸν vorurteilsfreier festgehalten.'

[36] Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), p. 130: 'Die Ethik sich beschäftigt mit dem ἦθος, dem Sein des Menschen.'

[37] Heidegger, *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* in *Gesamtausgabe* (GA24), p. 322: '*Das* Seiende zunächst verstehen, zu dessen Seinsverfassung das Seinsverständnis gehört, das Dasein' (author's italics).

[38] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 b 7: 'εἰ γὰρ καὶ ταὐτόν ἐστιν ἑνὶ καὶ πόλει, μεῖζον γε καὶ τελειὸτερον τὸ τῆς πόλεως φαίνεται καὶ λαβεῖν καὶ σῶζειν·ἀγαπητὸν μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἑνὶ μόνῳ, κάλλιον δὲ καὶ θειότερον ἔθνει καὶ πόλεσιν.'

[39] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 a 23, τἀγαθόν καὶ τό ἄριστον (the ἀγαθόν and the best).

[40] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 a 3. Τὰ γαθὸν οὗ πάντ'ἐφίεται.

[41] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094 b 12. ἡ μὲν οὖν μέθοδος τούτων ἐφίεται, πολιτική τις οὖσα.

[42] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 43: 'Die aristotelische Bestimmung des Daseins des Menschen ζωὴ πρακτική'.

[43] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 43: 'Aristoteles bestimmt das Dasein des Menschen als eine ζωὴ πρακτική τις τοῦ λόγου ἔχοντος, ein Leben, und zwar πρακτική, eines solchen Seienden, das die Sprache hat,' citing Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098 a 7.

[44] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 61: 'Im Sprechen über etwas vergegenwärtige ich es, bringe ich es ins Da.'

[45] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 46: '*Im Sein des Menschen liegt die Grundmöglichkeit des Sein-in-der-*πόλις". Im Sein-in-der-πόλις sieht Aristoteles das eigentliche Leben der Menschen' (emphases in original). Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253 a 9ff.

[46] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 46.

[47] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 56: 'Wenn der Λόγος das Miteinander-Dahaben der Welt ausmacht, konstituiert sich in ihm die Bestimmung des Miteinanderseins.'

[48] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 56: 'Daß die Welt in einem bestimmten "Aspekt" da ist, in einem Aspekt relativ auf das "Subjekt", d.h. die Welt begegnet nur in einem "subjektiven Aspekt", nicht eigentlich an sich.'

[49] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 61: 'αὐτὸ ἑαυτοῦ αἱρετόν, das, was "an ihm selbst um seiner selbst willen ergreifbar" ist – hier also die Bestimmung des ἀγαθόν als οὗ Ἕνεκα, "Worum-willen", "Um-willen-dessen",' citing Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1362 a 22). This is the first of four definitions in the text.

[50] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 62: 'Daß das ἀγαθόν primär ist Ende, τέλος, genauer, πέρας.'

[51] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 61: 'Eine fundamentale Bestimmung des Seins.'

[52] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095 b 18–20.

[53] Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie* (GA18), p. 65: 'Sofern das Sein des Menschen durch die πρᾶξις bestimmt ist, jede πρᾶξις ein τέλος hat, sofern das τέλος jeder πρᾶξις als πέρας das ἀγαθόν ist, ist ἀγαθόν *der eigentliche Seinscharakter des Menschen.* Das ἀγαθόν ist eine Bestimmung des Seins des Menschen in der Welt [. . .] Seinscharakter des Besorgens und damit des Daseins selbst.'

[54] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253 a 3.

[55] Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253 a 8–11.

[56] Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'* (GA53), p. 102: 'Der Aristotelische Satz, der Mensch sei ζῷον πολιτικόν, besagt, der Mensch sei dasjenige Wesen, das der Zugehörigkeit zur πόλις fähig sei; darin liegt aber gerade, daß er nicht ohne weiteres "politisch" ist.'

[57] Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'* (GA53), p. 99: '*Die* πόλις *läßt sich nicht politisch bestimmen*' (Heidegger's italics).

[58] Heidegger, *Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (GA44), p. 100 (= *Nietzsche* [GA6.1], p. 315]): 'Was Nietzsche hier in bezug auf das Weltganze betreibt, ist eine Art "negativer Theologie", die das Absolute auch dadurch möglichst rein zu fassen sucht, daß sie alle "relativen", d.h. auf den Mensch bezüglichen Bestimmungen fernhält. Nur ist Nietzsches Bestimmung des Weltganzen eine negative Theologie ohne den christlichen Gott.'

Chapter 4

Fighting Nihilism through Promoting a New Faith: Heidegger within the Debates of His Time

Thomas Rohkrämer

In a statement written in 1945 immediately after the defeat of the Third Reich, Heidegger emphasized the following reasons for accepting the position as Rector of Freiburg University in 1933:

> At the time, I saw in the movement that had come to power the possibility of an inner self-collection and of a renewal of the people, and a path toward the discovery of its historical-occidental purpose. I believed that the university, renewing itself, might also be called to participate significantly in the inner self-collection of the people.

The horrors of the First World War showed, he argued, that the Christian God had 'lost its effective force in history'. People still had private beliefs, but a shared communal faith, which could guide humans in their communal existence, was missing. In consequence, humanity was lost in inauthentic everyday norms and fashions, in simply improving their own material well-being. The only hope was a new beginning beyond the will to power through 'a reflection on the spirit of the occident'.[1] And while the meaning Heidegger connected with the term 'new beginning' did not remain wholly consistent over time, he had something quite similar in mind when he stated in his famous *Spiegel* interview in 1966 that 'only a God can save us' because a new 'appearance of God' would be an essential part of such a 'new beginning'.[2]

Following the philosopher's self-understanding, Heidegger has often been seen, especially by his supporters, as essentially an 'un-political thinker', with the possible exception of his brief public engagement at the beginning of the Third Reich.[3] And it is true, of course, that his philosophical work mainly engages with Greek philosophy and a few great thinkers of the Western tradition. However, although an understanding of being 'unpolitical' has traditionally in German history meant a positioning of the self beyond party-politics, it did not preclude very clear preferences about the shape of society and state.

Politics was a dirty word, and intellectuals could have quite concrete and controversial visions for the future of society, but as long as they felt that they spoke for the community or the state as a whole – in contrast to organizing in a party to fight for a particular interest – they did not regard themselves as 'political'. And this position – which found its paradigmatic expression in Thomas Mann's allegedly 'unpolitical' support of the monarchical and militaristic structure of Imperial Germany against the Western democracies in the First World War and against reformist liberal and socialist forces within[4] – is also that of Heidegger's. With the exception of his brief outspoken support for Nazism (and even this stand he only took publicly, once it represented the state), he avoided an alliance with a political movement, but this by no means meant a lack of opinionated engagement with his times. On the contrary, Heidegger engaged with current debates, and his philosophy was a conscious response to what he saw as the main problems of his time as well as an attempt to help prepare the ground for a future development towards what he perceived to be a more fulfilled existence and a superior social order. While his thought was deliberately too complex and differentiated for simple political appropriation, Heidegger always intended his philosophy to be an intervention which would influence the mentality of his time. As his former student Karl Löwith rightly noted: 'Only half of him was an academic. The other and probably greater half was a militant and a preacher.'[5]

Even before the publication of his first main work *Being and Time* in 1927, Heidegger found an enthusiastic group of followers by addressing the sense of disorientation following Germany's defeat in the First World War – a war in which the unprecedented intensity of destruction had given rise to the term 'total war'.[6] Heidegger's thoughts were close to that of the so-called Conservative Revolution: Conservatives that turned revolutionary because they not only rejected the allegedly un-German Republic, but were also left disillusioned by a German Empire which, they believed, had failed to unite the population behind the war effort and had shown its inner weakness when confronted with the revolutionary forces in 1918. Radical Conservatives neither wanted to turn the clock back nor to accept the Republic, which was seen as too divided between classes and milieus, too torn between conflicting political ideals, and too weak in its dealings with the West. They did not hark back to the immediate past or accept the present, but claimed that it is 'conservative to create things worth preserving'.[7]

There are many similarities between Heidegger and the Conservative Revolution, for example the cult of the soldier of the First World War, a strong rejection of both Communism and Western democracy, a belief in a structured hierarchy with many social layers, a strong elitism connected with a call for more social justice, or a desire for great spiritual goals to overcome the alleged materialism of the age. What I mainly focus on in this chapter is, however, a desire in which many of these elements came together: the desire for a single communal faith.

Why was the desire for a single communal faith particularly strong in German history?[8] The German lands were characterized by a complex multitude of ethnic groups, religious convictions and other milieus. Such a diversity of mentalities and worldviews within one language community came to be seen as a problem with the rise of nationalism, especially as an alleged cultural unity played a key role in justifying the call for political unification. The strong desire for uniting all Germans within a single communal faith thus emerged against the background of an increasing emphasis on the need to feel and think German. While the Catholic Church largely succeeded in holding on to its believers by rejecting modern thought and becoming more dogmatic and ultramontanist, which made its believers quite resilient to the temptations of a secular communal faith, a loss of faith or a merging of faith with the cultural fashions of the time was a much stronger threat to Protestantism. Such a *Kulturprotestantismus* tended to be easily compatible with political ideologies of the time and the different versions of a desire for a single communal faith.[9]

Since the Reformation, the mass of the population of the German lands was divided into two major confessions: Protestantism and Catholicism. For centuries, therefore, German culture had not been united in a single Christian faith, and there was obviously no realistic chance to achieve one united Christian Church in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the longing for a community united in a single faith emerged. Especially within Romanticism, we find many fond descriptions of the Middle Ages as a time when the whole community was united in a single religious faith,[10] but this was obviously mere nostalgia as there was no foreseeable way back after the religious divisions had lasted for such a long time. Like the widespread glorification of classical Greece, such historical examples could give an indication of what was intended or desired, but within a religiously divided society it was clear to the people at the time that a single communal faith could not simply be taken from the past, it had to be newly created.

We can distinguish different stages in the search for a single communal faith. The first is the ambition from Romanticism onwards to create a single communal faith through art.[11] When religion seemed to be lost in dogmatic beliefs unacceptable to the modern mind, art was to provide a more acceptable spirituality: 'At a time when religion has become artificial', Wagner famously stated, 'art reserves itself the right to save the core of religion by interpreting the mythical symbols, which the former wants to be believed as true, in an allegorical way. Through an ideal presentation of these symbols art can reveal the deep truth hidden in them.'[12]

While attempts to create a communal faith in high art remained largely elitist, social movements such as nationalism tried to provide a communal faith for the citizens of a state. Such a nationalist faith largely glorified the new status quo right after unification, but it soon turned into a rallying cry for change: faced with the reality of a nation deeply divided in cultural and political terms, the call for a 'second inner unification' gained force – demanding,

for example, tough measures against Jews, an allegedly un-German Catholic Church or the 'unpatriotic' Social Democrats.

The nearly unanimous preparedness to go to war in 1914 was greeted with such enthusiasm among the educated middle class because the outside enemy seemed to unite the nation in one destiny and purpose. But with the war turning against Germany, this unity soon disappeared again, and the crushing defeat led to deeper and more violent political divisions than ever. However, in response to a situation which frequently came close to becoming a civil war, the feeling that the nation was in need of more unity only grew in strength. Not only did the call for a nation united in a single communal faith mark all Conservative Revolutionaries, it also gained an unprecedented tone of desperate urgency and violent determination. In contrast to a more backward-oriented Conservatism, these extremist forces tried to face up 'heroically' to the exceedingly difficult new situation after the First World War,[13] and many of them hoped for an apocalyptic change: the most desperate situation was to offer the greatest chance for a radical turn to the better.[14] Such a conviction offered a convenient basis for wholly irresponsible political actions; if the creation of the worst situation was seen to be a necessary step towards the creation of a better future, all acts of destruction against the status quo appeared justified.[15]

How does Martin Heidegger connect with this tradition? While there are many similarities, the philosopher was obviously much too original a thinker for a complete fit. Above all, Heidegger took religion much more seriously than most of his political allies, possibly because of the highly influential Catholic background to his life.[16] While the majority tended to see the need for a single communal faith in very functional terms as a means to unite the nation, Heidegger was fascinated by the authentic religious experience. True religion for him was not, at least in phenomenological terms, a human construction, but a strange call from the outside which disrupts what an individual had thought and believed before. Not unlike the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who rejected any attempt to ally the ultimately 'unknown' God with any human ideology,[17] Heidegger rejected religious dogma, which in effect tries to establish human knowledge and control over God, in favour of the primal religious experience of being confronted with something wholly unexpected and different. In the early Weimar Republic, Heidegger studied the early Christians, especially Paul, and Luther, in order to gain an understanding of such an experience. And this was by no means simply an academic interest in arriving at a phenomenology of religion, but part of his critique of enlightened thought. The study of religion was, among other things, a means to question and criticize the belief in an autonomous subject. In his lectures of the early 1920s, Heidegger had already worked towards an understanding of humans as being within a wider framework, and a denial of the many relationships to the world around us was not just a false opinion to him, but also, more importantly, the expression of a deficient form of existence which suppresses an important part of being a full and authentic human being.[18]

His strong respect for the otherness of God led Karl Barth to the rejection of an appropriation of God for political goals – that is of the tradition of a political communal faith and especially of Nazism with its attempt to become the ultimate authority in Germany in political and spiritual matters. However, despite Heidegger's affinities with Barth's belief in the otherness of God, the philosopher joined the Nazi camp in 1933. Part of the opposing decisions of the two might have been their respective political opinions: Barth's sympathies with the political left created a natural distance from National Socialism, while Conservatives had more in common with the new political force. Accordingly, it is not surprising that Heidegger shared many Nazi convictions. Fairly close to the top of the list was the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft,* a community of the people based on a national socialism. Heidegger joined the party on May 1, that is Workers' Day. He celebrated the work service (*Arbeitsdienst*), supported a hierarchical 'German Socialism' which valued the 'honour of all labour'[19] and he said in the posthumously published *Spiegel*-interview that it was 'necessary to find a national, and especially a social, point of view, roughly along the lines of Friedrich Naumann's attempt',[20] referring to the Protestant pastor and liberal politician in the German Empire, who promoted a combination of nationalism and socialism. As previously stated, Heidegger shared the Nazis' anti-Communism, and he sympathized with their emphasis on *Heimat* and agrarianism as well as their celebration of military virtues and the fight against the Versailles Treaty. Last, but not least, Heidegger never had much regard for democracy, constitutionalism and pluralism[21] and he certainly had no qualms about the destruction of the struggling parliamentary Republic. On the other hand, there were also aspects of Nazism Heidegger disagreed with, for example their biological racism and presumably their style of politics, which large parts of the middle class regarded as too violent, too populist and too vulgar. In a letter to his brother on 4 May 1933, he wrote, for example, that 'you must not look at the whole movement from below, but from the perspective of the *Führer* with his great goals',[22] which clearly demonstrates that he had to blend out those parts of the practical reality of the movement that must have been disturbing to him in order to maintain his overall support for the regime.

It seems to me, however, that such a weighing of affinities and differences does not get to the main characteristics of Heidegger's initial attitude towards Nazism: the overwhelming enthusiastic hope for a fundamental turn. Not only do witnesses talk about his enthusiasm, but he himself has always put it at the centre. As the new Rector of Freiburg University, he called for a new start in Germany,

> when the spiritual strength of the West fails . . . , when this moribund pseudo-civilization collapses into itself, pulling all forces into confusion . . . Whether such a thing [a new start] occurs or does not occur, this depends solely on whether we as a historical-spiritual *Volk* will ourselves, still and again, or whether we will ourselves no longer.[23]

In his lectures of 1933/34, he spoke of the 'becoming of a *new spirit of the world as a whole*', a 'complete change' and a new 'vision for the world' ('*Weltentwurf*') that the Führer allegedly promoted.[24] In a lecture in 1935, he continued to talk about 'the greatness and magnificence of this new departure'; in 1945 he still admitted, as quoted above, that 'I saw in the movement . . . the possibility of an inner self-collection and of a renewal of the people', and in the *Spiegel*-interview of 1966 he continued to confirm that he had seen 'in the engagement with National Socialism a new and the only still possible way towards a renewal'.[25] If anything, his main fear was initially that the Nazi revolution would not be radical enough.[26]

In contrast to the theologian Karl Barth, Heidegger did not think about religion and a faith for the Germans within the Christian framework. Most frequently, he talked about the Greek Gods founding the *polis*, when he envisaged a community united in one faith, but in 1933 there was no talk of God. Instead, the emphasis was on a commitment to an allegedly 'German' spirit and destiny. But where can this 'spiritual destiny of the German people' be located? To some extent, Heidegger stated, in the German tradition of 'poets, thinkers', but he also connected it for a while very closely with 'the will of the [Nazi] state' and, as in the private letter to his brother Fritz quoted above, with Adolf Hitler: 'Not theories and "ideas" should be the rules of your existence', he said to his students. 'The *Führer* alone *is* the current and future German reality and its law.'[27] In line with the new state, Heidegger celebrated, for example, work service for the national community, military service in a strong Germany and service for 'the realisation of a *völkisch* approach to thinking'. 'The loyalty to and the allegiance with the will of the *Führer* is what creates community.'[28]

Such a fully fledged acceptance of the here-and-now was certainly in tension with Heidegger's previous critical distance from the dominant current opinions and self-serving ideologies. It was, however, by no means simply an accident that he slipped so easily into the conviction, shared by many, that 1933 saw an 'awakening', that is, the emergence of a new single communal faith. Heidegger had seen the Weimar Republic and the whole Western world as marked by pluralistic disorientation and a nihilistic materialism; in contrast, Nazism seemed to have the power to establish a new faith that would turn Germany into a true community with a historical destiny. Heidegger identified great historical moments in the past, when the truth for a community was allegedly experienced and established, he claimed more generally that nihilism could be overcome by 'great politics' (as well as through art),[29] and in 1933 he believed to live and participate in such a great historic moment. If Nazi ideology had been wholly incompatible with his own convictions, this belief could not have emerged, but neither was there a need for full unanimity of spirit between Heidegger and the new rulers. The desire for a great historical moment which would give rise to a new single communal faith was so strong that Heidegger was more than ready to blend out whatever did not fit his vision in 1933.

Committed to a phenomenological perspective, Heidegger had long been fascinated by the structure of any kind of experience powerful enough to overwhelm the human being, thus breaking modern humans' illusion about personal autonomy and rational control. It was the fulfilling sensation of being swept away by something more powerful, the sense of a communal enthusiasm that would break the loneliness of modern humans,[30] that was decisive for Heidegger's enthusiasm for National Socialism; in the context of this power the Nazis held over the minds of large parts of the people, the actual content and actions of the movement were secondary. The sense of community they were seen to create was all-important; with such a unanimity, the ugly aspects of the movement could gradually be overcome.

As with many intellectual fellow-travellers of Nazism,[31] it did not take long, however, before gradual disillusionment set in. Heidegger found out soon that the Nazis did not want to listen to his thoughts, but merely decorated themselves with the image of a famous philosopher. More fundamentally, he came to see Nazism not as a break with modernity, but as an integral part of it. The 'rule of the will to power', he came to believe, had become universal, 'may it be called communism or fascism or world democracy.'[32] And the most forceful expression of this will to power became for Heidegger modern technology, a theme he came to address in detail in the early 1950s, especially in his essay *The Question Concerning Technology*

With the theme of power and technology, Heidegger again drew on a powerful cultural theme in German history.[33] We find the closest intellectual predecessor of Heidegger in Ludwig Klages. This radical cultural critic not only criticized environmental destruction, above all in his article *Humans and Earth* (1913), but also launched a relentless attack on the will to power of modern man with his ambition to separate himself from nature in order to control it, propagating instead a more open and contemplative attitude in harmony with life.[34] While Ernst Jünger's *The Worker* (1932) provided what Heidegger regarded as the most insightful phenomenological description of the technological age, Ernst Jünger's brother Friedrich Georg turned this into a relentless critique of modern technology during the Third Reich and after.[35] Similarly, the sociologist Alfred Weber talked about a world in which humans would gain the characteristics of a robot, the philosopher Günther Anders claimed that humans could no longer really comprehend the effects of their technical actions and the critical theorists Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno voiced their fear that domination over outer nature would also imply domination over our own human nature.[36]

In regard to the relationship of modern technology and National Socialism, the leading Nazi Albert Speer came to argue after 1945 that 'the nightmare of many people . . . , that nations will come to be dominated by technology – it nearly came to be true in Hitler's authoritarian system'.[37] This was a theme, many conservative cultural critics including Heidegger and the Jünger brothers expanded upon: in this view, Nazism was not seen as the result of a peculiar

German tradition, but as an outcome of the modern age of technology. There might well be some truth to this analysis, but one also has to see that this argument served as a convenient excuse, because in this perspective it was no longer the actions of Germans that were decisive for the rise of National Socialism and the crimes of the Third Reich, but the much wider, largely anonymous forces of modernization. Blaming the technological age meant, then, accepting the need for a critical engagement with Nazism, while simultaneously evading the question of personal agency and guilt. And the argument served a second, equally important function: by putting the blame on the whole Western process of modernization, the German intellectual tradition was separated off from Nazism. Thus, one did not have to question German cultural criticism and investigate its links to National Socialism; rather the arguments of this tradition remained useful after 1945 for criticizing Nazism *and* the West – including the new Federal Republic of Germany – and for trying to find inspiration for the vision of a better society growing out of the positive aspects of the German past.[38]

Heidegger's topic was, then, rather trendy, and it emerged at a time, when the philosopher had not only read the key works of the Jünger brothers, but also kept personal contact.[39] However, the grounding of the discussion of technology within the framework of Heidegger's philosophy made it highly original. While previous cultural critics either saw technology as a tool which humans have to learn to use properly for the right purposes, or as a demonic force which threatens to enslave human kind, Heidegger broke with them regarding either humans or technology as autonomous agents. Humans are not transcendent subjects who use technology freely as a tool, but rather have been born into and shaped by the technical world. On the other hand, technology cannot be an autonomous agent either: this view, a misplaced personification, ignores the fact that humans created the technical world, that they are part of it and developed a 'technological mentality' within the process of technological modernization.

In consequence of the above, Heidegger argues, we cannot study technology from the outside or step out of the technological world, because its logic is part of our fundamental thought-structure. In consequence, we cannot unchoose technology, as this would involve stepping out of the life-world which is historically given to us. Our horizon of truth makes us think and act technologically; we may work on realizing the limitations of this perspective, which later Heidegger came to regard as a partial blindness,[40] and on altering this way of seeing the world, but we cannot simply step out of it.

In contrast to bleak pictures drawn by Ludwig Klages and Friedrich Georg Jünger, among others, Heidegger argued against a demonization of technology. He stressed that all technology was essentially a justified way of understanding and relating to the world. Technology is not just an arbitrary human activity, it 'is a mode of revealing'. On the most fundamental level it belongs to the 'realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where [. . .] truth happens'.[41] This, however, does not mean that Heidegger saw no danger in

modern technology. On the contrary, the truth which modern, scientifically based technology reveals is, he claimed, largely determined by human demands; while traditional technology lets things be, 'modern technology is a challenging' (*herausfordern*). While the work of the traditional peasant lets the soil reveal something about itself and bring forth its inherent qualities without interfering too much with it, the earth is now challenged to reveal 'itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit'.[42]

While Klages and Friedrich Georg Jünger identify with nature to the extent that they express the hope for an end of humanity before it destroys all the world around it, Heidegger's main concern is still what all this means for humanity. Human domination over nature ultimately means a one-dimensional existence, that is, an existence where the only goal left is one's own well-being. Heidegger does not see an ideal in a perfectly organized system, even if it would achieve sustainability because full control would isolate humans from their environment. What he emphasizes is die *Not der Notlosigkeit,* that is the (spiritual) deprivation in a world without (material) deprivation:

> Everything functions. That is exactly the uncanny, that it functions, and the functioning leads further and further to yet more functioning, and that technology increasingly tears human kind off the earth and unroots him . . . It does not even take an atomic bomb, the uprootedness of humanity is already reality. We only have technical relationships left. This is no longer earth, on which humans live today. [. . .] The uprooting of humanity which is taking place is the end, if thinking and poetry does not achieve a forceless power once again.[43]

Heidegger's discussion of technology is a clear sign of his awareness that his earlier hopes in the Nazi movement founding a new communal faith had been somewhat naïve. This realization set in before the Second World War began. In his notes 'Besinnung' or *Mindfulness* written in the years 1938/39, he spoke – in an implicit self-criticism – of:

> all those, who aim at the establishment of 'religions' and demand the visibility and comprehensibility of the service to God and who refer in this context to the past, do not sense the long, deep silence, in which lonely listeners have to receive the song of the flight of Gods in their ears.

Not the will 'to create something "new" ' opens the chance for the appearance of God; this can only be promoted through "patience and equanimity" '.[44] Not the active will to achieve change is seen as the proper way forward any longer – this is criticized above all in the Nietzsche lectures given between 1936 and 1940 – but a patient readiness for an outside impulse. The goal is to break out of the self-referential loneliness of the modern subject; how could such a change be successfully initiated by a resolute: 'I will achieve this'?

This hope for receiving an impulse from the outside, that is 'the transition from willing into equanimity',[45] gives rise to the intensive engagement with the concept of *Ereignis,* that is, a powerful, life-turning event – not unlike the religious experiences Heidegger studied in the 1920s. The year 1933 had been a delusion of an *Ereignis* – thus the question was what a true and authentic *Ereignis* might be. Heidegger's answer from 1936 onwards contains three new or newly revived elements: the emphasis on the thoroughly nihilistic character of the age where the gods have withdrawn; secondly, the emphasis on the limits to what humans can do: they can prepare the ground for the gods to appear and make themselves ready for the appearance of gods, but they cannot make the gods appear; and lastly, that god is ultimately unknown. Ultimately, humans can never fathom god, but this in no way diminishes his importance. Following Hölderlin, he states:

> For Hölderlin God, as the one who he is, is unknown and it is just as *this Unknown One* that he is the measure for the poet. This is also why Hölderlin is perplexed by the exciting question: how can that which by its very nature remains unknown ever become a measure? For something that man measures himself by must after all impart itself, must appear. But if it appears, it is known. The god, however, is unknown, and he is the measure nonetheless. Not only this, but the god who remains unknown, must be showing *himself* as the one he is, appear as the one who remains unknown. God's manifestness – not only he himself – is mysterious. Therefore the poet immediately asks the next question: 'Is he manifest like the sky?' Hölderlin answers: 'I'd sooner / Believe the latter.'[46]

In a brief summary of his new attitude, Heidegger thus comes round to recommend that we should act 'here and now and in little things, that we may foster the saving power in its increase'.[47] His attitude is no longer marked by the combatative activism, assertive authoritarianism and politicized optimism of the early 1930s, but is more of an appeal to contemplate the deficiencies of modern existence and to open oneself up to the influences of the world around us. The ultimate hope is still for a new appearance of gods for the whole community, but the attitude has become much more individualistic and modest. Every single realization that a life solely centred on one's own material well-being was deficient, Heidegger argued, was an important achievement. And every authentic moment, where one experiences living in what Heidegger comes to call 'the fourfold' in 1950 removes humans from the dangerous delusion of being an autonomous subject.

Human existence, Heidegger argues, is shaped by the 'fourfold', that is four relationships: to earth, to sky, to gods and to mortals. The relationship to earth means that humans do not live in an abstract place, but are intimately connected to a specific place with its landscape, its plants and its animals. The relationship to sky means an appreciation of the moon and sun, the changing

weather and the changing seasons. The relationship to gods is a connection with the spiritual forces binding a community. Finally, humans are closely connected to the humans around them.

On the one hand, the fourfold is a rather abstract anthropological description of human existence: humans always live within these relationships, whether they know it or not. But a conscious existence within the fourfold, where all the four relationships become concrete and specific, was also Heidegger's idea of a fulfilled life. And if people came to experience living in this fourfold, they would also find *Gelassenheit* or releasement in their attitude towards technology. Heidegger emphasized that what is dangerous is not technology as such, but, as already suggested in 1935, an empty technological frenzy. If humans have a clear idea to what purpose they want to use technology, an instrumental attitude can be integrated into life without becoming addicted to it or falling victim to the reductionist attitude that the world contains nothing but raw materials for human needs. With such a wider sense of existence, 'our relationship to the technical world becomes miraculously easy and calm. We let technical things enter our everyday world and keep them simultaneously outside, that is we let them be things which are nothing absolute, but reliant on something more important.'[48]

In the long tradition of critics of technology in German history, there has always been a strong attempt not to avoid an outright negation of technology as a whole. The critics recognized that there was no escape from it. Thus, they could not leave it at attacking technology; they had to contrast a negative reality with the potential for a better use in the future.[49] Heidegger's position is extreme, however, in arguing that a change in attitude is all that is needed to turn technology into a positive force. In essence, he still believes in the need for a powerful single communal faith, though this time one which appears as an outside force. If a new God appears and humans gain a new communal faith strong enough to check their individual will to power, then technology is no longer a self-centred expression of subjective human will and interest run wild, but a tool in the service of this new worldview. Secondly, Heidegger is equally extreme in arguing that technology, or more specifically the all-too-common modern-day experience of 'technics-out-of-control',[50] can offer grounds to realize humans' dependence on the world around them. In this and other contexts, Heidegger uses Hölderlin's words 'But where danger is, grows the **saving power** also' – an expression of his continued commitment to the apocalyptic thinking of his Weimar years.

Heidegger came to reject National Socialism, but it remains doubtful whether he saw this regime as in essence much different from the Western democracies: they were all, he argued, under the spell of a techno-centric will to power. Despite the horrendous break with civilization that National Socialism marked, Heidegger still maintained a cultural chauvinism regarding the German heritage,[51] believing, for example, that the allegedly closely related Greek and German were most suited to philosophical thinking.[52] Throughout his work,

the term '*Westen*' always carries negative connotations; when Heidegger talks about the positive potential of the European tradition, he uses the term '*Abendland*', that is occident, instead (this distinction is lost for readers of Heidegger in English translation where *Abendland* is frequently translated as the West). This continued critical distance to the West is another feature that connects Heidegger with his time: with the First World War, conservative thinkers in particular defined Germany against Western Europe and the United States, and this way of viewing the West as the opposing 'other' continued in the Weimar Republic and gained force in the Third Reich.[53]

Obviously, such anti-Western convictions became a serious difficulty in West Germany after 1945: the atrocities of Nazi Germany left no moral ground for national self-assertiveness, the protection the West offered against the East was more than welcome, and the Conservative party under Adenauer showed an unreserved commitment to integration into the Western world. A way to ease the transition from an anti-Western past into a pro-Western present was the lively discourse which contrasted the 'Abendland' with the allegedly totalitarian East.[54] In that perspective, Germany did not have to adapt to the free world, but had always been part of it – with the exception of a dictatorship for which Hitler, modern mass society or technology, but not a German 'special path' was blamed. Without wanting to diminish the importance of Heidegger's engagement with occidental philosophy, one also has to see the function it fulfilled within the discourse about the tradition of the *Abendland* in which he even continued to praise the value of German culture in contrast to an allegedly strong, but uncivilized and crudely materialistic America.[55]

To conclude: There are two sides to Heidegger, the thinker engaging with the philosophical tradition and, in Löwith's words, the 'preacher' addressing concerns of his time. While many Heideggerians emphasize his untimely distance to the politics of his time, Heidegger himself did not have any qualms about engaging with present concerns. On the contrary, in his mind, the past was not to be studied out of an antiquarian interest, but mattered for present purposes.

Heidegger almost constantly engaged with the debates of his time: since 'the great seminal catastrophe' of the First World War (George F. Kennan), which gave wide currency to doubts about the belief in progress, the 'threat of nihilism' was an ever-present topic and so too was the question of technology which had shown its destructive potential, with the discussion reaching its highest intensity in the decade after the Second World War, that is at the time of Heidegger's own intervention. The inter-war period also saw a wide variety of intensive attempts at saving religion from an all-too-convenient arrangement with the dominant culture of the time, most famously in Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*,[56] and Heidegger's emphasis on the otherness of God is clearly linked to the same concern. The hope for a community united in a single communal faith – so wide-spread among Conservative Revolutionaries in the Weimar Republic is, I would argue, the key reason for Heidegger's enthusiastic support of Nazism in 1933, and it is the background to his famous statement

from the posthumously published *Spiegel*-interview: 'Only a God can save us',[57] as a new communal faith would also give meaning and purpose to technology. And finally, Heidegger shared the continued reservations of many traditional Conservatives about the culture of the West, especially of the United States, after 1945, emphasizing instead the occidental tradition in which, according to Heidegger, Greece and Germany were the key players.

Despite his own stylization as the lonely thinker of the Black Forest, Heidegger was by no means untimely. His philosophy was too complex for a populist reception, but his role went far beyond a philosopher's philosopher. If there was a time when his wider influence waned, it was in the optimism of the 1960s, but with today's concerns about environmentalism and fragmenting societies, localism and religion, it might well be that such an optimism is much further removed from us than Heidegger's philosophy.

Notes

[1] Heidegger, *Das Rektorat* 1933/34 (GA16), pp. 374 and 376.
[2] Heidegger, *Spiegel-Gespräch* (GA16), p. 671.
[3] See, for example, in this book Miguel de Beistegui, *Questioning Politics, or Beyond Power*.
[4] For the most influential statement of this position see Thomas Mann's *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*.
[5] K. Löwith, *My Life*, p. 28.
[6] R. Chickering, *Total War*.
[7] Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich*, p. 202. For a more detailed account see T. Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne?*, pp. 270–6,
[8] For a detailed account of the tradition see T. Rohkrämer, *A Single Communal Faith?*
[9] For the classical theological analysis of this see K. Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*. From a historical perspective see above all T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866*, p. 429.
[10] See most famously Novalis' speech from 1799 'Christendom in Europe', and more generally H. Schanze (ed.), *Romantik-Handbuch*, Stuttgart, 1994, pp. 509ff. and 541ff.; G. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth*, pp. 77ff.
[11] M. Frank, *Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie*.
[12] R. Wagner, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 14, p. 130.
[13] The term 'heroic realism', frequently used to characterize this attitude of facing up to the changed historical conditions, was coined by Werner Best, who later filled important functions within the Third Reich, and was popularized by Ernst Jünger. See more generally H. Lethen, *Cool Conduct*.
[14] J. Brokoff, *DieApokalype*.
[15] See, for example, E. Jünger, *Das Abenteuerliche Herz*, pp. 189 and 257.
[16] He once stated: 'Without this theological origin I would have never arrived at the path of thinking' (quoted in Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*, p. 21).
[17] K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*.

[18] B. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*; B. Crowe, *Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religion*; L. Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism*.
[19] Heidegger, Rede zur 25jährigen Abiturfeier (GA16), pp. 281f.
[20] Heidegger, *Spiegel-Gespräch* (GA16), p. 655.
[21] Even in the interview with the *Spiegel* in 1966, when democracy had found wide acceptance in the Federal Republic of Germany, Heidegger voiced his scepticism towards this form of rule.
[22] Heidegger, In neue Aufgaben hineingestellt (GA16), p. 93.
[23] Heidegger, Die Selbstbehauptung (GA16), p. 117.
[24] Heidegger, Vom Wesen der Wahrheit (GA36/37), pp. 148 and 225.
[25] Heidegger, *Spiegel-Gespräch* (GA16), p. 658.
[26] D. Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit*, pp. 134f.
[27] Heidegger, Die Selbstbehauptung (GA16), p. 113; Heidegger, Die Deutsche Universität (GA16), p. 291; Heidegger, Rede zum Semesterbeginn 1933/34 (GA16), p. 184.
[28] Heidegger, Der Deutsche Student als Arbeiter (GA16), p. 206; Heidegger, Rede zur 25jährigen Abiturfeier am 26./27. Mai 1934 (GA16), p. 284.
[29] Heidegger, Nietzsche. Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst (GA43), p. 84.
[30] Drawing on Heidegger, Hannah Arendt claims: 'What prepares men for total domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever-growing masses of our century. The merciless process into which totalitarianism drives and organises the masses looks like a suicidal escape from this reality' (*The Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 317).
[31] R. Dahrendorf, *Versuchungen der Unfreiheit*, p. 33.
[32] Heidegger, Das Rektorat 1933/34 (GA16), 375.
[33] Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne*; Rohkrämer, *Contemporary Environmentalism*.
[34] L. Klages, *Mensch und Erde*; L. Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*.
[35] F. G. Jünger, *Die Perfektion der Technik*.
[36] A. Weber, *Der dritte oder der vierte Mensch*; G. Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*; M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. A book like Huxley's *Brave New World* shows that these fears were not restricted to Germany.
[37] A. Speer, *Erinnerungen*, p. 522.
[38] This is the core argument in D. Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit*, parts 3–5.
[39] Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit*, pp. 326–32.
[40] While Heidegger regarded the technical attitude towards the world as 'right', because it reveals part of the truth, it turned into an illusion or an 'enchantment' for him, if this perspective was accepted as the whole truth. He thus turns around Max Weber's influential concept of dis-enchantment, which also plays a central role in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Horkheimer and Adorno, by calling it an illusion.
[41] Heidegger, Die Frage nach der Technik (GA7), p. 15. In the translation I largely follow Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 283–318.
[42] Heidegger, Die Frage nach der Technik (GA7), p. 15.
[43] Heidegger, *Spiegel-Gespräch* (GA16), pp. 669f. ('Es funktioniert alles. Das ist gerade das Unheimliche, daß es funktioniert und daß das Funktionieren immer weiter treibt zu einem weiteren Funktionieren und daß die Technik den Menschen immer mehr von der Erde losreißt und entwurzelt . . . Wir brauchen

gar keine Atombombe, die Entwurzelung des Menschen ist schon da. Wir haben nur noch technische Verhältnisse. Das ist keine Erde mehr, auf der der Mensch heute lebt. [. . .] Die Entwurzelung des Menschen, die da vor sich geht, ist das Ende, wenn nicht noch einmal Denken und Dichten zur gewaltlosen Macht gelangen.')

[44] Heidegger, Besinnung (GA60), pp. 243 and 244 ('Alle, die auf das Einrichten von "Religionen" sinnen und auf die Sichtbarkeit und Verständlichkeit des Götterdienstes fordern und dabei auf Vergangenes verweisen, ahnen nicht die tiefe Stille, in der für lange Zeit von einsamen Hörern der Sang der Götterflucht ins Ohr eingeholt werden muß.' – The last God needs 'den Menschen des Da-seins . . ., der nicht mehr historisch zusammenrechnet, um ein "Neues" herzustellen, sondern Langmut und Gleichmut in seiner Stimmung hat, aus denen die wesentlichen Entscheidungen erahnt und damit schon als das erste Winken erfahren werden.')

[45] Heidegger, Feldweg-Gespräche (GA77), p. 109.

[46] 'Gott ist als der, der Er ist, unbekannt für Hölderlin, und *als dieser Unbekannt* ist er gerade das Maß für den Dichter. Darum bestürzt ihn auch das erregende Fragen: wie kann, was seinem Wesen nach unbekannt bleibt, je zum Maß werden? Denn solches, womit der Mensch sich misset, muß sich doch mit-teilen, muß erscheinen. Erscheint es aber, dann ist es bekannt. Der Gott ist jedoch unbekannt und ist dennoch Maß. Nicht nur dies, sondern der unbekannt bleibende Gott muß, indem er sich zeigt als der, der Er ist, als der unbekannt Bleibende erscheinen. Die *Offenbarkeit* Gottes, nicht erst Er selbst, ist geheimnisvoll. Darum frägt der Dichter sogleich die nächste Frage: "Ist er offenbar wie der Himmel?" Hölderlin antwortet: "Dieses / glaub- ich eher" ' (Heidegger, ' . . . Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . . ' (GA7), pp. 200f.) I follow the translation of Albert Hofstadter in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 222.

[47] Heidegger, Die Frage nach der Technik (GA7), p. 34 ('Hier und jetzt und im Geringen so, daß wir das Rettende in seinem Wachstum hegen').

[48] Heidegger, *Gelassenheit*.

[49] This is a key argument developed in detail in Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne*.

[50] L. Winner, *Autonomous Technology*.

[51] C. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots,* pp. 183–211.

[52] Heidegger, Spiegel-Gespräch (GA16), p. 679.

[53] J. Elvert and M. Salewsky, *Deutschland und der Westen*.

[54] A. Schildt, *Zwischen Abendland und Amerika*, chapter 1: Die Rettung des christlichen Abendlandes.

[55] P. Gassert, Amerika im Dritten Reich; Cürten, *Europäische Amerikakritik seit 1945*; D. Diner, *Verkehrte Welten. Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland*; A. Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen?*; P. Gassert, *Amerianismus, Antiamerikanismus, Amerikanisierung*; A. Lüdtke, *Amerikanisierung*; F. Trommler (ed.), *America and the Germans*.

[56] For a brilliant discussion of less well-known figures see Lazier, *God Interrupted*.

[57] Heidegger, *Spiegel-Gespräch* (GA16), pp. 99f.

Chapter 5

'Questioning Politics, or Beyond Power'

Miguel de Beistegui[1]

Let me begin with a few words regarding the nature of the complex and challenging – dare I say impossible? – task that faces us here. Following David Webb's generous (yet also perhaps treacherous) invitation, let us assume, albeit tentatively, that we can indeed envisage Heidegger as a political thinker. Let us assume that, when wanting to address the question of politics today, we can or indeed ought to turn to his thought – and this in spite of the fact that everything he wrote and did in relation to political matters would be precisely such as to suspend the possibility of ever considering him seriously as a *political* thinker. If, against all odds, and for a moment at least, we can assume the possibility of turning to Heidegger as a political thinker in a manner that is productive, such a possibility can only stem from the radical and revolutionary nature of his thought alone, from the original task that he set for thought. Such a task is first and foremost non-political. This doesn't mean that it is simply a-political, or without any political relevance whatsoever. It does mean, however, that if we approach it from the outside, with questions and problems already constituted and of a political nature, we shall never get an answer from it. At the same time, if we follow Heidegger's own path of thought, we shall most certainly never be able to envisage him as a *political* thinker. The question, then, is one of knowing whether we can extract a political dimension – and indeed a contribution to the current political situation – from a thinker whose thought is intrinsically not political. Can we move beyond this aporia?

Bearing in mind the reservations and difficulties I have just expressed, I would like to begin by presenting a conviction, perhaps something like an axiom, from which everything I shall say today, but, I believe, from which everything that can be said on the subject, derives. The (somewhat paradoxical) axiom stipulates that everything that can be extracted from Heidegger's thought by way of political contribution can be so extracted only from a position that is itself *essentially* non-political. This means that everything Heidegger says about politics, or that can be seen to resonate with our political situation, is articulated from a position or a space that is itself *not* political, a space that, furthermore, defines and decides the *essence* of politics. Everything that Heidegger says on politics

amounts to calling it into question, that is, our investment in it, and the assumptions that govern it. If Karl Löwith was correct in defining the fundamental character of contemporary politics as a *total* politicization of life, and in noting a remarkable contiguity between democratic and totalitarian regimes in that respect, then Heidegger's contribution might be seen to consist in calling such a total politicization into question.[2] With Heidegger, we might want to wonder the extent to which it is indeed the *total* politicization of life that is the issue, or whether it is the preliminary and unquestioned interpretation of who we are, of our being, in terms of life, a life itself immediately qualified as political (man as the *zoon politikon*), that is precisely what makes this total politicization of our being not only possible, but inevitable. Far from wanting to politicize Heidegger, then, far from wanting to bend this or that analysis (say, the analysis of the 'being-with' in *Being and Time*, or the discussion of the Greek *polis* in a number of texts from the 1930s and 1940s) towards a problematic and a space that will have been recognized and secured in advance as 'political', we should emphasize the distance – indeed the abyss – that Heidegger is concerned to establish between thought proper and political philosophy or theory, between that to which thought responds in being the thought that it is – and for which it is responsible – and political questioning and analysis, however fruitful and urgent it may be.

Let me try to make the same point in yet a different way. It is only to the extent that Heidegger calls the primacy of politics into question, and this means the allegedly decisive nature of the political sphere, or the arena in which what is most decisive is being played out, that his thought can be of interest to us. His contribution, then, is not to the political debate as such. Rather, it consists in asking whether what is historically at stake in politics and played out in political terms is itself political, and so a matter for political thought, or whether the questions and concepts of political thought are themselves shaped in response to a phenomenon, possibly an event, which it, as *political* thought, cannot interrogate, or even intimate. If Heidegger can be envisaged as a political thinker, it is only (and paradoxically) insofar as he questions the validity and decisiveness of what we normally understand by politics – political action and activism, institutions, regimes, the organization and distribution of power, etc. This doesn't mean that the differences between, say, types of regimes, don't matter – and in that respect we can only regret that he paid so little attention to them, especially in that darkest of times when, for so many, they meant the difference between life and death. It does mean, however, that in order to be fully appreciated and evaluated, they must be related back to the one difference that is *absolutely* (and not simply relatively) decisive, the very opening that stretches between being and beings, one in which we always find ourselves situated, and so always predisposed to think and act in a certain way. This dif-ference or interstice (*Unter-schied*) is the space of history itself, the always-reconfigured event of truth. If we turn away from this one difference and one question, we may be saying all sorts of interesting things, posing all sorts of compelling problems, but we are no longer operating within Heidegger's problematic.

What I would like to do here, and following Heidegger as much as possible, is to envisage our political situation from a non-political perspective, to provide the measure for an evaluation of contemporary politics as an *onto-historical* phenomenon. This, I will do by following a lead Heidegger develops in the 1930s and 1940s, and by focusing on the concept of *Macht*, the translation of which will turn out to raise key philosophical issues. For the moment, let me simply refer to is as Power. Despite its obvious political connotations and overtones, this concept will turn out to designate a phenomenon that is not so much political, as it is metaphysical. Politics, especially modern politics, will itself turn out to be an effect of *Macht*. Having done that, having revealed the structure of Power, its logic, imperatives and different regimes, I will consider briefly the possibility of a politics that would not be governed by such a principle of power, the possibility of what I would call a politics of powerlessness, or a politics of the otherwise than power.

'Power' beneath Politics

> *The most crucial political issue is, and always has been, the question of Who rules Whom? Power, strength, force, authority, violence – these are but words to indicate the means by which man rules over man.*
>
> *(H. Arendt, 'On Violence' in* Crisis of the Republic*)*

> *Power means the possibility of making one's own will triumph, albeit over resistances, irrespective of that on which this possibility depends.*
>
> *(M. Weber,* Economy and Society*)*

> *Some people, immediately and with the greatest certainty, want to locate the essence of power, and so the empowering of power, in the political 'sphere'* [im 'Raum' des Politischen]*, and this at a time when 'politics' is no longer an isolated domain of human action, but has taken hold of humanity and determined its direction in the midst of beings. Political planning and doing reveal power relations and struggles in a specific light. But the essence of power in its indeterminacy becomes manifest only when the political itself is experienced on the basis of beings themselves and the humanity that belongs with them.*
>
> *(M. Heidegger,* Die Geschichte des Seyns*)*

> *'Power' must be wrested from the realm of 'political' considerations, statements and parties.*
>
> *(M. Heidegger,* Die Geschichte des Seyns*)*

What is Heidegger's conception of Power, such that it can account for the features and specificities of modern politics, without itself being a 'political' phenomenon?

What is Power?

In a way, while not disagreeing with Arendt's assumption regarding 'the most crucial political issue,' Heidegger questions whether, and to what extent, politics really addresses the question regarding the origin or source (the 'essence') of ruling. The question is indeed one of knowing Who or What orients and decides our own actions and thoughts. It is a question of 'government', in the most literal sense. This question is precisely the one Heidegger already posed in his most explicitly political and politicized public intervention, in that speech or address that marked his official entry into the NSDAP and the beginning of his rectorate of the University of Freiburg. In that speech, while pledging allegiance to – and manifesting a blind faith in – the *Führer*, Heidegger also, and crucially, raised the question of the true source of leadership, which, in his mind, was not human, but 'spiritual': it is science, or knowing (*Wissen*) that is the true leader. I mention this text only to stress that Heidegger never quite believed that, at the historically most decisive level, human beings are the ones who rule. In fact, he always was quite convinced of the opposite, and so quite convinced that modern politics can be genuinely understood only by being envisaged from a non-political ruling principle, namely, *Macht*. 'All rulers [*Alle Machthaber*],' he writes, 'never "possess" power, for they are "possessed by it".'[3] Power is not in the hands of the powerful, but power distributes and organizes relations between subjects, who become the subjects they are through these relations. *Macht* is a principle of action that forces men and women to act in a certain way. It is the anonymous and impersonal principle that rules over politics itself, over power in a political sense. The German and English idioms are both somewhat confusing here, for they do not easily allow us to draw a crucial distinction between *Macht* as an ontological category, or an onto-historical phenomenon, and *Macht* as a political phenomenon, which we could designate with the German word *Gewalt*. In French, as well as in many Latin-derived idioms, the distinction would be that between *puissance* and *pouvoir*, between *potentia* and *potestas*.

Foucault, for example, takes the analysis of *pouvoir* in a political sense very far, extending its traditional social and juridical boundaries, revealing, for example, how *savoir* (knowing and knowledge) – which includes the scientific disciplines as well as the institutional framework they flourish in – is itself made possible by a certain organization of power relations, by certain regimes and mechanisms of power (Foucault calls them *dispositifs*) with which he associates certain forms of domination. Power, for Foucault, is not exclusively concentrated in the hands of government and ruling bodies. It is exercised not just through a handful of institutions such as the civil service, the police, the army, and the state apparatus, but also through a number of institutions that only seem to have nothing in common with political power as such, and seem to be independent from it. Such are the family, the school and the university, the hospital (especially psychiatry), etc. The genuinely political task, for Foucault, is to criticize the play

of these apparently neutral and independent institutions, to criticize and attack them so that the political violence that rules them be revealed and open to challenge. Foucault, then, extends the analysis of power to virtually the whole of our social life and its institutions. He even takes it beyond the logic of domination, arguing that power is not something that a handful of institutions and individuals possesses, and imposes onto others, but something that is *exercised*, a process of empowering, through which the social itself, in its multifaceted reality, is actually produced. It is far more impersonal, and diffused throughout the social body, than is ordinarily thought. It is not so much a vertical structure, imposed from on high, as a horizontal one, through which the network of institutions and social links is established. In that respect, Foucault comes very close to Heidegger's own position.

Despite this proximity, however, Foucault's analysis remains an analysis of *pouvoir*, and not *puissance*, of *Gewalt*, and not *Macht*. The choice of this philosopheme is all the more significant that it consists of a translation – in the most creative and productive sense of the word – of the Nietzschean concept of *Macht*, itself ordinarily translated into French as *puissance*. And to a large extent, the debate between Foucault and Heidegger would need to revolve around their respective interpretation of Nietzsche's *Wille-zur-Macht*. As we shall see in some detail, Heidegger's concept of *Macht* is, like Foucault's concept of *pouvoir*, all encompassing and impersonal, pre-individual and constitutive of social structures and links. For Heidegger, though, *Macht* is first and foremost an onto-historical event, the effects of which are indeed social and political, and indeed of the sort described by Foucault. This means that today's social and political movements, transformations, priorities, institutions, discourses (*énoncés*) must be interrogated and investigated from the point of view of a complex and differentiated phenomenon that is irreducible to the effects it produces, yet never given anywhere outside them. The question is one of knowing the nature of the phenomenon that produces the social and political: is it power in Foucault's sense (*pouvoir*), or in Heidegger's (*Macht*)? In any case, to claim, whether in relation to Heidegger or Foucault, that power produces the social-political body, does not amount to characterizing it as a cause, least of all a substance that would exist somewhere independently of the effects it produces. It is only its effects – and these effects are, amongst other things, yet exemplarily and most importantly, power-effects. By that, we need to understand effects of regimes, of peace and war, of production and consumption, but also of discourse, information, and even truth. As a principle of organization of practices and discourses, power exists only as already differentiated and disseminated. Yet it is one and unified throughout this dispersion. It spreads across and saturates every corner of the social-political realm, allowing its every point, however small, to communicate with all the other points, enabling the totality of power to resonate within each and everyone of them.

Although Power is visible and analysable only in the effects it produces, these are such that they reveal something like a structure, or, better said perhaps,

a set of distinctive traits. Heidegger identifies them most clearly in a section of *Die Geschichte des Seyns* entitled 'The Essence of Power' (*Das Wesen der Macht*).[4] Before listing and analysing them, let me draw your attention to the specific historical period (1939–40) in which these thoughts were developed: World War II had just broken out, unleashing the most formidable display of military power the world had ever seen, thus casting a shadow and a sense of imminent end over the continent once blessed by the gods' presence and the gift of thought, by a belonging to truth and a quest for beauty.

Heidegger begins his analysis by claiming that Power is a trait not of the human, but of Being. This, however, does not mean that the human is not implicated in the unfolding of Power: it is actually entirely implicated, called upon, or mobilized in a distinct way. Power, for Heidegger, is a distinct and singular mode, or phase, of the historical unfolding of Being, a distinct regime of truth that he encompasses under the philosopheme of 'the first beginning':

> Being as Power is the non-essence [*Unwesen*] of the unfounded essence [*Wesen*] of Being as *phusis* in the first beginning.[5]

This unfolding of Being as *phusis*, and its non-essence as *Macht* in the first beginning, in other words, the distinct relation between man and being as one of power and nature, will be contrasted with the unfolding of Being as *Ereignis* in the other beginning, that is, as this other relation, this other alliance between man and Being, one described as 'im-power' (*Ohnmacht*). For the moment, let us leave the word *Ereignis* untranslated, allowing it to stand as a question and a problem we shall have to return to. In the first beginning – and by that Heidegger means in the stretch of time that spans across the whole of the history of the West – but especially in modern times, beings, as things of nature, are unified in a chain of concepts that all revolve around the drive of power (*dynamis*, *potentia*, *potestas*, force, energy, will, and of course 'power' itself):

> Being as Power abandons beings to mere effectiveness [*Wirksamkeit*] (force [*Kraft*], violence, [*Gewalt*], etc.), and in this unleashing Power is from the start unconditional Power.[6]

Power is the power to disclose beings in their effectiveness and efficiency, their producibility, productivity, and reproducibility, in short, their 'machinability'. As such, it is accompanied by a series of processes of 'rationalisation': of labour, of economic productivity, of social practices and political discourses, of scientific research, etc. It is nature itself that is envisaged as effectiveness, efficiency, reserve, and power. And this, it can be only to the extent that beings as a whole are held and represented as what can be calculated in advance and predicted, and so subjected to planning, control and domination. Power is revealed not in military displays and power relations, in institutions and work relations alone; it

is also revealed in the will-to-plan-and-control that has permeated all sectors of life, from the sciences to the economy, from the factory to the home.

The second trait of Power that needs to be stressed is that it is self-moving. It is constantly aiming to surpass and enhance itself, to increase its power, to move towards hyperpower. This is what Heidegger calls the 'overpowering' (*Übermächtigung*), or also, following Nietzsche of course, but with a very different interpretation, the will-to-power (*Wille-zur-Macht*). Power is intrinsically wilful, that is, animated by an inner drive for more of its own nature, for hyperpower. It has no goal outside itself, no other *raison d'être* than the drive towards more power. It is, in Heideggerian terminology, its own unconditional, or absolute self-empowering, one that unfolds in and through its limitless and goalless self-overpowering. There is only one response to the question regarding the object to which the will to power is directed, or the direction in which it is heading, and that is: more power, the self-overcoming and overpowering of power itself, or power brought to the *n*-th power. The violence that is intrinsic to Power derives precisely from this logic of self-overcoming in ever greater modalities of power, or this intensification of a phenomenon that knows no limit: 'Power "needs" power (violence) [*Macht "braucht" Macht (Gewalt)*].'[7] Power needs violence in order to grow. Its self-overcoming amounts to the unleashing of violence. In fact, it is violence – especially political violence – *as such*.

By 'will-to-power', and contrary to what Weber seems to suggest in the statement I began by quoting, we must not understand the mere yearning and quest for power by those who do not possess it. We mustn't understand such a formulation teleologically, as if power were the result we sought, the goal we set out to achieve, as if, in other words, we 'willed' power. Rather, we can 'will' power only insofar as it has taken hold of us in the first place, only to the extent that we already find ourselves in its grip and under its demand. We must be empowered to will power. And so, the will-to-power is not an anthropological, but an ontological category, or, more specifically, an onto-historical one. By will-to-power, we must understand the self-affirmation of power itself, through which it struggles to increase its own being. Power is essentially self-overpowering. Thus understood, it is so overwhelming and all-pervading that it becomes the source of all valuation, the primary value, or the standpoint from which all things and situations are given their value. The Last Man, or the Man of the end of the first beginning, Heidegger claims, is the being who lives under the constraints and demands of *total* power. He is the mechanized, technologized man, or the being 'who is prepared to embark on the absolute domination of the globe'.[8] As such, he is the ultimate expression and culminating point of the history of Western man in the first beginning.

The third and last trait I wish to emphasize, then, concerns the connection of essence between Power and what Heidegger calls the end of the first beginning, or the end of metaphysics: 'The essential unfolding of Power as machination negates the possibility of the truth of beings. It is itself the end of metaphysics.'[9] It is metaphysics itself, and metaphysics in its entirety, that is *of* Power. This

means that all metaphysics is metaphysics of power, and that power itself is through and through metaphysical. How does Heidegger understand metaphysics? As the negation of the possibility of the truth of beings, as the systematic and radical impossibility of an awakening to the truth of being. What do the thematic of power, the interpretation of nature, and of the human, in terms of power, amount to? They amount to the ultimate degree of occultation of truth. And yet, Power, or, more specifically perhaps, the horizon of power that serves as the backdrop against which all things and all situations are evaluated, or simply come to be seen, is itself a possibility and an epoch of the truth of being. It is the regime of truth in which the event truth itself is least visible, most concealed. It is the uttermost *non*-essence of truth, yet still a modality of its unfolding. This, in turn, means that any reversal or overcoming of metaphysics, any recovering of the truth of being will amount to an overcoming, or at least a neutralizing of Power itself. It will amount to the constitution of a horizon other than that of Power and its will to dominate. Will such a reversal, or such an overcoming, greater than any revolution, ever take place? And might it be a matter of and for politics? No, at least no longer in 1940, no longer after the absurd and blind hope invested in Nazi politics. Witnessing the war, and the years that immediately preceded it, Heidegger seems convinced that politics can only remain in the hands of Power, that it can only be one of its most patent (and destructive) effects. We now need to turn to such effects, and to politics in particular, before returning to the question regarding the possibility of a politics of powerlessness, or *Ohnmacht*. Regarding the latter, I shall try to show how this specific aspect of Heidegger's thought can be played against other aspects of his thought, and how one might be able to advance towards something like a post-metaphysical politics.

The effects of Power

Having identified and analysed the most significant traits of Power as an onto-historical process, let me now turn – albeit only briefly and schematically – to the various types of effects it generates. For the sake of clarity, let us regroup these effects under two main categories, or types: ideological, and political.

If we look at the dominant political-ideological conceptions of the twentieth century, the first type of effects consist in the interpretation of the human in terms of matter, life, race and spirit. Despite the way in which they have been opposed to one another, and have led to the bloodiest conflicts in history, such determinations can be traced back to an interpretation of the human that is more or less directly, more or less explicitly derived from the central dualisms of ancient and modern thought: that between form and matter, matter and mind (or spirit), mind and body, and subject and object. All such oppositions testify to a specific interpretation of the human, and of the human in relation to the world. All fail to understand the phenomenon of world itself from the

perspective of its hidden side, one that Heidegger calls 'earth'. The world is itself understood as 'nature', and this means in such a way that the human finds itself in a position of centrality and domination in relation to it. The total realization or the consummation of subjectivity is visible on a number of levels, which could be called ideological, economical and political. Ultimately, such categories turn out be inadequate from Heidegger's perspective, since, for him, it is a matter of revealing their common onto-historical root, their common metaphysical origin, with the consequence that the boundaries between the various domains these categories serve to define appear less secure, less decisive.

§38 of *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, locates very clearly the roots of the concepts of 'people', 'community' and 'nation' in the metaphysics of subjectivity. Nationalism, as well as socialism, we are told, are consequences of the metaphysics of subjectivity. At the heart of the former lies an interpretation of who we are as 'life'. Life itself is understood as blood (and also soil) and, more dangerously, but also quite naturally, as race. 'The idea of race,' Heidegger writes, that is to say, 'the reckoning with race, springs from the experience of Being as subjectivity, and is itself nothing "political" [*ist nicht ein "Politikum"*].'[10] 'Race-breeding [*Rasse-züchtung*],' he goes on to write, 'is one way in which domination asserts itself [*ein Weg der Selbsbehauptungfür die Herrschaft*].' 'Race-fostering' [*Rassenpflege*] is not so much a political measure as it is a measure of Power, that is, a measure rooted in Power. It may be introduced in this or that way, terminated in this or that way, but, 'in its implementation and its promulgation, it depends on the prevailing conditions of domination and Power'. As such, 'the metaphysical ground of race-ideology [*Rassedenkens*] is not biologism, but the subjectivity that underlies the Being of all beings and that remains to be thought.'[11] Whether it is carried out in the name of the purity of the race and the need for vital space, or in that of the proletariat, political action testifies to an unrestrained struggle (*Kampf*) for the securing of power. Today's wars, Heidegger claims, are but the most visible and most devastating forms of the empowering and unleashing of power. They have become 'world' wars and 'total' wars, necessarily so, given the hegemonic and totalizing drive of power. Worldly armed conflicts are only one aspect of this struggle for power. As Jünger had already recognized, peace is now organized in a way that is also entirely subservient to the will-to-power: 'Peace is now the all-powerful control and domination [*Beherrschung*] of the possibilities of war and the securing of their mode of realisation.'[12] The very difference between war and peace has become tenuous, if not altogether untenable. It is only in the context of what Jünger calls a 'total mobilisation', that is, a mobilization of the whole of the real understood as resource, including human, that the figure of the Worker can be revealed as the other side of the figure of the Soldier. The Worker is the soldier of times of peace, when the struggle is economical, but extreme and violent in a different way, where the imperatives are of production (and, nowadays, in our global capitalist economy, of consumption, fuelled with 24hours/day advertising, political incentives, with the sole aim of keeping the machine running, an eye riveted on the risks of inflation, another on those of deflation, a third eye,

perhaps, riveted on the natural resources available around the world and on the best way to secure them, but utterly blind to the real force driving the whole process), but where the vocabulary and strategies of war are implemented: we talk of 'conquering' shares of a market, of 'targets', of 'global offensives' and 'defence strategies', etc. Our techno-discourse, eco-techno-nomics, and techno-politics are a direct expression of the will-to-dominate that is the driving force of Power.

What Heidegger is analysing in those pages is indeed the phenomenon of totalitarianism, one which, for him, is not limited to the political or ideological sphere, and also not to those regimes traditionally identified as 'totalitarian'. For it is not just the wars themselves that have become global; it is the world itself and in its totality that has become war-like, that is, the surface or the territory on which the struggles for its domination are played out. The world has become this space, or this arena, of which every inch, every corner has been colonized by the will-to-power. It is the sense of world itself that has changed, and this radical transformation is the phenomenon that needs to be analysed.

Let me now turn to the more political effects of Power, and by that I mean the various regimes that follow from the metaphysics of subjectivity underlying modern politics. All regimes, on Heidegger's reading, are regimes, or modalities of Power. 'One day, he writes, the common sense of democracies and the rational method and planning of the "total authority" will be discovered and recognized in their identity.'[13] This, Heidegger believes, can be achieved only by looking at the structure they have in common, and that is the State. The State, on Heidegger's reading, turns out to be the mode of political organization best equipped to maximize and rationalize the imperatives of power, and it is characterized primarily by its inability to call itself into question as an institution, that is, to bring into questioning its own metaphysical principles and imperatives of organization, domination and control. It is characterized by what Heidegger calls its *Fraglosigkeit*. It is *fraglosig* in connection with the nature of the relation to beings that characterizes it:

> The basic modern form, in which the specifically modern and self-positing self-consciousness of man orders the whole of being, is the State. Such is the reason why the 'political' becomes the normative self-certainty of historical consciousness. The political determines itself on the basis of history conceived in terms of consciousness, and this means experienced technologically. The 'political' is the completion of history. Because the political is thus the technological-historical certainty underlying all doing, the 'political' is characterised by the unconditional lack of questioning [*Fraglosigkeit*] with respect to itself. The lack of questioning of the 'political' and its totality belong together.[14]

What does this mean? That the modern political is essentially totalitarian, that is, driven by a logic and a demand of total power over which it itself has no power, a drive it itself cannot call into question. 'Totalitarianism' is a direct

consequence of the lack of questioning, that is, of thought in the most fundamental sense, which characterizes the logic of the will-to-power.

It is not the political, or politicians, that lead and guide. For they are themselves driven, that is, subjected to a force that is nothing personal, nothing like a lust for personal power, for what, too often, and especially in the case of the so-called 'tyrants' or 'dictators', we call megalomania. The psychopathological does not operate at the level at which issues of power, politics and history, can be adequately dealt with. The reason for the belonging together of the lack of questioning of the political and its totality, or for the existence of totalitarianism as the politicization of Being in its totality, Heidegger goes on to write, does not lie, 'as some naïve minds believe, in the free will of dictators,' but 'in the metaphysical essence of modern actuality in general.'[15] It is customary to locate issues of power in the types of regime that exercise it. And classical political philosophy argues over just that, that is, over which regime is the most suitable, or the most just, over how to define such regimes, and possibly how to reform or overthrow them. Thus debates have emerged over the merits and limitations of democracy, monarchy, aristocracy, and, in the last 150 years, over socialism and fascism. Now, as I suggested towards the very beginning of this chapter, Foucault has done a lot to reveal how power, while in many ways indissociable from state apparatus (government, the police, the penal system, the bureaucracy), is more diffuse and more complex, not simply identifiable with state-structures. In a way, Heidegger goes further still, by attempting to reveal a unifying a single structure, or, better said perhaps, a single historical event, of which all relations of power, including those regulating institutions such as the family, the school and the university, healthcare, etc. would be an effect. Without ever going into any of the microanalysis Foucault develops, Heidegger tries to extract a convergence or a common hidden commitment in those political regimes that are traditionally opposed and declared to be incompatible. It is normally assumed, Heidegger argues, that those regimes that give a free rein to the unlimited unfolding of power are the so-called 'authoritarian' or, we would say today, 'totalitarian' states. In the case of such regimes, it seems that power is entirely concentrated in the hands of one or a handful of individuals, who secure their power through the submission and exploitation of the masses. From the point of view of parliamentary democracies, such a display of unrestrained violence is attributable to the blind rage that is indissociable from the bare lust for total power. Power, it is thought, is abused, and the counter-power (*Gegenmacht*) of the people contained and silenced. By contrast, parliamentary democracies see themselves as involved in a process of checks and balances and alternative governments aimed at securing the sharing of power. Their power game takes on the appearance of 'free' negotiations and consultations, and this appearance generates the following appearance, in which this organization of power alone is deemed to be 'ethical'. There is no doubt that such differences matter, and mattered especially in Heidegger's lifetime. There is no doubt, also, that Heidegger chose to ignore such differences, preferring instead to equate

'Americanism' and 'Bolshevism,' refusing – even after the war – to condemn national-socialism, and to acknowledge its criminal responsibility in the deaths of millions of Jews, gypsies, communists and other political or religious groups. The question, however, is one of knowing whether there is anything to Heidegger's claim regarding the fundamental unity of destiny between totalitarian and democratic states. There is something deeply disturbing about such a claim. Yet it is a claim that today, after the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the victorious emergence of the forces of Capital and their formidable political vectors (the Western democracies), merits careful consideration. On the one hand, it is thought, Heidegger argues, that the despot, or the tyrant, monopolizes power, when, in actual fact, he himself is entirely in the hands of a logic and an economy of power that is perhaps best served and certainly most visible in totalitarian regimes. On the other hand, democracies, Heidegger believes, are under the illusion that power comes from the people, that it is an expression of the will of the people. The illusion consists in believing in something like a straightforward collective or popular will, in the belief that what is most decisive is a matter for us to decide, that we, the people, can *be* in power and hold it, when the situation is quite different – when we are in its grip, when power itself is that over which we have no power, when we cannot decide to not be involved in such power relations, in such a drive for power, when power, as the one dominating currency in the world, the one value that is recognized across the board and throughout the world, cannot itself be called into question, itself evaluated, and possibly overcome, transformed into something else.

The problem, Heidegger believes, is that we remain blind with respect to the real origin and siege of power, blind as to who, or rather what is really in power. And this is primarily because there is a general 'occultation of the true ruler' (*eine Verschleierung der eigentlichen Machthabe*), a self-concealing of Power in its imperatives, effects and general unfolding. The question, as Arendt asked, is indeed one of knowing Who or What is in power, Who or What governs, or rules. But, unlike Arendt, Heidegger believes it is Power itself that governs and rules, and this in such a way that it is itself never visible as such in the effects it generates. Power is what 'authorises', or 'empowers' (*ermächtigt*) political power, but also economic and symbolic power. It is what authorizes us as powerful beings, what empowers us in the face of nature, of the world, and of others. There is something like an authorization of power, or a process of empowering, through which our relation to all beings becomes one of power. The only thing it does not empower us to do is to resist power, to turn power back upon itself and replace it in the site of its own metaphysical origin.

In 1940, at the peak of Germany's military power and territorial gains, looking ahead, into the future, Heidegger sees not Germany, but communist Russia and America as the two super powers, that is, as the two modes of social, economic and political organization suited to the demands of Power in its total and global tendency. Under the section '*Koinon*', *Die Geschichte des Seyns* develops a long analysis of communism. Specifically, it interprets a number

of socialist policies in the Soviet Union – the communization of the land, of resources, of work and goods, the transformation of the bourgeois society into the classless society via the dictatorship of the proletariat, the nationalization of the industry and the banking system, the abolition of religious institutions, in short, the unification and homogenization of the country as a whole – in the light of a maximization of power and control, the ultimate horizon of which is the world itself and as a whole. By 1940, Heidegger seemed already convinced that national socialism, far from heralding a thousand-year empire, was no match for the superior mode of rational organization set up in Russia. The power of the third Reich was merely transitory. It is only because our time has been sealed in advanced by the stamp of the power of homogenization and hegemonization that the single class, the single party, the single thought can be held as a solution and a way forward. And if, through such measures, the proletariat is indeed freed, it is not from the yoke of the bourgeoisie, but *for* the systematic exercise of its destiny, for its own call to power. Nowhere, Heidegger argues, is the logic of power more visible than in communism: it reveals the extent to which power belongs neither to a class, not to a few, nor to the people as a whole, but to power alone. Power rules and dominates for the sake of its own self-empowering and over-powering. Communism, in its essence, is nothing like humanism. Like all regimes, it is a political and socio-economic response to an onto-historical problem (but then, all problems are onto-historical for Heidegger). Such is the reason why Heidegger rejects something like a Christian (or any other) spiritualism as an alternative to Marxist-Leninist materialism. First, Heidegger argues, Marxism is itself a spiritualism (it is the 'spirit' of metaphysics that speaks in Marxism). Second, the opposition between matter and spirit is itself a product of metaphysics, and so in no way begins to address the problem, that is, Power. It is not, he says, the flight from political actuality into the 'spiritual' that will allow us to overcome the horizon of Power that is, to paraphrase Sartre, the unsurpassable horizon of our time, but the thinking through of the political (*das Durchdenken des Politischen*), back into its unthought essence, namely, Power, as the drive towards beings as such and as a whole, and away from the *truth* of Being. Spirit, on the other hand, is just as much a form of domination of the metaphysical.

Overcoming Power?

Having broadly established modern politics as a response to a certain metaphysical demand, having revealed its various aspects as solutions to a problem that differs from it in nature, the question is one of knowing whether Heidegger is able to think something in place of politics, in place of the modern state, so as to neutralize Power and put it into question, bring it forward as a question. This, in a way, is a far more delicate and complex task. But it is one that Heidegger set out to achieve, in ways that were perhaps only partly successful.

In the face of Heidegger's diagnosis regarding the will-to-power-and-domination that has taken over the human in its relation to the world as such and as a whole, the question is one of knowing whether something can be opposed to power, whether we, humans, can mobilize a certain power against power itself. Or could our very powerlessness in the face of Power be the very form of our resistance to Power? Could it be an opportunity to reawaken ourselves to another power – not another form of power, of distribution and organization of power, but another *sense* of power: our power, and so our freedom to *be*, our power to be free. From what? From nothing – other than from Power itself. For what, then? For that which, from the start, and irreducibly, points beyond the will-to-power, beyond the current consummation of metaphysics in the drive for power, and into the truth of Being. Perhaps our own utter and extreme powerlessness in the face of the will-to-power marks the point at which we become free for something else, for that which is simply otherwise than the will-to-power. Perhaps it marks the moment at which we become empowered in the face of what, following Heidegger, we may want to call the *Ohnmacht*, or that which is simply without power, otherwise that powerful, and which would need to be distinguished most clearly from the *Machtlosigkeit*, or the powerlessness of our own will in the face of the will-to-power. Ultimately, and once this possibility held in reserve has been extracted, it will be a question of knowing whether there would be any sense in talking of a politics of powerlessness or, better said perhaps, of the otherwise than power (*Ohnmacht*).

What sort of reality, of possibility, can such a concept be said to designate? Freedom, as the ability to *be*, as this power or this ability that, already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger characterized as a *Seinkönnen*, and with which he identified Dasein as who we are. Our ability, or power to *be*, is radically different from our power to dominate and subjugate. It is a power to be Being itself, a power of letting-be. From this concept of *Ohnmacht* follows that of earth, and from the coming together of earth and powerlessness, we shall be able to sketch something like an infra-national cosmopolitanism.

Unlike the world, which is always involved in the process of its own territorialization, and which is an object of perpetual rivalry, a disputed object, something we long to conquer and possess, the earth does not belong to anyone. It does not even belong to all. Rather, we, as humans, belong to it: we are *of* it. It is our allotment and our destiny. It is that which is withheld, withdrawn from the world and the will-to-power that blows over its surface. It is that which does not allow itself to be captured, or secured through a rational apparatus, that which unfolds otherwise than through rationalization and power, discreetly, almost imperceptibly. It is the im-power of power itself, its condition of possibility and impossibility, the condition of its historical unfolding as well as of its impossible totalization and closure. It is, so to speak, the other side of power, the reverse or the lining of the totality and its tendency towards totalization, the singularity that marks the suspension of totalitarianism as such. It is the line through which power has always already begun to flee, and in the flight of

which the most thinking of thoughts is engulfed. It is this extreme possibility that is there from the start, yet nowhere less visible than when man rules over the world.

The earth withdraws before man's grip on the world, withdraws as man advances further in the world, transforming it into this space of production, this quantity to be measured, this resource to be extracted and maximized. As such, the earth is the shadow of the world, ungraspable and uncircumventable. If the world today is indeed envisaged as a reserve of resources (including human), and so governed by an imperative of maximization and optimization, the earth must be seen as a horizon of sacrifice, as an aneconomical space, or a space in which an altogether different economy would prevail. If our relation to the world is indeed economical, our relation to the earth is, following Hölderlin's idiom, poetic. Bataille understood this very clearly: the value of poetry, literature and art rests in its sacrificial potential, that is, in its ability to transform our relation to the world by turning to the earth as its aneconomical excess. Between metaphysical poietics, which understands nature and culture, humanity and animality, in productivistic terms, and historical poetics, in the space of which the question of our being is played out, the boundary may seem fragile. And it is true that both possibilities share a common origin, namely, truth. Yet they are two possibilities separated by an abyss. If Jünger's analysis of the figure of the worker and of the modern age as total mobilization, if Nietzsche's will-to-power and Marx's thesis regarding the material forces of production have all contributed decisively to the way in which modern man relates to its world, Hölderlin's poetic voice, and poetics in the most essential, counter-effectual sense, is still awaiting us on the other side, on the side of earth. It is the voice of the earth itself, in and through which an altogether different relation to the world and to others is first made possible.

It is on the basis of Hölderlin's poetry, and following Heidegger, that we can begin to sketch the idea – I hesitate to say the programme – of a citizenship of the earth. Of the earth, and not of the world, for all worldly determinations will turn out to be metaphysical, especially those of blood and soil, still operative today, when it is a question of attributing citizenship. It is remarkable that we have not yet been able to invent a citizenship outside the two highly problematic criteria of blood and soil. The citizenship of the earth, then, would translate into something like a geopolitanism, and precisely not cosmopolitanism.

Could such a politics, such a possibility, begin in Europe? Could it begin in Europe, at a time when Europe, in its slow and painful attempt to draft its first constitution, is wondering how to define itself as an Idea, that is, as more than just a socio-economic space?[16] If Heidegger is in any sense correct in saying that what characterizes humanity as such is the fact that, from the start, it is open to, and so always made to respond to, and so responsible for – in what amounts to a paradoxical logic and an ethics of responsibility in the face of the inevitable – something that exceeds it, and which is its own abyssal ground, something which it can never itself ground and secure, namely, Truth; if he is in any sense

correct in envisaging Europe as a certain response to this exposure, and so a destiny, a response that consisted in shutting down the space of thought opened up by truth, and of directing thought towards the world understood as nature, towards itself as rationality, and towards the human as power – then, to be a responsible European would be to call into question the history of Europe itself, and the way in which it has spilled over other continents, other parts of the world, exporting its will-to-dominate and its imperatives of power and production, turning the world as such and as a whole into one, all-encompassing Europe. Such a responsibility can be met not by developing yet a more integrated economic and industrial space – no matter how beneficial such an integration may have been for peace and stability in Europe in the last 60 years – but by developing a new sense of place, as the place of and for questioning. This means: as the place where the destiny of the human *in terms* of truth is taken up again, this time from the essence of truth itself, in what amounts to a repetition of Europe's history, but from what, in that history, had remained withdrawn, forgotten. Questioning, here, needs to be understood as a mode of being, as the mode of being in which we find ourselves when turning to that which, from the start and always, has turned itself towards us, summoned us, called upon us. It is Heidegger's ambition and, yes, despite what he often says, his hope, that Europe return to its 'nearness to the source', that it recognizes its exposedness and destination to truth as the very source of its historicity, that it measure up to it by remembering and repeating it, by enacting this turn within history, thus initiating this 'other beginning' he speaks of. And if the first, metaphysical beginning is understood as the history of a certain closure, the closure of the world itself, its enclosure and total appropriation, the other beginning, and the questioning it presupposes, is marked by a radical and impossible closure, for one that springs from the Open as such. Could Europe, then, come to stand for this impossible closure, could it ever be strong enough to affirm its own impossible closure, its own, essential and irreducible powerlessness in the face of the earth, to which it belongs? Could it do so not just negatively, by default, but positively, in what would amount to a joyful and mature gesture? Could that be 'politics' in the highest and ownmost sense? Perhaps, if we understand politics as the questioning that is concerned with our place on earth. Perhaps, if the *polis* (or whatever the name for this other space might be) designates the very space in which the future of Europe could be determined on the basis of its exposedness to the Open as such. 'Perhaps,' Heidegger writes in a way that demonstrates the programmatic and tentative nature of his enterprise, 'the word *polis* is the name for the domain that became increasingly and continually questionable and remained question-worthy.'[17] Perhaps this domain ought to be revived, and provide something like a passage, a transition, or a way into 'politics' in the other beginning. This is revolutionary politics in the strongest sense, insofar as it presupposes a break with the metaphysics of power and production that rule today. Yet it is also the most silent, most imperceptible of revolutions, insofar as it elevates powerlessness to the heights of a practice.

Notes

[1] First published in the *European Journal of Political Theory*, vol. 6 (2007), pp. 87–103. We remain grateful to the Editors and the publisher, Sage Publications, for allowing us to reproduce this article in this collection.
[2] K. Löwith, *Der okkasionnelle Dezisionismus*, p. 33.
[3] *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, Gesamtausgabe Band 69 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1998), p. 64. Henceforth GA69, followed by pagination.
[4] GA69, § 57.
[5] GA69, p. 62.
[6] GA69, p. 63.
[7] GA69.
[8] *Nietzsche* II, Gesamtausgabe Band 6.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), p. 39. English translation by David Farrell Krell, *Nietzsche* IV (New York: HarperCollins, 1982), p. 9.
[9] GA69, p. 71.
[10] GA69, p. 70.
[11] GA69, pp. 70–1.
[12] GA69, pp. 179–80.
[13] *Besinnung*, Gesamtausgabe Band 66 (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), p. 234.
[14] *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'*, Gesamtausgabe Band 53 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), pp. 117–18.
[15] Ibid., p. 118.
[16] This question must be immediately nuanced, as many 'Europeans' precisely refuse the idea of a Europe that would be anything other than a space for the free circulation of goods and workers.
[17] GA53, p. 99.

Chapter 6

Living the *Überfluß*: Early Christianity and the Flight of Nausea

Hal Broadbent

In *Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'*[1] Heidegger insists that nihilism in its essence is not to be denounced as yet another historical phenomenon 'along with others, with Christendom, with humanism, and with the Enlightenment' that come 'to the fore within Western history'.[2] These phenomena share a common characteristic: the reduction of 'superabundance'[3] in 'the movement toward less and less fullness and originariness within beings'.[4] Nihilism implies here aborted human experience which although negated nevertheless turns out to be the hidden wellspring resourcing these historical movements. In each one 'the human being feels himself exploited in manifold, not merely economic relations',[5] cheated out of the fullness of human experience that allows for an authentic encounter or excluded from any relation to being that entails 'an enquiring, struggling, grounding of the truth of being'.[6] It is these painful feelings of exploitation, cheated-ness and exclusion that open up the possibility (we will come to see) of understanding nihilism essentially in a transformed sense.

In Nietzsche's words, each of these movements represents the 'dismemberment into individuals'[7] of the otherwise 'mysterious primordial unity',[8] the breaking up of an otherwise 'mystic feeling of oneness'.[9] As illustrations of what Heidegger means by non-essential nihilism, these movements (most especially historical Christianity), are 'forms of a "will to decline" ', signs of 'abysmal sickness, weariness, discouragement, exhaustion, and the impoverishment of life'.[10] An 'ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states'[11] so that when man participates in them 'he is nauseated'.[12]

Heidegger is careful to point out that the historical phenomenon of Christendom is not, as one might presume, the singular and decisive manifestation in time of the originary experience that gave the early Christian communities their defining character. Such a claim would suggest that the dissolution of Christendom announces God's flight from the domain of human affairs or the withholding of God's further self revelation within history, in particular within the specificities of individual lives. 'A confrontation with Christendom,' he says,

'is absolutely not in any way an attack against what is Christian, any more than a critique of theology is necessarily a critique of faith.'[13]

Implicit in these remarks is the suggestion that the world still awaits the manifestation in time of the world-historical phenomenon of 'what is Christian'.[14] If Christendom is not the definitive locus of God's historical encounter with man then Christendom's demise offers the promise of the recovery of that 'dimension in which the divine can first emerge'[15] or 'the domain of the flight and arrival of the god'.[16] Man's departure from this domain (that non-essential nihilism names) results in an anti-realism that Heidegger attempts to deconstruct in his researches into the essence or movement of nihilism. In seeking thus to repatriate man in the *Überfluß* from which he has, through participation in these movements, become estranged, the virulent neo-Kantian theory of value that has infected the separate disciplines of theology and philosophy is countered. Existence is re-enchanted in this reversal and refusal.

In searching out nihilism's essence 'in order to "live resolutely" in wholeness and fullness'[17] Heidegger demonstrates 'a heroic penchant for the tremendous'[18] turning his back in proud audacity 'on all the weakling's doctrines of optimism'[19] that guide nauseating historical phenomena like Christendom, humanism and the enlightenment. As Nietzsche foretells, 'an excess of strength'[20] and 'courage'[21] are required in the venturing forward towards truth, when 'those aspects of existence which Christians and other nihilists repudiate'[22] are positively embraced because they are 'actually on an infinitely higher level in the order of rank among values than that which the instinct of decadence could approve and call good'.[23] Whereas nihilists need the lie (i.e. need to negate or nay-say aspects of existence), the brave and heroic on the vanguard of the *movement* of nihilism find the truth of knowledge in their 'saying Yes to reality'.[24] The essence of nihilism, contrary to prevailing misconceptions, transpires to be the highest affirmation of life.

In this chapter I want to explore the possibility that nihilism, as 'the fundamental movement of the history of the West',[25] contains in its essence the historical phenomenon of 'what is Christian'.[26] The latter can be defined as 'the Christian life that existed once for a short time before the writing down of the Gospels and before the missionary propaganda of Paul'.[27] This Christian life in no way belongs to Christendom for as Heidegger (following Nietzsche) reinforces 'Christendom and the Christianity of New Testament faith are not the same.'[28] Could it be that the originary Christian experience found in Thessalonica,[29] for example, 'twenty years after the crucifixion'[30] in AD 53, is the seed, long in germination, for a globally dominant political form manifesting contemporaneously as 'the world-historical moment of the planetary consummation'[31] of nihilism? Christendom may be in disintegration but could the essential and primordial Christian experience *per impossible* be the impetus driving the flourishing movement of nihilism?

To research this claim I propose to examine part of a lecture course *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* given in the winter semester of 1920–1921 by Heidegger, then in his early thirties, as a young Privatdozent of

Freiburg University. Having identified motifs, understood in Heidegger's sense as 'ever-repeatedly surfacing'[32] tendencies, from the text I will then conduct a close reading of *Zur Seinsfrage* written over 30 years later in 1955 as Heidegger's 'contribution to a publication in honour or Ernst Jünger'.[33] If it can be shown that these early motifs re-emerge in Heidegger's later thoughts on European nihilism, it may be possible to posit a tentative connection between 'the original features of Christian religious *lived* experience' that constitute 'primordial Christian religiosity'[34] and 'the saying of recollective thinking'[35] whose oscillation, though 'we rarely experience',[36] is nevertheless 'the essence of nihilism'.[37] It will become clear as the argument develops that *nihilism*, understood in its usual sense as the negation of one or more aspects of life, as 'denying, nay-saying, nullifying, negation . . . the opposite of affirmation',[38] is not the same as the *essence of nihilism*. The latter, as distinct from the negation of existence arousing nausea, interprets the *nihil* as that which is not a thing, that is, the no thing or life not negated as a thing but affirmed in its wholly otherness as the *überfluß*. The disappearance of former values, 'the collapse of the reign of the transcendent and the "ideal" that sprang from it',[39] is 'greeted as a liberation, touted as an irrevocable gain, and perceived as a *fulfilment*'.[40]

This chapter thinks nihilism, following Heidegger and after Nietzsche, 'in the most profound sense'[41] as the assassination of (or the saying-No-to) 'two millennia of anti-nature and desecration of man'.[42] 'The highest art in saying Yes to life'[43] does not preclude the tragic. It is in essence 'the relentless destruction of everything that was degenerating and parasitical'[44] to make possible once again 'that excess of life on earth'.[45] As the 'radical repudiation of the very concept of *being*'[46] nihilism is, in a word and in its most radical sense, '*becoming*',[47] that is, not being as something that has arrived and is settled but presencing as an ever-coming into being. 'In the very "ground" of being,' Heidegger says, 'the first thing that "becomes" is "nothingness" to which, at the end, truth indeed accrues.'[48] The aim of the movement of nihilism as the 'saying Yes to life even in the strangest and hardest problems'[49] is 'to be oneself the eternal joy of becoming, beyond all terror and pity – that joy which includes even joy in destroying.'[50]

Einleitung in die Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens

The preferred way to identify the tendencies repeating and re-surfacing in Heidegger's reflections on the religious life or primordial Christian experience would be to follow the sequence of Heidegger's lecture series paying heed to the progression of his thought that culminates in his explication of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. However, owing to the limitations of space it is not possible to adopt this method. Instead, I shall offer a description of the three main motifs that surface in two key sections of the second part of the lecture series:[51]

- *The Fundamental Posture of Paul*[52]
- *The 'Having-Become' of the Thessalonians*

The Fundamental Posture of Paul

Heidegger identifies three decisive moments in Paul's biography:

1. 'Self-certainty of the situation in his own life'[53] when, assured of his interpretation of Jewish scriptures, he vigorously and mercilessly persecuted the first Christians;
2. 'Break in his existence'[54] when, on the road to Damascus, he has an experience that makes him relinquish the certainties and assurances of his previous life;
3. An 'original historical understanding of his self and of his existence'[55] that introduces a struggle against the surrounding world: the opposition of 'faith and law'[56] becomes decisive.[57]

For Heidegger, Paul's fundamental posture, grounding his apostolic achievements, is summarized in the thirteenth verse of chapter three from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

> . . . forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front.[58]

In other words, Paul acquires an 'original historical understanding of his self and of his existence'[59] when, moulding himself to the pattern of Jesus' death, he dies to the law (both ceremonial and moral) 'as that which makes the Jew a Jew'[60] and allows himself instead to be gripped and seized by the things he cannot see, namely by faith. It is by believing what he hears (like Abraham's justification by faith alone), rather than slavishly adhering to the provisions of the law, that he 'lives temporality as such'[61] or that he comes to an 'original historical understanding of his self and of his existence'.[62] In the end, it is 'the opposition of faith and law'[63] that is decisive for Paul and his *Grundhaltung*. The 'meaning' found in the experience of faith relativizes everyday structures of significance loosening their grip and neutralizing/negating their influence. In opting for faith over the law, he moves from a life lived within the shadows of the past to one that strains forwards to grasp the promises of the future,[64] 'striving towards the goal of resurrection from the dead'.[65]

The 'Having-Become' of the Thessalonians

Having established Paul's fundamental posture ('forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front'),[66] I will now rehearse Heidegger's phenomenological understanding of the First Letter to the Thessalonians.

Heidegger, in accordance with the schema of phenomenological investigation (outlined above), begins with the 'object-historical report'[67] of the situation found in Acts 17.4 and concentrates his attention on Paul's relation to 'the

"few" who "fell to him"'.[68] He asks what happens to our understanding of this relation when we turn from the historical report to the 'enactment-historical'[69] situation. We come to the realization that Paul does not relate to the Thessalonians as a subject relates to objects but is himself included 'in the state of the congregation'[70] such that 'in them he necessarily co-experiences himself'.[71]

Heidegger subjects the state and character of Paul's relation 'to those who have "given themselves over to him"'[72] to further and closer scrutiny. He surmises that Paul's relation to the Thessalonians (in which he co-experiences himself) has two main and determining phases:

1. 'their having-become'[73]
2. their 'knowledge of their having become'[74]

Because Paul co-experiences himself in his relationship with the Thessalonians 'their having-become'[75] is his own. In other words through examining the *Habensbeziehung* of the Thessalonians, that is, 'their having-become'[76] it is possible to come to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what was entailed in the 'break in his existence'[77] on the road to Damascus.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that they do not need to have anything written to them (4.9) because their knowledge of their having become is not of the same character as regular, ordinary everyday object-historical (scientific) knowledge. Rather, their knowledge of their having-become 'is entirely different from any other knowledge and memory. It arises only out of the situational context of Christian life experience.'[78] In other words when the Thessalonians come to experience their being ontologically as 'like an I' (*ichlichen*) instead of ontically as an 'I am' (*ich bin*) their knowledge and understanding of this experience is not propositional but intuitive. It is this knowledge, 'of one's own having-become',[79] that is 'the starting point and the origin of theology'.[80] It is 'in the explication of this knowledge and its conceptual form of expression'[81] that 'the sense of a theological conceptual formation arises'.[82] From out of this knowledge 'the meaning of facticity'[83] (one of the constituting factors of primordial Christian religiosity) is determined, although both (particular knowledge and facticity), artificially separated here to facilitate explication, are nonetheless 'entirely originally co-experienced'.[84] Heidegger says :

> Having-become is not, in life [just] any incident you like. Rather, it is incessantly co-experienced, and indeed such that their Being [*Sein*] now is their having-become [*Gewordensein*]. Their having-become is their Being now.[85]

It seems Heidegger is saying here that Christian being is not transcendent to life itself but that it comes into being in the specific and particular facts of history itself. In other words, being is inconceivable without an historical understanding or without reference to personal destiny; it (being) only becomes meaningful when it is conceived within a horizon of temporality. Unlike the Mystic 'removed from the life-complex'[86] the Christian 'knows no such

"enthusiasm", rather he says : "let us be awake and sober." '[87] To demonstrate further what it means to say that the being of the Thessalonians, after their experience of primordial Christianity through Paul's proclamation, is now to be found in 'their having-become'[88] Heidegger offers 'a narrower determination of having-become'.[89]

In the sixth verse of the first chapter Paul defines the *genesthai* as a *δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον -δεχθήσεται τὸν λόγον-*, 'an acceptance of the proclamation'.[90] Although accepting the *logon* instils ' "great despair" '[91] in the one thus acquiescing, for it consists 'in entering oneself into the anguish of life',[92] it simultaneously rouses to life 'a "joy" (*metacharas*) which comes from the Holy Spirit'.[93] This joy is 'not motivated from out of one's own experience'[94] but is freely bestowed as 'a gift'. As such it 'is incomprehensible to life'.[95] For Heidegger the formal term 'having-become' (*genesthai*) indicates all of these things.

In the thirteenth verse of the second chapter St. Paul ascribes the origin or source of the *logos* to God. In other words my having-become can only come about as a result of my contact with and exposure to God. This is God, not 'grasped primarily as an object of speculation',[96] which represents an inauthentic understanding of God, but God understood outside 'the conceptual connections'[97] that were introduced when 'Greek philosophy penetrated into Christianity'.[98] My encounter with divinity, 'a living effective connection with God',[99] occurs with my acceptance of the *logos*. Heidegger puts it thus:

> the having become is understood such that with the acceptance, the one who accepts treads upon an effective connection with God.[100]

Acceptance of the word is the how (or 'process') by which a person in Thessalonica became a Christian, that is, experienced primordial Christian religiosity. It informs the way the one-who-accepts lives his/her life thereafter introducing a 'standard of living'[101] and accounting for the Christian's subsequent 'self-conduct in factical life'.[102] In short the having-become of the earliest Christians came about through an accepting and receptive disposition towards the word of God. The acceptance is 'a transformation before God'[103] that results in 'the transformation of life'.[104]

Acceptance or reception of the *logos* (understood as 'a turning-*toward* God')[105] is 'an *absolute turning-around*'[106] that implies and necessitates 'a turning-*away* from idol images'.[107] The having-become of the Thessalonians then is enacted or made effective in factical life through two distinct dispositions :

1. serving (*douleuein* – *δουλεύειν*)
2. waiting (*anameunein* – *αναμένειν*)

While, on the one hand, there is joy to be found in the serving of others, on the other, awaiting the *parousia* is an experience of 'an absolute distress'.[108] Acceptance of the word of God in the transition from everyday being to having-become is 'an entering-oneself-into anguish'.[109] A 'fundamental characteristic'

of Paul's 'self-world' and by extension primordial Christian religiosity is 'distress'. In Nietzsche's words we could paraphrase Heidegger to say that in the one who 'treads upon an effective connection with God'[110] tragedy (i.e. Pauline distress) is re-born or inserted once again into the human condition.[111]

To conclude this section of the chapter, Heidegger's researches into primordial Christian religiosity have revealed that Paul's proclamation, lived and expressed in his letters, did not touch epistemology or psychology on account of the fact that the knowledge he proclaimed was unrelated to 'phenomena of consciousness'.[112] The knowledge he professed rather was found in the basic complexes of serving and waiting because 'the complexes of enactment themselves, according to their own sense, are a "knowledge".'[113] The ground and 'basis of enactment from which knowledge itself arises'[114] is found, not in the sophistications of human wisdom or 'theoretical cognition',[115] but in having (as distinct from being) *pneuma*. 'The terrible difficulty of the Christian life'[116] lies in the fact that it is not 'removed from the life-complex'[117] of history itself finding a refuge in objective states that transcend the individual. Rather, in the proclamation and acceptance of *logos*, the authentic self is engendered which enacts itself through 'a real and original relationship to history'.[118] In short, for Heidegger original Christian religiosity, because it negates worldly structures of significance finding 'meaning' instead in the proclamation of the *logos*, is essentially nihilistic and is where the essence of nihilism is to be found.

Having identified the key motifs that recur in Heidegger's lecture course *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*, I will now turn my attention to the late Heidegger's thoughts on European nihilism as these are reflected in *Zur Seinsfrage*. To recapitulate, the key motifs can be arranged under three headings:

Object-historical

The peace and security, derived from living life guided by the strictures of the law, implies an orientation of a subject towards objects, for instance, idols and the beyond (as temporal objects) of the *parousia*. In blocking against an authentic experience of history this orientation protects against the disturbances represented by Christian proclamation.[119] Complexes of sense that assert themselves outside the ordinary significances of life are resisted and denied so that the self-world (the 'I am') exists in isolation from the authentic self ('having-become'). Worldly structures of significance are decisive for life which is lived unfulfilled, that is, closed of to a *Vollendung* or the *Überfluß*.

Turn

Acceptance of the proclamation, that is, the *logos*, is an absolute turning around from a life determined by the law to one lived in faith. The turn is the forgetting of what lies behind (the past) and a straining in the present for what lies ahead

(the future). This turning away from idols and turning toward God is living temporality as such.

Enactment-historical

With the phenomenological destruction of the object-historical self (the 'I am') effected in the turn, the self is no longer determined by relations to beings but through having-relations. The having-become is not a thing or being as such but is rather a joyful serving and a distressed waiting, that is, an enactment. The peace and security of object-historical life is exchanged for the terrible difficulty and ecstatic joy of the enactment historical (i.e. Christian) life. Worldly structures of significance, not being decisive for life, are thereby negated.

Zur Seinsfrage

In his review of Ernst Jünger's *Über die Linie* Heidegger, before launching into the detail of his discussion, identifies the question Jünger sets out to answer: will 'the movement of nihilism',[120] understood after Nietzsche as 'the process whereby "*the highest values become devalued*" ',[121] come to an end 'in a nihilistic nothing'[122] or will it be 'the transition to the realm of a "new turning of being" '.[123] These starkly contrasting possibilities explain why, in its essence, the meaning of 'the movement of nihilism' is 'ambiguous'.[124] Heidegger sets himself the task of thinking ahead of the image of the line to the space ('itself determined by a locale')[125] where the line intersects. It is from out of the locale (determining the space), Heidegger maintains, that 'the essence of nihilism and its consummation'[126] will emerge. The current lack of clarity or ambiguity serves to blind us 'to the presence of "this most uncanny of all guests" '[127] which, as the will to homelessness,[128] 'has long since been roaming around invisibly inside the house'.[129] Heidegger's task in *Zur Seinsfrage* is 'to catch sight of and see through this guest'[130] to throw light on this ' "process that far exceeds history" '.[131]

Although Heidegger entertains the possibility that the movement of nihilism may come to an end 'in a nihilistic nothing'[132] the central concern of *Zur Seinsfrage* is nevertheless to discuss, through dialogue with Jünger, what it means to claim that the movement of nihilism is consummated or finds its truth in ' "a new turning of being" '.[133] In other words Heidegger, in spite of asserting the ambiguity of nihilism's essence, does not seriously countenance the prospect that the movement of nihilism is a nihilistic nothing. In the early stages of his chapter, for instance, he agrees with Jünger's emphasis that 'nihilism is not to be equated with illness, nor for that matter with chaos or evil'[134] for what is at stake is ' "the whole" ',[135] that is, " 'the planet in general" '.[136]

The thinking prefiguring the 'crossing of the line'[137] does not speak 'the language of metaphysics'[138] because this remains 'entangled in the logical-grammatical conception of the essence of language'[139] which actively 'prevents a transition over the line'.[140] In the '"new turning of being"'[141] which is the end towards which the movement of nihilism is oriented there must be therefore 'a transformation of our saying'[142] if not 'a transformed relation to the essence of language'[143] itself. This raises the question of how the essence of nihilism can be spoken of or discussed at all. The answer Heidegger proposes, which explains the title *Zur Seinsfrage* of his paper, is:

> the only way in which we might reflect upon the essence of nihilism is by first setting out on a path that leads to the essence [*Wesen*] of being. On this path alone can the question concerning the nothing be discussed. *But the question concerning the essence of being dies off if it does not relinquish the language of metaphysics, because metaphysical representation prevents us from thinking the question concerning the essence of being.*[144]

In other words, there is a close connection between the being of man understood as *das Nichts* and the essence of nihilism, neither of which can be thought if 'the thoughtfulness of thinking'[145] unfolds in 'the tempo of reckoning and planning'.[146] 'The transformation of that saying which gives thought to the essence of being'[147] is a direct response to 'the necessity of allowing all as yet intact sources of strength to flow'.[148] Thinking beyond metaphysics by extrication from the entanglements of logical-grammatical language allows the line to be crossed in '"a new turning of being"'[149] in which '"that which is actual begins to shimmer"'.[150] It is in the pain commensurate with being as *Gestalt* that the actual announces itself. Pain is actuality's 'counterattack'[151] against the onslaught of technicity.

At this juncture Heidegger identifies a problem with Jünger's presentation: if the movement of nihilism searches out the *essence* of being, to which it returns man, then that to which being is returned in its new turning (i.e. being's *essence*) must be other than being itself.[152] If it is other than being itself then the movement of nihilism is not found in the being to which metaphysical being has returned (suggested in Jünger's '"new turning of being"')[153] but in *the action of the turning*. In other words, the essence of being as essential presencing is not an altered *stasis* (though a *stasis* nevertheless) but an enactment or a becoming. Since the turning has no being but is nothing (or rather nothings) then the nonhuman transcendence to which man is called in his pain is to become *das Nichts*. Heidegger says :

> the human essence resides in the fact that at all times it endures and dwells in one way or another within such turning or turning away . . . talk of a 'turning of being' remains a makeshift measure that is thoroughly worthy of question, because being resides within the turning, so that the latter can never first come to 'being' from the outside.[154]

If being is named from the perspective of 'the subject-object relation',[155] as Jünger appears to do, so that the human being (returned) is only 'one particular entity among others (such as plant and animal)'[156] it 'fails to ponder something worthy of question that it has left unthought'.[157] Presencing, outside the subject-object relation of being, 'is a call [*Geheiß*] that on each occasion calls upon the human essence'.[158] No longer a thing standing in relationship to other beings, being human as no thing (*das Nichts*), 'divine in kind',[159] is 'the belonging together of call and hearing'.[160] My attentiveness to the saying of the call transports me outside the matrix of being that ordinarily constrains and entangles (this was earlier referred to as phenomenological destruction) enabling me 'to speak of the nothing'.[161] It now becomes clear that in the movement of nihilism everything, for Heidegger, 'depends on the correct saying'[162] or put otherwise:

> on that *logos* whose essence the logic and dialectic that come from metaphysics are never able to experience.[163]

So if the movement of nihilism names the ontological event of being coming into its ownmost as presencing, a naming that can not rely on 'propositional statements in which thinking dies out',[164] then can anything further be said about this phenomenon? Given that the realm it points us towards 'demands a different saying'[165] and that 'no information can be provided concerning the nothing'[166] is it possible to say something that further elucidates rather than merely informs the question?

After depicting the essence of being that presences through the turning as being, to show that it is 'other in essence than . . . the subject-object relation',[167] thinking is plunged 'into the claim of a more originary call'[168] and emerges as 'thoughtful commemoration'.[169] If being has no is-ness it 'belongs to the nothing'[170] so that 'the human being is not only affected by nihilism, but essentially participates in it.'[171] Indeed, 'in nihilism the nothing attains domination in a particular way.'[172] Heidegger elaborates further:

> the human essence itself belongs to the essence of nihilism and thereby to the phase of its consummation. As that being which is in essence brought into the need of being, the human being is part of the zone of being, that is, at the same time is part of the nothing.[173]

Whereas being can be represented metaphysically in time as 'happening as a sequence',[174] being rather 'prevails as the destiny of the surpassing'.[175] As being reduces and altogether disappears, being 'irrupts in a singular uncanniness'[176] albeit withdrawing from 'representation as nihilistically determined'.[177] In maintaining itself 'in a concealment that conceals itself'[178] it points out the region of 'oblivion'[179] that in its sheltering 'preserves what is yet unrevealed'.[180] Oblivion, far from 'merely missing something',[181] transpires to be the pleroma from out of which all life emerges. Heidegger says :

> Correctly thought, oblivion . . . shelters untapped treasures and is the promise of a find that awaits only the appropriate seeking. To have some premonition of this requires . . . only an attentiveness . . . to that which has been.[182]

This attentiveness to what lies concealed beyond the relations of being is 'recollective thinking'.[183] It situates presencing (the essence of being) in the relations of having for 'it recollects thoughtfully what presences as that which has been, and which is not past, since it remains that which does not become past in all enduring granted by the event [*Ereignis*] of being in each case.'[184] As we are in the habit of forgetting oblivion, wherein resides 'the essence of nihilism',[185] of 'casting it to the winds',[186] when we open ourselves up to it in reflective thought instead of feeling peace and security 'we experience an unsettling necessity.'[187] The 'turning back'[188] of recollective thinking 'to that which has been'[189] is not a 'going back to times past in the attempt to freshen these up in some contrived form'.[190] Back means simply 'the direction pointing to that locality (the oblivion of being)'.[191]

Having now completed the review of *Zur Seinsfrage* and identified the key motifs that recur in the text I will now compare these to those from Heidegger's lecture course *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*. To recapitulate, the key motifs of *Zur Seinsfrage* can be arranged under three headings:

The *Gestalt* of the Worker

The security and rest that derive from being formed by the stamping and shaping of the *Gestalt*[192] is confirmed in pain. If the growing power and effective force of the technological worldview is to continue enlarging its expanding sphere of influence across the globe, actuality must succumb without resistance to the objectifying grasping of the *Gestalt*. The future success of the technological domination of the planet depends on our indifference to actuality's counterattack. It is the main characteristic of nihilism, understood as a nihilistic nothing, to be complicit in the reduction and drying up of the *überfluß*. This understanding of nihilism requires my neglect of a more originary call and the claim actuality's counterattack makes on me. This is achieved by continuing to think metaphysically and not recollectively.

'The transition to the realm of a "new turning of being"'

Attentiveness to the call or the saying of recollective thinking, that is, the *logos*, transports being from the realm of the subject–object relation (where it is one particular entity among others) to the region of oblivion where being no longer is or where *das Nichts* abides.[193] In reflective thinking beings are surpassed by being in the move from historiographical metaphysical representations happening as a sequence to the history of being that prevails as the destiny of the surpassing.

Presencing – the event of presence as that which has been

With the reversal of the *Gestalt*'s rescendence (i.e. its phenomenological destruction), being in its transcendence is awakened to a *non*human excellence of a divine kind. The migration from relations of being opens up an awareness of self as *Gewesenen*, as that which has been. Instead of feeling secure in the familiar domain structured by the *Gestalt* (in which the *Überfluß* dries up) I am overwhelmed by an unsettling necessity to live fully immersed in the now overflowing *Überfluß* sheltering untapped treasures and promising a find that awaits only the appropriate seeking.

Conclusion

At the start of this chapter I set out to explore the possibility that nihilism, as 'the fundamental movement of the history of the West',[194] contains in its essence the historical phenomenon of 'what is Christian'.[195] Instead of being the 'denying, nay-saying, nullifying, negation . . . the opposite of affirmation'[196] of life I set out to explore an understanding of the *essence* of nihilism 'as a liberation . . . as an irrevocable gain . . . as a *fulfilment*'.[197]

I have shown, in a reading of *Zur Seinsfrage*, that when being attends to 'the saying of recollective thinking'[198] (*logos*) it 'dissolves into the turning,'[199] that is, the *Gestalt* is destructured, being taken up into its essence as *das Nichts* and presencing as that which has been, *des Gewesenen*. This coming into the locale of nihilism's essence, the oblivion of being, where that which presences is held out into the nothing, is an unsettling experience. As disturbing as it may be, however, living the *Überfluß* is the consummation or destiny of the movement of nihilism. If the *Überfluß* is where the essence of nihilism resides the *Zuwendung* is how the *Überfluß* is accessed.

I have also demonstrated, in a reading of *Einleitung in die Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens*, that when being accepts the Pauline proclamation (*logos*), in the turning away from idols towards God, the significances of life are no longer experienced as ultimately captivating and unremittingly decisive. While distress and terrible difficulty come to characterize primordial Christian religiosity (as a result of negating ordinary worldly structures of significance) there is nevertheless a deep and overwhelming joy to be found in the rebasing of life from the object historical, where I live in the shadow of idols and the past, to the enactment historical, where treading an effective connection with the living God floods life with new significances and impels me forwards with indefatigable hope and anticipation of the future. Being, following acceptance of the *logos* in the *Weg*wendung from idols and the *Hinwendung zu* the Living God, is transformed into the having become, *das Gewordensein*[200] which manifests in time as the enactment (serving and awaiting).[201]

Insofar as 'the saying of recollective thinking'[202] is the *logos* opening up the locale of oblivion where being is understood in the transformed sense as

coming-to-being (that is, as no thing) and where the essence of nihilism is to be found, it coincides with the proclamation of Paul in which the *logos* opens up a space beyond worldly structures where being is understood in terms of the having relations of *Ichlichen* (i.e. as having-become) and where primordial Christian religiosity[203] is to be found. We can conclude therefore, having demonstrated a common provenance, that the originary Christian experience found in Thessalonica 20 years after Christ's crucifixion is the seed, long in germination, for a globally dominant political form manifesting contemporaneously as 'the world-historical moment of the planetary consummation'[204] of nihilism. In *Besinnung* Heidegger confirms 'that the fundamental knowing-awareness of the commencing epoch of modernity is a remembrance of "that which already sways" – "already has been" – in this epoch.'[205] As primordial Christian religiosity is a turning (*wendung*) away from idols and objective time in order that being as *Gewordensein* can come to 'be', so the movement of nihilism is a turning (*wendung*) away from technologically constructed being that understands history as the unfolding of sequential time so that being as *Gewesenen* can emerge. The ostensible difference between the experience characteristic of originary Christianity and the experience pointed out in the movement of nihilism proves to be but a mirage in the light cast by the *logos*. Both transpire to be but different sayings of the same answer. But to what question? *Zur Seinsfrage* of course!

Notes

1 Heidegger, *Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'* in *Holzwege* (GA5), pp. 193–247.
2 Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 201: 'die neben anderen, neden dem Christentum, neben dem Humanismus und neben der Aufklärung . . . der abendlädischen Geschichte auch vorkommt'.
3 Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage* in *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 412: " 'Überfluß' " (Heidegger is citing from Ernst Jünger's *Über die Linie*.)
4 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 412: 'die Bewegung zum Immerweniger an Fülle und an Ursprünglichem innerhalb des Seienden im Ganzen'.
5 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 412: " 'der Mensch empfindet sich als Ausgebeuteter in mannigfachen und nicht nur ökonomischen Beziehungen' " (Heidegger is citing from Ernst Jünger's *Über die Linie*).
6 Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 282: 'einer erfragenden, erkämpfenden Gründung der Wahrheit des Seins'.
7 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 29: 'Zerstückelung in Individuen'.
8 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 26: 'geheimnissvollen Ureinen'.
9 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 26: 'mystische Einheitsempfindung'.
10 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, pp. 12–13: 'Formen eines "Willens zum Untergang" . . . tiefster Erkrankung, Müdigkeit, Missmuthigkeit, Erschöpfung, Veramung'.
11 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 52: 'asketische, willenverneinende Stimmung ist die Frucht jener Zustände'.
12 Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 53: 'es ekelt ihn'.

[13] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 203: 'ist eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum keineswegs und unbedingt eine Bekämpfung des Christlichen, so wenig wie eine Kritik der Theologie schon eine Kritik des Glaubens ist.'
[14] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 203: 'Christlichen'.
[15] Heidegger, *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (GA67), p. 199: 'die Dimension . . . innert deren erst das Gottheitliche . . . aufgehen kann'.
[16] Heidegger, *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (GA67), p. 199: 'der Beriech von Flucht und Ankunft des Gottes'.
[17] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 15: 'um im Ganzen und Vollen "resolut zu lebe"'.
[18] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 15: 'diesem heroischen Zug in's Ungeheure'.
[19] Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 15: 'sie allen den Schwächlichkeitsdoktrinen des Optimismus'.
[20] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 349: 'eine Überschuß von Kraft'.
[21] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 349: 'Mut'.
[22] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 349: 'die von den Christen und andren Nihilisten abgelehnten Seiten des Daseins sind'.
[23] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 349: 'von unendlich höherer Ordnung in der Rangordnung der Werte als das, was der Décadence-Instinkt gutheißen, gut heißen durfte'.
[24] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 349: 'das Jasagen zur Realität'.
[25] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 201: 'die Grundbewegung der Geschichte des Abendlandes'.
[26] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 203: 'Christlichen'.
[27] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 202: 'das christliche Leben . . . das einmal und für kurze Zeit vor der Abfassung der Evangelien und vor der Missionpropaganda des Paulus bestand'.
[28] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 203: 'Christentum . . . und Christlichkeit des neutestamentlichen Glaubens sind nichts das Selbe.'
[29] Heidegger maintains that 'the Pauline letters are, as sources, more immediate than the later composed gospels' [Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 83. 'Die Paulinischen Briefe sind als Quellen unmittelbarer als die später verfaßten Evangelien.'] This is because 'Paul . . . has come to Christianity not through a historical tradition, but through an original experience' [Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 69. 'Paulus . . . durch eine ursprüngliche Erfahrung, nicht durche eine historische Tradition zum Christentum gekommen.']
[30] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 87: 'zwanzig Jahre nach der Kreuzigung'.
[31] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 409: 'der weltgeschichtliche Augenblick der planetarischen Vollendung des Nihilismus'.
[32] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'wieder auftauchende'.
[33] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 385: 'Beitrags zur Festschrift für Ernst Jünger'.
[34] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 80: 'Urchristliche Religiosität'.
[35] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 423: 'die Sage des andenkenden Denkens'.
[36] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 423: 'wir selten erfahren'.
[37] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 424: 'des Wesens des Nihilismus'.

[38] Heidegger, *Nietzsche Zweiter Band* (GA6.2), p. 42: 'Verneinung, Neinsagen, Nicht-sagen, Negation . . . der Gegenfall zur Bejahung'.

[39] Heidegger, *Nietzsche Zweiter Band* (GA6.2), p. 25: 'als Verfall der Herrschaft des Übersinnlichen und der aus ihm entspringenden "Ideale" '.

[40] Heidegger, *Nietzsche Zweiter Band* (GA6.2), p. 26: 'als Befreiung begrüßt, als endgültiger Gewinn gefördet und als *Vollendung* erkannt'.

[41] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 348: 'im tiefsten Sinne'.

[42] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'zwei Jahrtausende Widernatur und Menschenschändung gelingt'.

[43] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'die höchste Kunst in Jasagen zum Leben'.

[44] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'die schonungslose Vernichtung alles Entartenden und Parasitischen, wird'.

[45] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'jenes Zuviel von Leben auf Erden'.

[46] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'radikaler Ablehnung auch selbst des Begriffs "Sein" '.

[47] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 351: 'das Werden'.

[48] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 250: 'Als Erstes "wird" . . . das Nichts, dem freilich ganz zuletzt die Wahrheit zufällt.'

[49] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 350: 'das Jasagen zum Leben selbst noch in seinen fremdesten und härtesten Problemen'.

[50] Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, p. 350: 'über Schrecken und Mitleiden hinaus, die ewige Lust des Werdens selbst zu sein, – jene Lust, die auch noch die Lust am Vernichten in sich schließt.'

[51] Entitled *Phenomenological Explication of Concrete Religious Phenomena in Connection with the Letters of Paul* [Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 67: 'Phänomenologische Explikation Konkreter Religiöser Phänomene im Anschluß an Paulinische Briefe'].

[52] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 72: '*Die Grundhaltung des Paulus*' (emphasis in the original).

[53] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73: 'Selbstgewißheit der Stellung in seinem eigenen Leben'.
In chapter 3 (verses 5 to 6) of his letter to the Philippians, Paul elaborates: 'Circumcised on the eighth day of my life, I was born of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents. In the matter of the Law I was a Pharisee; as for religious fervour, I was a persecutor of the Church; as for uprightness embodied in the Law, I was faultless' [*The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943].

[54] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73: 'Bruch in seiner Existenz'.
In chapter 3 (verse 8) of his letter to the Philippians, Paul elaborates: 'because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything else as loss. For him I have accepted the loss of all other things, and look on them as filth' [*The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943].

[55] 'All significances lose their allure (that is, their significance) when I come into the knowledge of Christ. In other words, knowledge of Christ negates ordinary structures of meaning/significance which are otherwise determinative for everyday life. Dying to (resisting the allure of) earthly significances arousing the anger and fury of those whose lives remain guided by them is being moulded to the

pattern of Jesus' death and partaking in his sufferings' (Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73. ‚Ursprüngliches historisches Verständnis seines Selbst und seines Daseins'.)

In chapter 3 (verses 10 to 11) of his letter to the Philippians, Paul elaborates: 'I have gained an uprightness from God based on faith [i.e. not from the Law] that I may come to know him and the power of his resurrection, and partake in his sufferings by being moulded to the pattern of his death, striving towards the goal of resurrection from the dead' [*The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943].

[56] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 72: 'Glaube und Gesetz'.

[57] Security of partial existence governed by the Law (being) exchanged for relentless and restless struggle for the *Überfluß* generated by faith in Jesus (becoming).

[58] *The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943.

[59] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73: 'Ursprüngliches historisches Verständnis seines Selbst und seines Daseins'.

[60] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 72: 'als dasjenige, was den Juden zum Juden macht'.

[61] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 80: 'lebt die Zeitlichkeit als solche'.

[62] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73: 'Ursprüngliches historisches Verständnis seines Selbst und seines Daseins'.

[63] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 72: 'Die Gegenüberstellung von Glaube und Gesetz'.

[64] Nietzsche characterizes the switch in orientation from the past to the future as 'believing sooner in the Nothing, sooner in the devil than in the "Now"' [Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 15: 'welche lieber noch an das Nichts, lieber noch an den Teufel, als "Jetzt" glaubt']. He deploys *das Nichts* to name the realm of transcendence that stands over and against reality, that is, in the opposite sense (as we will see) to Heidegger.

[65] Chapter 3, verse 11, The Letter of Paul to the Philippians, *The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943.

[66] *The New Jerusalem Bible*, p. 1943.

[67] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'objektiv-geschichtlichen Berichts'.

[68] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'den "Einigen", die "ihm zufielen"'.

[69] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 89: 'der vollzugsgeschichtlichen'.

[70] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'in der Beschaffenheit der Gemeinde.'

[71] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'Er erfährt in ihnen notwendig sich selbst mit'.

[72] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'die sich "ihm zugelost haben"'.

[73] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'ihr Gewordensein'.

[74] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'ein Wissen von ihrem Gewordensein'.

[75] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'ihr Gewordensein'.

[76] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'ihr Gewordensein'.
[77] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 73: 'Bruch in seiner Existenz'.
[78] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'ist ganz anders als jedes sonstige Wissen und Erinnern. Es ergibt sich nur aus dem Situationszusammenhang der christlichen Lebenserfahrung.'
[79] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'um das eigene Gewordensein'.
[80] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'der Ansatz und Ursprung der Theologie'.

If it is my having-become rather than my being itself that is the starting point for theology then Heidegger's remark, that if he were to write a theology the word ‚being' would not appear in it, begins to make sense. Theology for him is to do with *der Habensbeziehung* and not with relations between beings.

[81] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'In der Explikation dieses Wissens und seiner begrifflichen Ausdrucksform'.
[82] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'ergibt sich der Sinn einer theologischen Begriffsbildung'.
[83] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'der Sinn einer Faktizität'.
[84] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'ist ganz ursprünglich miterfahren'.
[85] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'Das Gewordensein ist nun nicht ein beliebiges Vorkommnis im Leben, sondern es wird ständig miterfahren und zwar so, daß ihr jetziges Sein ihr Gewordensein ist. Ihr Gewordensein ist ihr jetziges Sein.'
[86] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'aus dem Lebenszusammenhang herausgenommen'.
[87] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'kennt keinen solchen "Enthusiasmus" sondern er sagt: "Laßt uns wach sein und nüchtern." '
[88] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'ihr Gewordensein'.
[89] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 93: 'nähere Bestimmung des Gewordensein'.
[90] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'ein "Annehmen der Verkündigung" '.

It is particularly worthy of note that Heidegger here renders the Greek word *logos* by the German *Verkündigung*. When he says therefore that Paul's letters are to 'to be analysed from out of the basic phenomenon of proclamation' [Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 81: 'Aus dem Grundphänomen der Verkündigung . . . dessen Sach- und Begriffscharakter zu analysieren'] he means from 'out of the basic phenomenon of *logos*'.

[91] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'großer Trübsal'.
[92] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'in die Not des Lebens hineinzustellen'.
[93] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'eine Freude . . . vom Heiligen Geist kommt'.
[94] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 94: 'nicht aus der eigenen Erfahrung motiviert wird'.

[95] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'dem Leben unverständlich ist'.
[96] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 97: 'primär als Gegenstand der Spekulation gefaßt wird'.
[97] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 97: 'der begrifflichen Zusammenhänge'.
[98] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 97: 'die griechische Philosophie sich in das Christentum eingedrängt hat'.
[99] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'eines lebendigen Wirkungszusammenhangs mit Gott'.
[100] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), pp. 94–5: 'Das Gewordensein wird so verstanden, daß mit dem Annehmen die Annehmenden in einen Wirkungszusammenhang mit Gott treten.'
[101] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'Lebenshaltung'.
[102] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'Sich-Verhaltens im faktischen Leben'.
[103] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'ein Wandeln vor Gott'.
[104] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'den Lebenswandel'.
[105] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'eine *Hin*wendung zu Gott'.
[106] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'eine *absolute Umwendung*'.
[107] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 95: 'eine *Weg*wendung von den Götzenbildern'.
[108] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 68: 'eine absolute Bedrängnis'.
[109] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 98: 'ein Sich-hinein-Stellen in die Not'.
[110] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), pp. 94–5: 'einen Wirkungszusammenhang mit Gott treten'.
[111] In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche ascribes the decadence of Western culture to the gradual overlaying of the tragic in occidental history from the time of Socrates. It seems that for Heidegger acceptance of the *logos*, like 'the mystic tones of reawakened tragic music', [Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 127: 'dem mystischen Klange der wiedererweckten Tragödienmusik'] breaks open 'the enchanted gate which leads into the Hellenic magic mountain' [Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, p. 127: 'verzauberte Pforte . . . die in den hellenischen Zauberberg führt'].
[112] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 123: 'Bewußtseinsphänomene'.
[113] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 123: 'die Vollzugszusammenhänge selbst ihrem eigenen Sinn nach sind ein "Wissen".'
[114] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'die Vollzugsgrundlage, aus der das Wissen selbst entspringt'.
[115] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'theoretische Erkennen'.
[116] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'die ungeheure Schwierigkeit des christlichen Lebens'.

[117] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'aus dem Lebenszusammenhang herausgenommen'.
[118] Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 124: 'ein echtes und ursprüngliches Verhältnis zur Geschichte'.
[119] In the early phases of the lecture series Heidegger speaks of the 'these tendencies to secure' which 'actually defend themselves against history' [Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des Religiösen Lebens* (GA60), p. 47: 'diese theoretischen Sicherungstendenzen . . . sich eigentlich gegen die Geschichte wehren.']
[120] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'Die Bewegung des Nihilismus'.
[121] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: '"*daß die obersten Werte sich entwerten*" '.
[122] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'im nichtigen Nichts'.
[123] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'der Übergang in den Bereich einer "neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.
[124] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'Die Bewegung des Nihilismus', 'mehrdeutig'.
[125] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'der selbst von einem Ort bestimmt wird'.
[126] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'des Wesens des Nihilismus und seiner Vollendung'.
[127] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'die Gegenwart "dieses unheimlichsten aller Gäste" '.
[128] In *Sein und Zeit* being-towards-death names the departure of being (*Sein*) from beings (*Seiendes*). As the realm of beings is (ordinarily) the home of man *sein-zum-tode* wills homelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit*) in the same way as the 'most uncanny' (*unheimlichste*).
[129] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: 'er überall schon längst und unsichtbar im Haus umgeht'.
[130] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: 'es gilt, diesen Gast zu erbllicken und zu durchschauen'.
[131] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: 'einen Vorgang, der die Geschichte weit übergreift'.
[132] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'im nichtigen Nichts'.
[133] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'einer "neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.
[134] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: 'der Nihilismus sei nicht der Krankheit, sowenig wie dem Chaos und dem Bösen gleichzusetzen.'
[135] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: '"Das Ganze" '.
[136] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 387: 'den Planeten überhaupt'.
[137] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 405: 'Überqueren der Linie'.
[138] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 404: 'die Sprache der Metaphysik'.
[139] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 405: 'in die logisch-grammatische Auffassung der Sprachwesens verstrickt'.
[140] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 405: 'die einen Übergang über die Linie . . . verwehrt'.
[141] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: '"neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.
[142] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 406: 'die Verwandlung des Sagens'.
[143] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 405: 'ein gewandeltes Verhältnis zum Wesen der Sprache'.
[144] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 405: 'das Wesen des Nihilsmus nur in der Weise besinnen, daß wir zuvor den Weg einschlagen, der in eine Erörterung der Wesens de Seins führt. Nur auf diesem Weg läßt sich die Frage nach dem Nichts

erörtern. *Allein die Frage nach dem Wesen des Seins stirbt ab, wenn sie die Sprache der Metaphysik nicht aufgibt, weil das metaphysische Vorstellen es verwehrt, die Frage nach dem Wesen des Seins zu denken.*'

145 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 406: 'die Bedachtsamkeit des Denkens'.

146 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 406: 'dem Tempo des Rechnens und Planens'.

147 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 406: 'die Verwandlung des Sagens das dem Wesen des Seins nachdenkt'.

148 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 406: 'die Notwendigkeit hinweisen, alle noch unversehrten Kraftquellen fließen zu lassen'.

149 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: 'einer "neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.

150 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: '"beginnt zu schimmern, was wirklich ist" '.

151 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 402: 'Gegenangriff'.

152 Heidegger calls the *essence* of being 'essential presencing' [Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 407: 'das An-wesen'].

153 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: '"neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.

154 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 407: 'Das Menschenwesen beruht . . . darauf, daß es jeweils so oder so in der Zuwendung und Abwendung währt und wohnt . . . so bleibt . . . die Rede von einer "Zuwendung des Seins" ein Notbehelf und durchaus fragwürdig, weil das Sein in der Zuwendung beruht, so daß diese nie erst zum "Sein" hinzutreten kann.'

155 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 408: 'die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung'.

156 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 407: 'ein besonderes Seiendes unter anderen (Pflanze, Tier)'.

157 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 408: 'bedenkt nicht, was sie schon an Fragwürdigem ungedacht läßt'.

158 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 408: 'Geheiß ist, das jeweils das Menschenwesen, insofern ruft'.

159 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 404: 'göttlicher Art'.

160 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 408: 'das Zusammengehören von Ruf und Gehör'.

161 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 409: 'als vom Nichts zu sprechen'.

162 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 409: 'das rechte Sagen ankommt'.

163 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 409: 'auf jenen *logos*, dessen Wesen die aus der Metaphysik stammende Logik und Dialektik nie zu erfahren vermag'.

164 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 410: 'auf Aussagesätze . . . in denen das Denken abstirbt'.

165 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 410: 'ein anderes Sagen verlangt'.

166 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 410: 'sich über das Nichts . . . keine Auskunft erteilen läßt.'

167 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'anderen Wesens ist . . . die Subjekt-Objekt-Beziehung'.

168 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'in den Anspruch eines anfänglicheren Geheißes'.

169 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'das gedenkende'.

170 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'zum Nichts gehört'.

171 Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'ist der Mensch nicht nur vom Nihilismus betroffen, sondern wesenhaft an ihm beteiligt.'

[172] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 411: 'im Nihilismus das Nichts auf eine besondere Weise zur Herrschaft gelangt.'
[173] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 412: 'Das Menschenwesen gehört selber zum Wesen des Nihilismus und somit zur Phase seiner Vollendung. Der Mensch macht als jenes in das Sein gebrauchte Wesen die Zone des Seins und d.h. zugleich des Nichts mit aus.'
[174] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 413: 'in ihrer Abfolge als ein Geschehen'.
[175] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 413: 'das Geschick des Überstiegs'.
[176] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p.414: 'bricht in einer einzigen Unheimlichkeit auf'.
[177] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 414: 'dem nihilistisch bestimmten Vorstellen'.
[178] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 415: 'in einer Verborgenheit, die sich selber verbirgt'.
[179] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 415: 'Vergessenheit'.
[180] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 415: 'das noch Unentborgenes verwahrt'.
[181] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 415: 'des bloßen Versäumens'.
[182] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 415: 'Die recht bedachte Vergessenheit . . . birgt ungehobene Schätze und ist das Versprechen eines Fundes, der nur auf das gemäße Suchen wartet. Um solches zu vermutten . . . nur . . . Achtung des Gewesenen.'
[183] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 416: 'das Andenken'.
[184] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 416: 'Es denkt jenes Gewesende an, das nicht vergangen ist, weil es das Unvergängliche in allem Währen bleibt, das je das Ereignis des Seins gewährt.'
[185] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 424: 'des Wesens des Nihilismus'.
[186] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 422: 'in den Wind schlagen'.
[187] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 422: 'erfahren wir die bestürzende Notwendigkeit.'
[188] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 422: 'Rückkehr'.
[189] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 416: 'jenes Gewesende'.
[190] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 422: 'ein Rückwärts zu abgelebten Zeiten, um diese versuchsweise in einer gekünstelten Form aufzufrischen'.
[191] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 422: 'die Richtung auf jene Ortschaft (die Seinsvergessenheit)'.
[192] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 396: 'Die Gestalt des Arbeiters'.
[193] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 386: '"neuen Zuwendung des Seins" '.
[194] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 201: 'die Grundbewegung der Geschichte des Abendlandes'.
[195] Heidegger, *Holzwege* (GA5), p. 203: 'Christlichen'.
[196] Heidegger, *Nietzsche Zweiter Band* (GA6.2), p. 42: 'Verneinung, Neinsagen, Nichtsagen, Negation . . . der Gegenfall zur Bejahung'.
[197] Heidegger, *Nietzsche Zweiter Band* (GA6.2), p. 26: 'als Befreiung . . . , als endgültiger Gewinn . . . als *Vollendung*'.
[198] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 423: 'die Sage des andenkenden Denkens'.
[199] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 410: 'löst sich das "Sein" in die Zuwendung'.
[200] In *Introduction to Phenomenology of Religion* Thomas Sheehan points out that *Gewordensein* names the same complex of sense as *Gewesenheit*. He says that in *Gewordensein* 'we recognise one of the earliest statements about what *Being and*

Time will call *Faktizität* and ultimately *Gewesenheit*' (in Joseph Kockelmans (ed.), *A Companion to Martin Heidegger's 'Being and Time'* (1986), p. 54).

[201] In *Die Metaphysik des Satzes vom Grunde* [GA29] Heidegger refers to the being of the first Christians as not being, *das Nichts*, which serves to 'annul the things that are (*ta onta*)' [GA29, p. 222: 'das Seiende . . . zu vernichten'].

[202] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 423: 'die Sage des andenkenden Denkens'.

[203] Heidegger hints at this coincidence when in *Zur Seinsfrage* he says: 'this saying [that is, the *logos*] which is meant to provoke reflection comes to be discarded as an obscure mumbling or dismissed as pompous **proclamation**' [Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 423: 'dieses Sagen, das eine *Besinnung* veranlassen möchte, nur als dunkles Raunen abgestellt oder als herrisches Verkünden zurückgewiesen wird']. The German word translated into English as 'proclamation' is *Verkünden*. We saw earlier that Heidegger translated *logos* in Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians as *Verkündigung*.

[204] Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (GA9), p. 409: 'der weltgeschichtliche Augenblick der planetarischen Vollendung des Nihilismus'.

[205] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 233: 'Das wesentliche Wissen vom beginnenden Zeitalter der Neuzeit ist schon ein Erinnen as das, was in ihm gewesen'.

Chapter 7

Heidegger on Virtue and Technology: The Movement of Nihilism

Joanna Hodge

Introduction

It is well enough known that Heidegger provides a diagnosis of a movement of nihilism, in both short and long form, in a series of essays, published post-war, and in a series of lectures, dating back at least to the mid-thirties, culminating in the 1951–52 lecture cycle, *What calls for thought?* (1954), delivered on his return to Freiburg im Breisgau, as Emeritus Professor.[1] In this chapter, different versions of that movement will be identified, as arising from laying emphasis on different components in that diagnosis, as well as from shifts of emphasis in Heidegger's own enquires. In addition, the respective constraints of lecture cycles, individual addresses, and published papers provide different inflections of what may or may not be a single cumulative analysis. This introduction will identify various distinct layers in the connection to be made out between the diagnosis of a movement of nihilism, and the analysis of an emergent formation, variously invoked as technology, as technics, and as framing (*Gestell*). The following sections will make links more explicitly from the analyses of the movement of nihilism to the stages in the overall movements of Heidegger's enquiries, and this linking will be followed by brief indications of the importance for Heidegger of a discussion of Aristotle on virtue, of Augustine on temptation, and of the analysis of distortions imposed on the terminology of the Greek inception of philosophy, by its appropriation for the purposes of systematizing Christian doctrine. It will be intimated that the account of nihilism shifts, once it is shown to have begun in the attempt to retrieve a non-Christian, because pre-Christian, Aristotle, from behind the back of appropriations by Augustine, and by the doctors of the Church.

There will, then, be a truncated fifth section, concerning a connection from the supposed current figuration of technology, in the twentieth century, to an analysis of the impact on religious belief of systems of theological doctrine, in which attempts are made to conjoin results derived from the Greek origins for philosophy with Gospel testimony. The figuration of technology as in excess of

machine-based production processes is to be complemented by an account of the technologies, institutionalizing Christianity, in excess of the first waves of evangelism and conversion. This last discussion will be foreshortened to an absurd degree, in line with the length limitations implicit in the essay form. Its point, however, is to suggest that the question of technology does not arrive for the first time in the twentieth century, with the assemblages of mechanical devices, designed to ameliorate the material conditions of human beings. There are also spiritual technologies, to which these materialist technologies must be contrasted, and it may be the case that potentialities in such spiritual technologies are suppressed in a subordination of religious concerns to the exigencies of institutional organization. Locating these other arrivals of technology, as modes of installing religion as institution, and as modes for combining apparently incompatible bodies of doctrine would open out this more recent questioning of technology to more effective interrogation, to reveal the tensions between the various strands caught up and twisted together within the dynamics of the processes indicated, but not yet adequately analysed, under the terms 'technology', and 'technics', and in the substitution of a work of framing, and organizing in place of the activities of questioning and problematizing.[2]

It is by now well known that Heidegger's term '*Technik*' does not exactly translate as 'technology', nor yet as 'technics' nor yet as 'technique'. The former has wider scope, and less specific twentieth-century temporalizations, than the term 'technology', and the attempt to give the term the backward scope, reaching to the age of the Greeks and Romans, by translating it as 'technics' has not been entirely successful. The post-war diagnosis of the arrival of technology, in a distinctively modern form, is made public by Heidegger in the essay *Die Frage nach der Technik*, published as the first essay in *Vortraege und Aufsaetze* in 1954. This essay gives a worked-up version of the themes of the four lectures, delivered in Bremen in 1949,[3] which addressed the linked themes, the Thing, the Enframing, the Danger and the Turn. It is in these lectures that there is to be found the controversial, offensive remark, likening the processes of reducing human beings to corpses, in the Concentration Camps, to the activities of motorized agriculture. Thus, even when Heidegger makes clear his abhorrence for the activities of the Nazis, he is to be censored for getting the tone and perspective wrong. Moralizing righteousness is not a characteristic of Heidegger's modes of analysis, and description: his mode is rather that of attempting to step back into a stance from which the widest overview of entire historical trajectories might come into view. However, at this juncture he had stood in the midst of the politics of his day, and surely deserves censure for the line he took.

The argument of this essay is that Heidegger's diagnoses of technology and its associated theme nihilism arrive across an extended trajectory, covering the entire movement of his thought, which can be thought of in two distinct ways. For the trajectory of a diagnosis can be supposed to start either with the 1935–36 lectures, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), and the associated turn into the

intensive reading of Nietzsche, in which Heidegger identifies a deepening crisis in the condition of the human, dating back to Oedipus; or it can be thought of as starting already from the attempt in the early 1920s, to retrieve an Aristotelian notion of virtue and of *kairos*, the time of the turn, from behind the back of its appropriation by Augustine, and then by Thomas, for the purposes of systematizing Christian teaching, and rendering it a religion for the intellectual classes, as well as for the dispossessed.[4] The last section of this essay returns to the fateful impact of this Christianization of Greek philosophy. This last section is on the way to the following analysis: where, in the Middle Ages, what there is can be rendered arcane and inaccessible to meditative thought, by the imposition of theological categories, and the installation of an Inquisitorial inspection of faith, so a New Scholasticism renders a relation to natural forces of regeneration unavailable, through the obfuscatory effects of technically administered mediations, producing a reality in the image of its own technical and calculative procedures. This auto-production, by contrast to a hetero-genesis, overlays the forces of regeneration, which are thus constrained and brought to a standstill in the apocalyptic vision, which Heidegger proffers, of a completion of metaphysics, in a will to will nothing at all. In these processes of obfuscation, technical mediation and elimination, there is an effect of depotentiation of what remains of the sources and resources for assigning, and affirming meaning, a word weakened almost beyond retrieval, but which Heidegger seeks to reaffirm by retrieving Husserl's notion of *Besinnung*, the mode of meditation, which assigns meaning. The notion of *Besinnung* is inflected in the following way in an essay from 1954, translated into English as 'Science and Reflection (*Besinnung*)':

> Reflection is not needed, however, in order that it may remove some chance perplexity or break down an antipathy to thinking. Reflection is needed as a responding that forgets itself in the clarity of ceaseless questioning away at the inexhaustibleness of That which is worthy of questioning- of That from out of which, in the moment properly its own, responding loses the character of questioning and becomes simply saying. (QCT, p. 182)

This notion of reflection is thus not one which provides the basis for affirming the lucidity of a reflecting subject: it is one in which the question of meaning is reaffirmed as a central issue for the viability of thinking.

The question of nihilism arrives in a slightly different guise in the English speaking, as opposed to the German- and French-speaking worlds, as a result of its place in the early translations of Heidegger's essays.[5] The questions of nihilism and of technology are closely connected, but in a way which perhaps conceals the issues in question, rather than opening them up for discussion, or for thought. For the title of the essay on technique, *Die Frage nach der Technik*, means, strictly, a questioning of technique, as a diminished successor term, to be related back to the Greek notion of *techne*. In that essay, Heidegger indicates a connection back to Plato's discussions of *techne* and *episteme*, and to Aristotle's

analyses in *Nicomachean Ethics* of the ways of opening up what there is: *episteme* and *sophia*, *techne* and *phronesis*, and *nous* (Book 6, 3, 1149b15).[6] This inflection, and its initial conjoining to a notion of the turning, *die Kehre*, get covered over in its common transposition into the notion of technology, the question concerning technology, which becomes the title of a collection of essays attributed to Heidegger, in English translation, shortly after his death in 1977. This framing conceals the trajectory of a weakening of thought from Plato and Aristotle on *techne*, to techniques of confession, and the examination of conscience, into the calculability of modern notions of technology. No amount of commentary can undo the impact of this transposition; it is, however, worth signalling how, when Heidegger insists that the essence of *Technik* is not itself *technisch*, it may well be that the essence of *techne* is to be thought through an invocation of a movement of nihilism, in this double sense of covering up exactly that to which Heidegger is trying to draw attention. This double movement, concealing what is to be attended to, is distinctive of this entire area of enquiry.

The Movement of Nihilism, the Movement of Heidegger's Thought

The movement of nihilism may also be thought as a moment in the history of ideas, whereby a series of thinkers take up and develop a set of overlapping themes, with some fairly drastic social and political implications: the visionary destruction of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (1872) translating into the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, in 1914; the descriptions of Zola's *Germinal* turning into workers' revolution. This characterization of Heidegger's thinking of the movement of nihilism, as a response to historical events, and as taking place within a historical–causal nexus, gets some credence if the date 1935–36 is emphasized, for this is indeed a significant date in the development of the Nazi movement, and furthermore of Heidegger's responses to that development. The apocalyptic tone of those lectures are for this reading an indication of Heidegger's increasing disillusion concerning the ability of the Nazi movement to rise to the task of retrieving meaning and reactivating a sense for how what there is arrives. How Heidegger might have mistaken the Nazi movement for one capable of such ontological renewal is the ineradicable dereliction of his thought, and the energy for enquiry released by the degree of his disillusion, an index of the magnitude of the error. However, the concern with a movement of nihilism is announced already in his inaugural lecture, in Freiburg im Breisgau, 1928, 'What is metaphysics?'. In the 1949 preface to the Third Edition of *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, on the essence of grounds as reasons, Heidegger marks a connection between these two texts from 1928 in the following way:

> The treatise 'On the essence of ground' was written in 1928 at the same time as the lecture 'What is metaphysics?'. The lecture ponders the nothing, while the treatise names the ontological difference. (p. 97)[7]

He then adds: 'What if those who reflect on such matters were to begin at last to enter thoughtfully into this same issue that has been waiting for two decades?' (p. 97). This suggests that the discussion of the thing, of the enframing, of the danger, and of the turning, in the 1949 Bremen lectures is to be understood as taking up again these two themes, nothingness and ontological difference, in the exposition of which the enquiry into being, in *Being and Time,* broke off. The treatise, *On the essence of ground* (1929) begins with an invocation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* book delta, on the nature of beginnings (1013a17), which Heidegger quotes: 'It is common then to all beginnings to be the first point from which a thing either is, or comes to be, or is known'[8]; and he then comments: 'Here, the variations in what we are accustomed to call "ground" are identified: the ground of what-being, of that-being, and of being true' (p. 98). These of course are three of the ways of saying being which Aristotle, and Heidegger in his turn, find both worthy of comment, and as obstacles to the provision of a definitive ontology, a unitary unequivocal account of being.

Thus, the movement of nihilism may also be thought, as sometimes Heidegger seems to think it, as a structure, through which to grasp the destiny of Western philosophy, and of human civilization, as founded in a Greek inception, and then falling away from its own highest calling, releasing a demonic power which might then be thought to illuminate any narrative of the disasters of the twentieth century. On this account the diagnosis of nihilism is not a response to the disaster of Nazism: the diagnosis precedes Nazism, and the disaster of Nazism is framed as a symptom of the movement of nihilism. This notion of a demonic power is explored by Heidegger in the reading of Antigone, given in those 1935–36 lectures, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), which were published post-war in 1953, with the infamous phrase about the inner truth and greatness of National Socialism.[9] The concept of nihilism, as a single movement of history, with an intensification into catastrophe, the Danger, is then to be contrasted to a more nuanced structuration of nihilism, as a movement in what there is, whereby the very possibility of change, underlying these various notions of history, decline, and its opposed, supposed preferred term, rise, might be brought into view. This then is an account of nihilism as always in play, no more in the twentieth century than in preceding epochs of history. Here, there are both great historical themes, and diagnoses of historical events; there is also, by contrast, an overarching philosophical concern with a history of philosophy, and its falling off from a high point of achievement among the Greeks, which then mutates into an account of the inevitability of such falling off, if the ontological account offered by Heidegger is accepted: that being cannot arrive, it can only intimate itself, and, in the current epoch, intimates itself only in a mode of greatest concealment.

This latter line of enquiry links into Heidegger's attempt to retrieve Aristotle's accounts of change and of movement, which, for Aristotle are indications of the lesser, transient status of that which alters, when it changes and moves, by contrast to what takes precedence, as what remains, the eternal, immutable unmoved mover, of the latter passages of *De Anima.*[10] In any discussion of

Heidegger's relation to the Greeks, his relation to Aristotle remains the most perplexing, since he seems both to accept Aristotle's claim that the highest mode of being is indeed that of this unmoved mover, as complete self-completing process, and to dispute that such an existing can be brought into any domain delimited by human enquiry. In this latter domain, for Heidegger, at least from the time of the 1924 lecture, *The Concept of Time* on, there is change, and, thereby, the primordial structures of time, and of temporalizations, can come into view, and arrive as finitude and as finite. The diagnosis of nihilism is thus as a register for the incompleteness of any arrival of being in the world. Nihilism is thus both historical, and ontical occurrence and point of view; it is also historial and ontological event, above and beyond human participation, out of which what there is arrives as partial, as damaged, and in conflict with itself. This then opens out a role for religion in providing either consolation, in response to this damage and conflict; or indeed redemption from it. This role for religion plays an occluded role in the development of Heidegger's thinking, returning in the passages in section seven of *Vom Ereignis: Of Enowning: Contributions to Philosophy* (1989), 'The Last God', concerning a turning into the event, which brings the human into the determination of that structure, taking possession of its own history, surmised in *Being and Time* in the analytic Dasein, but left as a historial potentiality, not given a full determinacy as actualized.[11]

There is then a difference to be marked between nihilism, expressed as surface effects of historical events, and a diagnosis of nihilism as part of a philosophical account of the ontology, as what there is, and what there cannot be, making possible those events, changes, and their intensification as catastrophe. Beginning with an account of the sources for these various different layerings and structures of nihilism, as diagnosed by Heidegger in his readings of Nietzsche, this chapter will suggest that these notions of nihilism permit the diagnosis of a transition from a Greek, ontological and unified notion of virtue, preserved in Aristotle's texts, into a decadent form of Christian virtue, dispersed into free standing, and disunited components, with Heidegger seeking to retrieve the former, in the account offered of existentials, in *Being and Time*. This diagnosis is taken up in the next part of this chapter. The penultimate section of the chapter will give a sketch of how the emergent conception of technology is a refinement of, and intensification of notions of nihilism, both passive and active, with the potential for such a retrieval of a properly pre-Christian Aristotle, emergent out of a trajectory of decadence and ruin. The last section will mark how a transition out of the technologies of religious supervision and surveillance, into the modern technologies of communication and transportation, reveal the more thoroughgoing permeation of modes of existing, which Heidegger indicates, when he claims that nihilism no longer stands at the door but has gone 'all the way through the house'. The role of Christianity in Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism prompts the thought of technology, as standing in a successor relation to theology. While this section of this chapter focuses on notions of movement, of nihilism and of a movement in Heidegger's

diagnoses of the movement of nihilism, the next section will look at Jacques Taminiaux's response to Heidegger on Aristotle, moving the focus back to Heidegger's early lectures from the 1920s. This leads into a broader reflection on a relation between religion and theology, as mirroring that set out by Heidegger as holding between thinking and philosophy. Theology and philosophy operate as technologies to control and hold in place the otherwise disruptive forces of thinking and religion.

From Short to Long Form: Varieties of Nihilism

There is, as remarked, a short and a long form for Heidegger's diagnosis of nihilism. The short form arrives emphatically in the texts of the 1950s, and especially in the 1951–52 lectures, *What Calls for Thought?*, which diagnose the arrival of nihilism as both registered in and obscured by the failure of thinking and by a failure to take up an inheritance from the Greeks. In these lectures, Heidegger returns to Nietzsche's attempt to return to the Greeks, to retrieve from a Greek inception a more nuanced account of that inception, as opposed to the sanitized version arriving in, for example, English Public Schools, through the classical humanist thematics of an ideal of public service, a practice of poetic commemoration and the sanctification of Greek virtue, in an all-embracing rhetoric of Christian salvation. The short version is summed up in the essays emerging from the attempt at a diagnosis of contemporary conditions, given in the Bremen lectures from 1949. There are thus three versions of an account of nihilism already in play: that of the 1950s essays on technology and nihilism; that of the Bremen lectures; and the stretching back at least to the 1935–36 lectures, *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The account dating from the 1949 lectures looks like a response to the disaster of Nazism, with more than a hint that, for Heidegger, the main damage here is not, astonishingly, the millions of Jewish and Soviet dead, and the crime of organized death in the camps, but rather the damage to an ideal of Germanness, as a moment of resistance to a planetary emptying out of what technical mastery means. This judgement defies commentary.

There is then an account of nihilism, which identifies this failure of judgement as evidence of the wider movement of nihilism, as historical process, which remains to be analysed. While justified, this version of nihilism, too, misses Heidegger's insistence on a level of ontological analysis which is designed to capture a whole destiny of what finitude means, and its consequences for the philosophical task of providing an account of being. This version, developed between the lectures *What Calls for Thought*, the 1954 paper, 'The Questioning of Technique', and an important essay in 1955, called '*Zur Seinsfrage*', seeks to discover in these notions, thought, thinking, and the questioning of being, the obscuring and loss of dynamism in ontological analysis. This then is a more cautious diagnosis of nihilism than that given in the 1935–36 lectures, for which the greatest of human beings, emblematized in the figure of Oedipus, is fated

to destructiveness. However, if these more cautious approaches to an analysis of nihilism are embedded into the cycles of lectures on Nietzsche, given from 1936 to 1944, it is possible to combine readings of the essays on technique, with a reading of the essays on Nietzsche, and of Nietzsche's attempt to return to the Greeks, as teacher of eternal return and of overcoming, from the later period: the long essay 'Nietzsche's aphorism, "God is dead"', from *Holzwege/ Off the Beaten Track* (1950), and the essay 'Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?' first delivered in 1953, and published in *Vortraege und Aufsaetze* (1954).[12] In these essays, the upshot of the reading of Nietzsche, and the dynamics of Heidegger's independent attempt to perform a return to the Greeks are brought together.

In the former essay, Heidegger announces his intention to give a diagnosis of the essence of nihilism. He also announces that even, or more exactly, especially Nietzsche does not address the question of the essence of nihilism, as a movement:

> In the age of that completion and consummation of nihilism which is beginning, Nietzsche indeed experienced some characteristics of nihilism and at the same time he explained them nihilistically, thus completely eclipsing their essence. And yet Nietzsche never recognised the essence of nihilism, just as no metaphysics before him ever did. (p. 109)

In the latter essay, the role of Zarathustra, as the teacher of Eternal Return and of Overcoming, is under interrogation, to show that there is no incompatibility in affirming these two themes. While for Nietzsche what is important is a movement from passive to active nihilism, which arrives in the posthumously edited volume *The Will to Power*, cited by Heidegger as one of his main sources, for Heidegger there is a further register of nihilism to be responded to. For Nietzsche, the decline marked up in passive nihilism and traced out in *Genealogy of Morals* (1885), in the triumph of the ideals of the weak and the disempowering of the strong, is to be turned around by an active revaluing of values, expressing will to power. This tendency to decline, at work in Western culture, and, according to Nietzsche, most markedly in Christianity, can be turned around into a hastening of that decline in order to make ready for an overcoming. One difficulty with this Nietzschean account, as suggested, is that it is not obviously free of the structural dynamics of a Christian expectation of an imminent arrival of the Kingdom, in which all will be made new in the twinkling of an eye (*in einem Augenblick*). For Zion is adjured to prepare itself to receive this day the purest and fairest, in short, the one, who passes over from fragile finitude to assured perfection, in a supreme moment of overcoming. A different difficulty arrives in the wake of the overcoming in Christian revelation of any distinction marked up between history as narrative, and history as symptom of a distinct ontology, which may be overcome. The partial histories of human undertakings and of human evolution, and even the movements of ontology would, for a Christian history of salvation, be merely moments within a wider process. It is not obvious

that Nietzsche manages to move the diagnosis of nihilism beyond the compass of a Christian heresy.

For Heidegger, after the writing of *Being and Time*, the two differentiations, between active and passive nihilism, and between human history and an ontology of being, remain at the level of an ontical account, in a regional ontology of the human. By contrast, the history of being withdraws from human inspection. His differences with Nietzschean nihilism are marked up most clearly in the Letter on Nihilism, *Zur Seinsfrage*, *On the question of being,* addressed in 1955 to Ernst Jünger, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. This letter underlines the analysis offered in the *Letter on Humanism*, that an understanding of being remains closed to those in the grip of this account of nihilism, centred on the experience of human beings as human. At the level of a human self-relation, human agency appears to play some role in a direction of what occurs, a view which cannot be attributed to Heidegger, even in the earlier phases of his thinking. Thus, the transition from a thinking of Dasein, as Decision or Resolution, *Entschlossenheit,* to thinking a relation of releasement, *Gelassenheit* with respect to the movements of being, is not to be thought as a shift from voluntarism to resignation: for releasement is by no means a gesture of resignation, and the invocation of decisiveness is not a call to action. Each is a call for a recognition and affirmation of what is ontologically given, and, therefore, not subject to alteration, nor to human influence. Thus, when in the post-war texts, Heidegger diagnoses a nihilism which no longer 'stands before the door, but has gone right the way through the house', he is marking a shift from any apparent moment of choosing between the two stances of passively experiencing a process of decline, and seeking to hasten it on, in the Nietzschean figuration, to one to which, on another occasion, I have given the name 'demonic nihilism' in order precisely to distinguish that thought from each of these Nietzschean versions of nihilism.[13]

While there might be thought to be a relation, even a dialectical one, between three moments or phases of nihilism, this, again, seems to me to be misguided, covering over a change of levels in the deployment of the notion of nihilism, and allowing the connotations of the term 'dialectic' to distract from the diagnostic, as opposed to the practical dimensions of the enquiry. For Nietzsche, in the mode of Zarathustra, action is possible, and an affirmative stance towards nihilism shifts its effects. For Heidegger, affirmations of nihilism indicate a set of misguided responses to an ontological state, or condition, naming a lapse in meaning, a gap opening up, resulting from deficiencies in the mode of arrival of being. There is history, because being arrives in deficient, or unsaturated modes, permitting, indeed compelling, movement and innovation in the spaces which an arrival of being might make fully determinate. If Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche is understood to have an origin already in the early 1920s, and not to be a sudden irruption in the 1930s, then it can be seen as already active in Heidegger's return to Aristotle, to excavate further possibilities from this Greek source, which Nietzsche perhaps passes over too swiftly in the

direction of the affirmative reading of the Dionysian components of the tragic writings of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Heidegger's emphatic reading of a self destructiveness of human being, revealed in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles, shifts the emphasis from the workings of fate in human action, to a meditation on the consequences of these workings in the disasters which befall unwitting agents. The shift is from affirmation to meditation, *Besinnung*, and the disaster is not one from which those agents may, by a dialectical or affirmative movement, recover. A further feature then of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, and of the return to Aristotle, is to bring to the fore a radical rethinking of the notion of movement, whereby it is released from the flattening effects of Hegel's powerful, but two-dimensional notion of the movement of the dialectic. It is also released from recuperation in the dynamics of a logic of redemption.

Retrieving Aristotle: From Value, to an Affirmation of Virtue, as Excellence

The analysis of nihilism as a decadence, passive and active, and of a subsequent transition into overcoming in Nietzsche's texts is anticipated in Heidegger's early readings of Aristotle, in the excavation from Aristotle of an analysis of *Ruinanz*, a strong version of the decay, from which there may be no recovery, and of the *kairos,* as the moment of *phronesis*, in which a movement of deliberation arrives at a determinate strategy, if only of understanding what is in play. The wager of the analyses of *Being and Time* is that the moment of *kairos* may be transformed into a moment, within the movements constitutive of Dasein, as the site at which being may arrive. *Ruinanz* is discussed by Heidegger in his 1921–22 lectures, in Freiburg, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (GA61: 1985), in part three, on Factical Life. There, the 'whereto' (*wozu*) of the movement of *Ruinanz* is already designated as 'nothingness' (pp. 106–8).[14] The collapse of meaning intimated in the movement of *Ruinanz* is to be retrieved by exposure to the counter movement of care, and this notion of counter movement then plays a role in the developing dynamics of enquiry leading into the notion of another beginning. The account of movement here is one which retrieves an ontological meaning from an ontical experience of succumbing to, or being absorbed by, particular cares, or concerns, losses of energy and retrievals in passive and active nihilism. This account is also aligned to the analytics of temptation, which Heidegger develops in the immediately preceding lectures on Augustine, in Spring and Summer 1921, *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (GA60: 1995). These lectures have been effectively read by Daniel Dahlstrom, to point up the traces of the reading of Augustine, in the accounts of care, and fear, of the for the sake of which, and of human thrownness, in Division One of *Being and Time.*[15] Heidegger's lectures move from a reading of Augustine, in GA60, 1921, back into the reading of Aristotle, in *Phenomenological Interpretations*

of Aristotle: Introduction to Phenomenological Research (GA61, 1921–22). The move is from an analysis of temptation as a movement of decay and recovery, to a diagnosis of movement and decay, in terms of a retrieval of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. The importance of these lectures on Aristotle, for the emergence of the themes of *Being and Time* may be indicated by the following remark:

> Time is to be understood here neither as a framework for ordering things, a dimension of order, nor as the (specifically formal) character of the connections among historical events, but as a specific mode of movedness in the sense of a character that not only makes movedness possible, releasing it from within, but co-constitutes it as itself moving in an autonomously factical way. (GA61, p. 103)

What arrives here is a valorization of local movement, as opposed to any claim of priority for the unmoved mover of Aristotle's *De Anima*. The preceding reading of Augustine's *Confessions Book X*, in the *Religious Life* lectures, reveals the more determinate versions of movement, as incontinence and temptation, which are the lived versions, the *Erlebnis*, of the abstract movement of *Ruinanz*. This notion of *Ruinanz* is an early place holder for the destruction subsequently traced in the analyses of the movement of nihilism.

In all these readings, there are at work certain valorizations of authors, and of strands of their enquiries, over others, and of certain interpretations of those enquiries, over others. The supposed overcoming of good and evil, in notions of good and bad reading would be comical, were it not still invested with the full power of a malignant annihilating power. There is a need to distinguish between a multiple inheritance, which may be variously appropriated, to various different effects, and a unification of a single tradition, with a single authoritative movement, which can be used to silence and intimidate the heterodox. Some of this discussion has not yet arrived even at an understanding of the Nietzschean horizon for discussion: beyond good and evil, both in terms of any supposed role for humanity, and in terms of a recovery of Christianity in that account, and above all in terms of deliberation on protocols of reading. The Protestant traditions of hermeneutics, and of the occasionality of meaning, stand in some tension with the Augustinian and Thomist versions of analogical reading, and both are to be contrasted to the traditions of rote learning. A humanity beyond good and evil is one which is open to the rigours of Bataille's acephalic analyses of *The Accursed Share* (1967, 1976), and one open to the horrors of twentieth-century warfare, in which first adult, and then child soldiers are dragooned into taking part in mass rape and human massacre. There may, after all, be a case for a strategic retrieval of Christianity, one emancipated from onto-theological dogmatism, in order to stage a negotiation within, and between faiths. This strategic retrieval would contrast to the outright gesture of rejection of all religion, in the modes of Feuerbach and Marx, as an elaborate deception, as superstition, or ideology, the myth of a

redemption from evil, covering over a persistent abuse of women and children by priests of all denominations. For such priesthoods are found not only in organized religions.

It is important to note that the privileging of 'good' over 'bad' readings of texts makes some claim on an objectively constituted, neutral domain of scholarly evaluation, which for Nietzsche at least must have the status, also, of a delusory idol, ready for destruction. For Heidegger, as for Nietzsche, there is a strong notion of necessity in play here, which would permit a diagnosis of the comedy of styles of enquiry, which, in helping themselves to a Nietzschean distinction, between passive and active nihilism, then thinks: passive bad, active good. The implied voluntaristic self-affirmation of willing an active nihilism, as self-emancipatory, as opposed to taking part in the passive nihilism of decadent culture, is one which leads to the misunderstanding of Heidegger's lectures, summed up by the student who declared '*Ich bin entschlossen: ich weiss nur nicht wozu.*' The determinate opening of Heideggerian overcoming is one of self-containment, precisely not one of activism. This then would form the basis for a critique of responses to Heidegger on nihilism, which seek to emancipate the human, by putting it in charge of its destiny. The long form of Heidegger's diagnosis of the movement of nihilism not only forecloses any such voluntarism: it also presents an internal dynamic, of a reading in process of development. This, then, opens up a further dimension on the notion of a movement of nihilism. For Heidegger's own readings switch orientation back and forth between an analysis of the metaphysics of the will, and an analysis of a more discursive poetics; and they switch from an orientation towards Nietzsche's, and Hölderlin's retrievals of the Greeks, to an orientation towards the event of innovation in the German language, to which the writings of Luther, of Nietzsche, of Goethe and Hölderlin so emphatically contribute. It will not be possible here to trace out the full implications, nor yet the detail of the twists and turns of the reading, which would require monograph-length treatment. The rough outline however provides a defence against the lure of any foreshortened version. For this short form lends itself the more easily to this voluntarist misinterpretation, especially if Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who teaches Eternal Return and Overcoming, is understood to be Heidegger himself. It is value which is overcome, when virtue reveals itself as self-overcoming.

This opens out the possibility of, and need to yoke together, the long and short forms of diagnosis, permitting a delimitation of a certain disjunctiveness at work between them. Key here is a contrast of registers, between the elegiac tone of Hölderlin's invocations of a receding world of titanic self-genesis, and the neo-brutalism of SMS-speak. The neo-brutalism of some of Heidegger's own linguistic innovations can then be identified as indicating that, despite his own preferences, there can be no return to the horizon of Hölderlinian self-immolation. The search for a model of self-overcoming, in the Hölderlinian text, the moment of Empedocles providing meaning for Oedipus' suffering, can thus be shown to be unavailing. However, the discussion also reveals the

elision, in the articulation of plural *techne* into technology, of what, for both Heidegger and Aristotle, is the role of a notion of wisdom, *sophia*, as giving meaning to *technai*. This role for *sophia*, as the *arete* of *technai*, the fulfilled excellence of a techne taken to the limit, is discussed by Jacques Taminiaux in an important essay, grounded in a lifetime of reflection on the relation between Heidegger's innovations, Heidegger's readings of Aristotle, and, more generally on the retrieval of classical Greek thinking in the inventions of phenomenology.[16] This notion of *arete*, usually translated as virtue, and discussed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is confusingly divided up into a multiplicity of disseminating abstractions, divided roughly into intellectual and moral virtues, as a result of which the point of the term goes missing. For the notion of *arete* as excellence permits the identification of a potential to be cultivated, and thus the possibility of, and capacity for, a fulfilment, self-completion or actualization, in this case of both *technai* and *episteme*. In his essay, Jacques Taminiaux traces a re-emergence of the Aristotelian notion of *arete*, in the articulation, in Division Two of *Being and Time*, of the Heideggerian notion of *Gewissen*, of wanting to acquire a determinate certainty. This re-emergence can be further traced into the dual notion of *Entschlossenheit*, delimited opening, which Heidegger subsequently reinterprets as *Gelassenheit*, releasement, which comes available in that delimited opening: that which permits what there is to come into view.

Technologies of Appropriation

Thus the long form of Heidegger's diagnosis of a movement of nihilism takes place starting with the attempt to retrieve elements from the history of philosophy, left behind in the take up of Aristotle into a dogmatizing Christian inheritance, in which the form of classical virtue, as site of potentiality, competes with the articulation of Christian virtues, for the purposes of catechism, and then gets left to one side. This grounding of Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, on self-overcoming as a pursuit of an Aristotelian excellence, gets covered over when the account of Heidegger on nihilism is started up from the readings of Nietzsche, from 1936, and not as already in formation from the early 1920s. The role of the reading of Nietzsche in the lectures, *What calls for thought?*, is captured in Heidegger's citation from Nietzsche: 'The wasteland grows: woe to him who hides wastelands within!' (GWXIV, p. 229). Heidegger frames the reading of Nietzsche with a reading of Parmenides saying: 'one should both say and think that being is', and he returns to a remark about reading Aristotle, quoted by Heidegger from his own earlier text on Kant: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929):

> It profits nothing of course that we now quote this statement of Aristotle again, if we neglect to hear that it relentlessly insists on our taking the road into what is problematical. His persistence in that questioning attitude

> separates the thinker Aristotle by an abyss from all that Aristotelianism which, in the manner of all followers, falsifies what is problematical and so procures a clear-cut counterfeit answer. (p. 212)[17]

It is not, I suggest, chance that brings to the fore this question of how to read Aristotle against the grain in the 1951–52 lectures. This has been the task governing a certain trajectory of thought, from 1921 to 1951. It would be possible to repeat the claim in the form: the persistence in that questioning attitude separates the thinker Nietzsche by an abyss from all that Nietzscheanism which, in the manner of all followers, falsifies what is problematical.

In the course of these lectures, Heidegger transposes the taken-for-granted reading of Parmenides' saying, the famously obscure claim, that thinking and being 'are the same'. He works up to the following translation: 'for the same: taking it to heart is also presence of what is present', and he then comments:

> The two belong together in this way, that the essential nature of *noein*, named first, consists in its remaining focused on the presence of what is present. (pp. 241–2)

Heidegger then links this directly into Kant's critical programme of demonstrating that the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience (CPR A 158, B 197), all under the rubric of his commitment to questioning whether presence arrives, whether thinking and presencing can be thought of, as happening at the same time, in the same time, as coincident. Heidegger identifies this 'sameness' as the central thematic of the Western philosophical tradition, and he surmises that this concentration has permitted the emergence of the fateful forces, brought together under the rubric 'technology'. The movement of nihilism, then, is that which has given birth to the dominance of technology, as the framing relation within which human beings find themselves in a world, or rather do not find themselves, because part of the structure of the dominance of technology is to conceal the reach into another dimension made available by a self-relating, in the human, in its relation to existing and to being. The 'sameness' of thinking and being conceals the occasion of the response to this thought.

The task of finding oneself, having registered the movements of temptation and incontinence, of fallenness and dispossession, is rendered all the more difficult, by the emphasis on learning how technologies work, rather than on thinking what it means that there is technology. Thus along with the puzzle of not thinking, to which Heidegger's question: 'What calls for thought?', is designed to draw attention, there is also a failure to think what it means to be human, and to think how, what it means to be human is not a single unchanging structure, and is therefore not a structure on the basis of which an unchanging insight into what there is might come available. This question was opened up by Heidegger in the famous, but notoriously opaque 'Letter on Humanism'

addressed by Heidegger to Jean Beaufret, in reply to the question, what, if anything, might be the connection between Heidegger's work and that of Sartre.

I have argued that reading the 'Letter on Humanism' and the 'Letter to Ernst Jünger' together brings out a connection between an erasure of the question about the humanity of the human, and the deepening concealment of how what there is arrives, as it arrives, in the arrival of a completed nihilism.[18] This should now be put in the context of this longer version of an engagement with the movement of nihilism, as itself, a movement. While it appears to be initiated in a context of Heidegger lecturing on Schelling and on Kant, on human freedom, and in which he has first taken up and then stepped back from affirming common cause with Hitler and the NSDAP, it is a movement which also sets out the task of stepping back into the ground of metaphysics, in order to retrieve the thinking of another beginning. Thereby, the discussion loops back into the motivating forces precipitating the incomplete project of *Being and Time,* and the attempt at a retrieval of Aristotle's texts, and of Aristotle's retrieval of the Greek beginnings of metaphysics. There is here then a series of movements of doublings and duplications. Heidegger returns to his own text, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics,* in order to mark up a further return to, and doubling of, Aristotle's own attempt, in the text known as the *Metaphysics,* to find a systematic account of what there is, by responding to the writings of his predecessors.

Aristotle leaps behind the writings of his immediate predecessor, Plato, and seeks origins and stimulus for his questions in the enquiries of Empedocles of Agrigento, and Heraclitus of Ephesus, in those of the Italians, the Pythagoreans and the Eleatics. Heidegger, in these essays from the 1950s, both invokes and urges an engagement with his own lectures on Nietzsche, from the 1930s, and 1940s, on the *Will to Power as Art*, and on the *Eternal Recurrence of the Same*, which he published in truncated versions in the 1961 volumes, *Nietzsche.*[19] For Heidegger, in the latter thought, of eternal return, Nietzsche brings together the two apparently opposed lines of thinking, of Parmenidean sameness and of Heraclitean flux. Thus, far from hailing Nietzsche as breaking with the tradition of thinking sameness, Heidegger reads Nietzsche as bringing that thinking of sameness to a turning point, where its dissolution into technological forces, the increasing power of the forces generating the spreading wasteland, can be marked up. The question of technology then can be retrieved from the will to will nothingness only when the dynamics of reading, and especially of Heidegger's techniques of reading of his own texts, and of those of the tradition, culminating with those of Nietzsche, have been brought to the fore. The movement of nihilism can be traced out by the patient work of reading, and by attentiveness to the role of reading in retrieving and redeploying the meanings consigned to texts. One obstacle then to thinking about the rarity of thinking, identification of which might permit an affirmation of thinking, is the lack of acknowledgement for a role of reading as *Besinnung*, a primordial assigning of meaning.

Notes

[1] These lectures were translated relatively early on, from the Max Niemeyer edition, *Was heißt Denken?* (1954) (GA8), translated by J. Glenn Gray, as *What is called thinking?*.

[2] For a vigorous analysis of the advantage of discussing technics, rather than technology, see Bernard Stiegler: *Technics and Time* volumes 1 and 2 (1994).

[3] See Martin Heidegger: *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954) (GA7), and the translation into English, in *The Question concerning Technology and other Essays*. See also Martin Heidegger: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (GA79).

[4] See Martin Heidegger: *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935–36) (GA40), published by Max Niemeyer in 1953, and Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time* (1927) (GA2).

[5] See Martin Heidegger: *Vortärge und Aufsätze* (GA7), parts of which are translated in Martin Heidegger: *The Question concerning Technology and other Essays*; *Early Greek Thinking, The Dawn of Western Philosophy*; and parts in Martin Heidegger: *Poetry Language Thought*, which also includes a couple of essays from *Holzwege* (GA5), now translated as Martin Heidegger: *Off the Beaten Track*. For Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Jonathan Barnes (ed.): *The Complete Works of Aristotle* vol. 2, pp. 1729–867.

[6] See *The Question concerning technology*, p. 13, and *Vorträge und Aufsätze* pp. 14f. Heidegger writes: 'Technik ist eine Weise des Entbergens. Die Technik west in dem Bereich, wo Entbergen und Unverborgenheit, wo aletheia, wo Wahrheit geschieht.' This, of course, gets translated as 'Technology is a mode of revealing . . .'.

[7] These texts were collected in Martin Heidegger: *Wegmarken* (GA9) and translated as Martin Heidegger: *Pathmarks*.

[8] For Aristotle*: Metaphysics*, see Jonathan Barnes (ed.): *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, pp. 1552–1729.

[9] See Martin Heidegger: *Introduction to Metaphysics* (GA40), 'In 1928 there appeared the first part of a collected bibliography on the concept of value. It cites 661 publications on the concept of value. Probably by now there are a thousand. All this calls itself philosophy. In particular, what is peddled about nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism, but which has not the least to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement [namely the encounter between global technology and modern humanity] is fishing in these troubled waters of "values" and "totalities" ' (p. 213). The phrase in question was probably added by Heidegger in 1953, at the time of publication, and in German reads 'planetarisch bestimmten Technik' (GA40, p. 208). The adequate commentary on the idea, that National Socialism constituted some kind of defence against a planetary erosion of determinate technics, is beyond the scope of this chapter. Thorough knowledge of classical texts, once thought to be the guarantee of humanist values, is clearly insufficient to protect against forming the worst possible political allegiance.

[10] For Aristotle: *De Anima,* see Jonathan Barnes (ed.): *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, pp. 641–90.

[11] See Martin Heidegger: *Vom Ereignis: Beitraege zur Philosophie* (GA65), translated as *Of Enowning: Contributions to Philosophy* by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. This section seven has as an epigraph the following: 'The whole of otherness against

what has been, and at the same time against the Christian' (cf. GA65, p. 403. 'Der Ganz Andere gegen die Gewesenen, zumal gegen den christlichen').

[12] See Martin Heidegger: *Vortäge und Aufsätze* (GA7).

[13] For a discussion of the invention of a demonic nihilism, in which the opposition between passive and active nihilism is overcome and left behind, in the move to an ontology of nihilism, see 'The Monstrous Rebirth of Nihilism', Joanna Hodge, in Keith Ansell Pearson and Diane Morgan (eds) *Nihilism Now? Monsters of Energy*, pp. 70–85. In this essay there is an exploration of the paradoxes of the becoming common place of nihilism. It proposes a response which is not altogether compatible with that which is under investigation in this chapter. The central diagnosis runs with the following analysis of three paradoxes of the becoming common place of nihilism: 'that Nietzsche supposes his own thought as a non arrival, as posthumous; that the thought of nihilism is supposed all the same to have arrived and is relayed as though it had arrived, and were well understood; and that Heidegger explores this non arrival through the thought of nihilism as the spread of technology in a form which then generates the non arrival of thinking. This has led to the monstrous rebirth of the thought of nihilism in a form no longer, or not yet thought, in a form beyond the active and passive nihilisms of *The Will to Power* . . .' (Ansell Pearson and Morgan, p. 71).

[14] See Martin Heidegger: *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (GA61). See part three, Factical Life, chapter two, *Ruinanz*, on a movement of decline, or collapse, and the countermovement, arising from the proto-analyses of care (*Sorgen*, *Besorgtsein*, *Besorgnis*) (pp. 99–102), which leads into an analysis of *kairos* as a distinctive modality of temporality and of 'chairological ways in which apprehensive life announces itself'. See also Martin Heidegger: *Phenomenology of Religious Life* (GA60).

[15] See Daniel Dahlstrom: 'Temptation, Self-Possession and Resoluteness: Heidegger's Reading of *Confessions* X and What is the Good of *Being and Time*?', pp. 248–65.

[16] For this essay, see Jacques Taminiaux: 'The Interpretation of Aristotle's notion of *arete* in Heidegger's first courses', in Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (eds): *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy*, pp. 13–27. See also, Jacques Taminiaux: *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*. For Heidegger on Aristotle, see Robert Bernasconi: *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*; Walter A. Brogan: *Heidegger and Aristotle, the Twofoldness of Being*; Will McNeill: *The Glance of the eye: Heidegger Aristotle and the Ends of Theory* and *The Time of Life: Heidegger and Ethos*.

[17] For Heidegger citing himself, see Martin Heidegger: *What Is Called Thinking* (GA8), p. 212, where his translation of Aristotle's sentences from *Metaphysics* Z, 1028, b2 ff., are translated thus: 'and so it remains something to be looked for, from of old and now and forever and thus something that offers no way out: what is being . . . ' This is to be found in Martin Heidegger: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (GA3), p. 173.

[18] See Joanna Hodge: *Heidegger and Ethics*, chapter three, 'Humanism and Homelessness'.

[19] See Martin Heidegger: *Nietzsche* (1961).

Chapter 8

Nihilism and the Thinking of Place

Jeff Malpas

Nihilism and Topology

According to late Heidegger the contemporary world is suffering from an 'oblivion of being' – we live, he says, in a 'desolate time', a time of destitution, a time of the 'world's night'.[1] He sees this desolation and destitution as most accurately diagnosed by two key thinkers, one of whom is the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and the other the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. It is Nietzsche who provides Heidegger with much that is foundational to his analysis of the nihilism that he takes to be characteristic of modernity, yet it is Hölderlin who provides him with a way of thinking that is possible even in the face of such nihilism. Not only does Hölderlin mark the way towards later Heidegger's attempt to re-engage with the piety of thinking, namely its properly poetic character, but it is also Hölderlin who plays a crucial role in Heidegger's recognition of thinking as essentially a form of topology – a 'saying of *topos*'.[2] It is as topology that thinking is poetic (which has implications for how we understand the notion of the poetic itself); it is also as topology, and only as topology, that thinking is able to recognize and to begin to understand the nihilistic character of modernity. The nihilism of modernity is, above all, a denial of the very *topos* in which thinking itself comes to pass; and the possibility of finding a way to think in the face of such a denial (a denial that refuses even to recognize its character *as* denial) is thus essentially dependent on maintaining a proper sense of that the topological character of thinking, and so of thinking's proper *place*, as well as our own orientation within it.

The idea that the Heideggerian response to the nihilism of modernity is indeed to be understood in terms of a turn to the topological might seem an unsurprising claim, and to be characteristic of a whole series of 'anti-modernist' reactions that emphasize place, rootedness and community of which Heidegger's is merely one, albeit highly influential, example. On such an view, the turn to *topos* is also entirely consistent with Heidegger's political entanglement with Nazism in the 1930s – Nazism being understood as itself drawing heavily on a conception of German identity as rooted in 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boden*),

in *Heimat* and Fatherland, and thereby standing opposed to the decadent excesses of a nihilistic and cosmopolitan modernity.

In fact, the thematization of *topos* in Heidegger's thought, and the emphasis on Hölderlin as opposed to Nietzsche (and so on the resistance to nihilism rather than merely its proclamation), is increasingly explicit as Heidegger moves away from, rather than towards, the engagement with Nazism. Moreover, the Heideggerian critique of nihilism, especially as it develops in the 1930s and early 1940s around the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, and which is there articulated in terms of a critique both of 'subjectivism' and of metaphysics, is itself directed at what also appear as potential tendencies in Heidegger's own previous thinking, including the thinking that moves Heidegger in the direction of Nazism.[3] Rather than simply a form of reactionary romanticism, then, the Heideggerian turn to topology can be taken as constituting a critical response to a destitution and nihilism at the very heart of modernity – a nihilism and destitution that is not marked by any single political ideology of the right or the left, and that Heidegger saw as exemplified in Nazism, but which, today, is perhaps more clearly evident in the world-wide dominance of a corporatized, bureaucratized 'economism'. The exploration of the interrelation between the themes of nihilism and topology in Heidegger's thought, with respect to which I will address only one small part here, cannot be separated from the shifts in the development of Heidegger's thinking both in terms of his engagement with the philosophical tradition (and the larger history of the West of which it is a part), as well as with certain problematic elements within his own thinking. This is not an engagement that is ever finally settled, however, but one that always remains unstable, and to some extent uncertain.

It is the instability and uncertainty in any thoughtful engagement that is reflected in Heidegger's own thematization of the *Kehre*, the 'turning' that belongs to thinking as such, and of the centrality of questioning to thinking. The *Kehre* is itself a turning back (in the sense of a re-turning or re-orienting) to being, and being is *presence* – on this latter point Heidegger remains insistent.[4] The *Kehre* is thus also a turning back to presence. But the presence at issue here is not the determinate appearing of things in the present. It is rather the appearing of things in a sameness and multiplicity that always goes beyond any single determination – a constant unfolding of things as things. This is why being and questionability belong together, and why the question of being is one with the being of the question, since for something to be present is for it to appear *as questionable*, as standing within a free-play of possibility that can never be exhausted. Yet this inexhaustibility of appearance, this dynamic indeterminacy of presence, while it always remains, is nevertheless also constantly solidifying into the simple unity of a determinate aspect. For this reason, thinking, as a turning back to presence, is also an overcoming of forgetfulness. It is thus that Heidegger characterizes thinking as a remembering or recollection, and also, since he takes remembrance to be a form of thanking (as it is an attending to and recognition of what is already given), as a form of giving thanks.[5]

The turning back to being, to presence, to the thing, that is at issue in the *Kehre* is also, it should be said, a turning in relation to *place*. The very understanding of being as presence already indicates the topological orientation that is at issue here and that underpins all of Heidegger's thinking whether explicitly or implicitly. Presence does, of course, carry a *temporal* connotation, and it is this connotation that comes to the fore in Heidegger's early thinking, but presence is better understood as encompassing both a sense of the temporal *and* the spatial that is only properly expressed in terms of the notion of place or *topos* (place can thus never be simply identified with the spatial alone). Presence always calls upon place – presence is a being-here/being-there – just as place also calls upon presence. Thinking is then a turning back into the place in which we already find ourselves and to which we are given over; thinking is a putting in question our own place as we turn back to it. The turn *to* place in Heidegger's thought, which is itself a turning *in* and *of* place, is also indicative of the way in which all of Heidegger's thinking itself turns around the single question of place, and in which in this place, all of the other elements in his thinking are brought together. The question of place may thus be said to be all that Heidegger's thought addresses – not in the sense that this is *only* what is at issue, but in the sense that this question *encompasses* every other question, and is that to which every other question must be brought back.

The issues that are at stake in Heidegger's thinking of nihilism, and of modernity in general, as it connects with his thinking of place (and less directly, with the matter of questioning in his thought) comes to a particular focus in the 1935–36 essay 'The Origin of the Work of Art', or more specifically in the 'Appendix' ('Zusatz') to that essay written in 1956. In his clarificatory comments on the earlier essay, Heidegger focuses on an issue that is at the centre of his turn to topology and at the centre of the problem of nihilism: the question of the proper understanding of the relation between being and human being, which is also the question of the human relation to place, and the underlying question of the nature of place as such. It is on these comments, and particularly the manner in which they thematize the Greek term *thesis*, that I will focus my discussion here. The aim will be to lay bare one part of the larger development of Heidegger's thinking, and the problems with which it is concerned, particularly as these connect with the matter of both nihilism and topology.

Place and 'Position'

'The Origin of the Work of Art' is situated at a key point in the development of Heidegger's *Denkweg*. It is in this essay that Heidegger first presents the 'event' of truth in terms of the gathering of elements around a single 'thing' – the artwork, the temple – allowing the opening up of world on the closedness of earth.[6] It is also in this essay, in a way directly connected with its thematization of the event of truth, that the topological themes present in Heidegger's

thought from the start take on a new and more explicit character. Thus, for all that 'The Origin of the Work of Art' constitutes something of a *Holzweg* (a forest path that follows its own particular direction), it nevertheless harks back to important elements, including certain problematic elements, in Heidegger's earlier thought, while also pointing the way forward, as Gadamer recognized,[7] to key aspects of the later work.

One such pointer forward of particular relevance to the issue of both topology and nihilism is the appearance in the essay, and in Heidegger's appended comments, of the term that figures in later writings as designating the essence of technology, namely, *Gestell*. In his 1956 discussion, Heidegger notes that the way in which *Ge-stell* (which Heidegger hyphenates here) is used in the 1935–36 discussion is in the Greek sense of 'the gathering together of the bringing forth' and so as enabling a mode of appearance or unconcealment. The sense of *Ge-stell* that Heidegger employs later, as 'the summoning of everything into assured availability' that is the essence of technology, is a sense that he tells us is 'thought out of' this earlier use even though it is distinct from it.

Consequently, although 'The Origin of the Work of Art' does not itself take up the problematic character of modern technology, and so does not take up the movement of nihilism as it occurs in relation to modernity, it nevertheless already operates, through its initial deployment of the term *Ge-stell*, within a framework out of which the later thinking can emerge. Equally significant, however, is the way in which the notion of *Ge-stell* as it appears in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is explicitly presented by Heidegger, in his appended comments, as deriving, 'not from bookcase [*Büchergestell*] or installation' (a derivation often cited in discussions of the term[8]), but rather from this Greek sense of a gathering that also brings forth, which is itself understood in terms of a 'placing' or 'positioning'. *Ge-stell* is the 'positioning' that allows something to stand before us, to appear, in a manner that has a bounded shape and character, an orientation, one might say, belonging to it. It is thus that Heidegger's use of *Ge-stell* in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' is translated by Young in the Cambridge edition of the essay as 'placement'. As a result, *Ge-stell* has to be seen as itself carrying a set of topological associations that are themselves central to the analysis that 'The Origin of the Work of Art' develops.

Inasmuch as 'The Origin of the Work of Art' provides a 'topology' of truth and of the artwork, so it is a topology that focuses on the happening of truth as occurring in and through the 'placed' work. The happening of truth is therefore an establishing and opening up of *place* as much as it is an establishing and opening up of *world*. Moreover, although terms referring directly to place (terms such as *Ort* or *Stätte*) appear only occasionally in the discussion in 'The Origin of the Work of Art', whereas they become much more central in later essays, the earlier essay already seems to draw upon a similar notion of place as itself a *gathering* – a gathering focused in the placed work – to that which appears so prominently in Heidegger's later explications of place.[9]

The topological character of Heidegger's thinking of *Ge-stell* is reinforced by Heidegger's comment, again from the 1956 'Appendix', that *Ge-stell* 'as the essence of modern technology, comes from letting-lie-before experienced in the Greek manner, λόγος, from the Greek ποίησις and θέσις'. The last of these, *thesis*, means position, orientation, setting or placing, and the verb from which it is derived, *tithemi*, has almost exactly the same connotations as the German *stellen* that recurs throughout 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and is present in *Ge-stell* as well as a range of other terms such as *vorstellen* (to represent), *aufstellen* (to set up or to install), *feststellen* (to fix in place or make determinate), *herstellen* (to produce). Heidegger also takes the Greek sense of *thesis* to be at work in his use, in phrases such as 'the *setting*-to-work of truth', of the German *setzen* (meaning to set) – quoting himself, he writes 'So one reads on p. 36: "Setting and taking possession [*Setzen and Besetzen*] are here always (!) thought in the sense of the Greek, θέσις, which means a setting up in the unconcealed". The Greek "setting" means: placing as allowing to arise, for example, a statue.'[10] *Ge-stell*, *stellen*, *setzen*, and *thesis* with these, all seem to be understood in explicitly topological fashion as tied to a sense of place or being-in-place – although it is a sense of place that is also connected with a notion of *setting-in*-place, which is perhaps also a *setting-up* of place, or positioning.

Partly because of the use of *Ge-stell* in his later thinking, but also because of the possible tension between the ideas of 'placing' or 'setting' and 'letting happen' as these relate to truth and the artwork, Heidegger devotes considerable attention to an analysis of what is involved in the key terms at work here, 'to place' and 'to set' (*stellen* and *setzen*), arguing for an understanding of these terms that does indeed connect them with a reading of *thesis* as a 'bringing *hither* into unconcealment, bringing *forth* into what is present, that is, allowing to lie forth'.[11] The topological character of *thesis* comes clearly to the fore in this discussion (especially in the emphasis on bringing *hither* and the bringing forth *into* what is present), and it is further given prominence through Heidegger's explication of *thesis* (and with it *stellen* and *setzen*) in relation to the notion of boundary (*peras*). The 'fixing in place' of truth, which is also a setting of truth to work, is a matter of the establishing of a boundary or outline, but in a passage that closely parallels Heidegger's comments elsewhere, notably in 'Building Dwelling Thinking',[12] Heidegger says that 'the boundary, in the Greek sense, does not block off but, rather, as itself something brought forth, first brings what is present to radiance . . . The boundary which fixes and consolidates is what reposes, reposes in the fullness of movement.'[13]

Heidegger's discussion of the concepts of placing and setting is a complex one. He is concerned both to preserve an original Greek sense in which these terms may be employed, and yet also maintain the continuity between this sense and the transformed sense that belongs to them as they appear in the analysis of technological modernity. *Ge-stell* is thus related to the Greek *thesis* and yet it has to be read as encompassing both the original Greek and the modern sense. The matter is further complicated, however, by the fact that the Greek term

thesis has itself been taken up into contemporary discourse. Heidegger notes this, commenting that 'In the dialectic of Kantian and German idealism . . . thesis, antithesis, and synthesis refer to a placing within the sphere of the subjectivity of consciousness. Accordingly, Hegel – correctly in terms of his own position – interpreted the Greek θέσις as the immediate positing [*Setzen*] of the object.'[14] As Heidegger will have been well aware, the use of *thesis* evident in Hegel also occurs in Husserl, who employs the German *thetisch,* or 'thetic' (which he explicitly understands in relation to *Setzen*) to refer, in general, to the intending of some object *under a certain determination.*[15] The sense of thesis as a positing (often understood as a 'position' in the sense of a 'claim') is probably the one most familiar to us today – and it is also one in which any topological connotation has been more or less lost or else subsumed under the idea of the posit or the projection (although in the German, of course, a project is itself a 'throw', *Entwurf*, a movement *outwards* – a sense also present in the Latin from which the English term derives).

Significantly, there is another place in Heidegger's work in which the notion of thesis is discussed 'topologically' – where, in fact, it is the relation between *thesis* and *topos* itself that is at issue. In his 1925 lectures on Plato's *Sophist*, Heidegger considers the concepts of *thesis* and *topos* in the course of his exposition of Aristotle's understanding of mathematics.[16] What Heidegger tells us about *thesis* in the *Sophist* discussion is not incompatible with his comments 30 years later in the Appendix to 'The Origin of the Work of Art'. However, the earlier comments tend implicitly to draw attention to what the later comments seem concerned to downplay, which is precisely the connection between *thesis* and the modern sense of posit or projection. *Thesis* is distinguished from *topos* in that place is absolute (every being has its proper place), and there is an ordering of such places within the *cosmos*, while position is absolute as it pertains to the cosmos (so 'above' is that to which fire and air move) and relative as it pertains to us (so 'above' may change as we move our bodies).[17] Thus geometrical objects have position (*thesis*), but they have no place (*topos*). They are essentially abstracted from place and from body (even though they can be reapplied to particular places and bodies), yet nevertheless retain a directionality and orientation, although one that is relative to us. So the abstract geometrical figure is not in any place, but nevertheless has, for instance, a left and a right.[18]

One might say that *thesis* is revealed as having two modes, one of which is almost identical with *topos* (the sense in which *thesis* is positionality in the *cosmos*) and which also belongs to the thing, and the other of which is separate from *topos* (inasmuch as it is fundamentally a matter of human *bodily* orientation, or perhaps better, of the orientation of human *activity*), and which therefore belongs to *us* rather than to the thing itself. The possibility of separating position from place in this way opens up the possibility that position, *thesis*, may indeed be understood in the sense of posit or projection – specifically in the sense of a *human* posit or projection, although in Aristotle it has not yet acquired the full implications associated with it in its modern usage.

We might say, then, that the idea of *thesis* already carries within it, in the very possibility of the distinction between the positionality of *place* and the positionality of *human activity*, the possibility of a subjective understanding of positionality, in the sense of a mode of positionality determined on the basis solely of the human, and so also, perhaps, of a 'subjective' understanding of place itself. All that is required to arrive at the latter destination is to lose the sense of absolute determination of place belonging to the thing itself, and all that will be left is the relative 'place' of 'subjective' positionality – indeed, even the thing might be said to disappear in such a relative positionality. This is precisely what seems to happen within the subsequent history of Western thought, and to some extent, it is this development that marks the history of metaphysics, and that can already be seen to mark the movement towards nihilism (both in the sense of the denial of value and in the sense of the dominance of *Gestell*) – although the exact nature of this development still requires further elucidation.[19]

The sense of *thesis* as posit, as Heidegger would insist, is still more nascent in the Greek use of the term than fully realized, yet it indicates how the Greek sense of the term is not discontinuous with the modern. In this respect, Heidegger's own use of *thesis* to distinguish between the two uses of *Ge-Stell* – one referring to the Greek and the other to the essence of technology – might be thought to be somewhat misleading. *Thesis* already contains a similar ambiguity or equivocation to that which is present in *Ge-stell*. Consequently, in his insistence, at least in the his 1956 comments, on reading *Ge-stell* in relation to *thesis* as a way of understanding *Ge-stell* differently, Heidegger may be thought deliberately to overstate and to obscure the difference between the Greek and the modern.[20] At the same time, however, the ambiguity at issue here is itself closely related to a difficulty that Heidegger himself recognizes as lying at the very heart of his own thinking, not only in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' but also in *Being and Time*. This difficulty cannot be resolved merely by clarifying the ambiguity that surrounds *thesis*, since that ambiguity is itself an expression of the difficulty at issue. It is to that difficulty that I now turn.

Place and 'Subjectivism'

If the appearance of the notion of *Gestell* in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' points forward into Heidegger's later writing, another reference points back to the earlier. In a particularly important passage from the 1956 'Appendix', Heidegger directs attention to a 'distressing difficulty' that is evident in the 1935–36 essay, and that he tells us has preoccupied him since *Being and Time*. He writes:

> According to pages 44 and 33 [of 'The Origin of the Work of Art'], it is the art*work* and the art*ist* [*Kunst*werk and *Kunst*ler] that have a 'special' relationship to the coming into being of art. In the label 'setting to work of

> truth', in which it remains undetermined (though determin*able*) who or what does the 'setting', and in what manner, lies concealed the relationship of being to human being. This relationship is inadequately thought even in this presentation – a distressing difficulty that has been clear to me since *Being and Time*, and has since come under discussion in many presentations (see, finally, 'On the Question of Being . . .').[21]

The difficulty to which Heidegger alludes here is one that can be construed in terms of the notion of *thesis* we have just been discussing, since what is at issue is the extent to which being itself may be considered to be a 'posit' or 'projection' (perhaps even a 'product' or 'result') of the human.[22] The problem here is thus the tendency to treat *thesis* as already tending toward a form of human-centred *subjectivism*.

In another of his late essays (from 1954), Heidegger discusses the idea of *thesis* in a way that makes this quite clear, and argues, once again, for a distinction between the Greek and modern senses of *thesis*. Beginning with the notion of 'work' (a notion that also appears in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in terms of the 'working' or truth), Heidegger writes:

> 'To work' means 'to do' [*tun*]. What does 'to do' mean? The word belongs to the Indo-Germanic stem *dhē*; from this also comes the Greek *thesis:* setting, place, position. This doing does not mean, however, human activity only; above all it does not mean activity in the sense of action and agency. Growth also, the holding-sway of nature (*physis*), is a doing, and that in the strict sense of *thesis*. Only at a later time do the words *physis* and *thesis* come into opposition . . . *Physis* is *thesis*: from out of itself to lay something before, to place it here, to bring it hither and forth (*her- und vor-bringen*], that is, into presencing. That which 'does' in such a sense is that which works; it is that which presences, in its presencing.[23]

In asserting the identity of *thesis* with *physis,* and so appearing to deny the ambiguity that seems so self-evident here, Heidegger is resisting the tendency to think of *thesis* as indeed something accomplished primarily by human beings. Moreover, in asserting the coincidence of *thesis* with *physis*, a coincidence which is not accidental, Heidegger also asserts the character of *physis* as itself a positioning or placing, as a happening of *topos*, and of presencing as therefore something essentially tied to such placing – as essentially *topological* in character. To take matters even further, we can say that what is implied here is a conception of *topos* according to which *topos* must indeed possess a 'power' of its own (to use Aristotle's phrase), and cannot be identical with any form of simple 'location' or already-determined 'site' that arises primarily out of human activity or intervention. *Topos*, no less than *thesis*, is thus not to be construed as any form of 'construction', neither in the sense of a 'social' construction nor a construction based upon scientific 'projection', and yet it is precisely towards its

understanding as such a construction that the modern appropriation of *topos* and *thesis* inevitably tends, an appropriation that is itself made possible by the ambiguity in the very notion of *thesis*.

The understanding of presencing that emerges in Heidegger's discussion of *thesis* is the very same conception that becomes clearest in Heidegger's later thinking and that leads him to characterize that thinking as a saying of the place of being – a *Topologie des Seyns*.[24] The story behind the development of this topology is one that I alluded to in my introductory comments above,[25] and is not a story that I have the space to expand upon. Instead, what interests me here is just the way this topology is connected to Heidegger's thinking of *thesis* as that connects to his reading of the nature of *Ge-stell*, and so to the nihilistic character of the modern age. Central to this is the difficulty concerning the relation between being and human being that Heidegger identifies in his 1956 comments – what might be termed the question of 'subjectivism' – which is, at its most general level, a question of *thesis* or posit in the sense of *foundation*, but more specifically, is the question of the role of the foundation of presencing, and so also of place, as it stands in relation to the human.

It is important to recognize, however, that the 'difficulty' referred to here has a twofold reference: it indicates a difficulty that Heidegger experiences in his own thought and which extends at least from *Being and Time* onwards (something indicated by Heidegger's own frequent reference to the problems of 'subjectivism' and 'anthropologism' that emerge in relation to *Being and Time* itself);[26] but it also indicates a problematic tendency within the history of Western metaphysics that is identical with the rise of the technological and the dominance of the human, with the loss of any sense of value in the very insistence on the pre-eminence of value, and which is also made salient by Nietzsche's valorization of the 'will-to-power' and his proclamation of the 'death of God'. It is nonetheless the same question of place that can be seen to underlie this twofold set of issues, and it is thus that in Heidegger's later thinking both sets of issues come together, and are, to some extent subsumed (and thereby also transformed), under the single task that is the saying of the place of being – the *Topologie des Seyns*.

If the 'difficulty' at issue here is inadequately thought, as Heidegger claims, 'even' in 1935–36, then it is inadequately thought in 1927, in 1930 and 1933 (it undoubtedly plays a role in Heidegger's own entanglement with Nazism[27]), and is likely also to be inadequate even in the *Contributions* on which Heidegger works from 1936 to 1938 (which should give pause to those who would give this work a more privileged status).[28] What is at issue in this difficulty is *the* fundamental difficulty in Heidegger's thinking, *and* in the thinking of modern philosophy. It is the fundamental question that underlies what Heidegger calls nihilism and also *Gestell*, and that is central to the project of topology.[29] It is the question as to how we are to understand the happening of presence, which is also a happening of place, in the light of the realization that this topological happening also inevitably implicates the human. The happening of place is a

happening of world, and as such it is always the happening of a particular formation of world, a particular formation of place, but it can easily appear as if this formation is itself something *posited* on the basis of human being. The question is how to understand the happening of place and world, the happening of presence, so that it is not understood as founded in any merely human act (nor, indeed, in *any* foundation in the usual sense at all), even though it is only in relation to human activity that such a happening arises.

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', the difficulty is evident in a particularly acute manner in Heidegger's attempt to think the work of art as itself having a founding role in the establishing of world, and not only the architectural work of art, but also the founding act of the statesman or the originary saying of the poet (here Heidegger surely has Hölderlin – 'the poet of the Germans'[30] – in mind).[31] Within the history of thought, this difficulty is intensified as place comes increasingly to be understood as falling under the sway of human activity, and as human activity itself increasingly appears as nothing more than an endless 'positioning' and 'placing' (*Ge-stell*) that encompasses even the human.[32] Within such a framework, in which the 'positional' has been rendered as identical with the measureable and the calculable, and in which the thing itself has all-but vanished,[33] the original separation of *thesis* from *topos* that was already indicated in Aristotle (but in a way that did not give undue emphasis to *thesis* alone), transformed with Descartes, and heralded by Nietzsche, is revealed as itself leading to the seeming obliteration of place. *It is this that is properly the movement of nihilism – a movement in and of place that cannot be adequately thought independently of place.*

So far I have talked of 'subjectivism' and 'subject' without any additional clarification of what these terms might mean in the Heideggerian context at issue. In fact, these terms have a very specific meaning for Heidegger that is related to their more commonplace contemporary usage in philosophy, but also somewhat different. The difference at issue here is itself indicated by the fact that even while Heidegger often admits a subjectivist tendency in *Being and Time*, it is also the case that he always views *Being and Time* as a work that is intended to take issue with subjectivism. The tension that is evident here arises largely from the fact that the subjectivism that appears in *Being and Time* as the target of Heidegger's critical engagement actually appears as a form of *objectivism* – that mode of static presentation of things, and of the world, that takes things as merely present-at-hand, and so as essentially *spatialized* (this latter point being especially significant from a topological perspective).[34] It is this objectivism that Heidegger identifies with the Cartesian conception of the world as *res extensa*, and that it is so identified also indicates the implication of such objectivism with subjectivism.

As Heidegger sees it, subjectivism has a twofold reference: it draws first upon a tendency at the heart of metaphysics, namely, the demand for a foundation (and as such, a form of 'subjectivism' can already be discerned even in Greek as well as Medieval thought); but it also names the particular mode of thinking

that construes the foundation at issue always in relation to the human. More specifically, subjectivism is that mode of metaphysical understanding that takes things as appearing always as objects standing in relation to a subject, and so as also standing within the frame of the representational (where representation translates the German *Vor-stellen* – literally a standing-before). Subjectivism is a particular way of taking up the 'positive' (or 'thetic') character of presence – which is its being always placed – according to which the placing is always a placing of some object in relation to or by a subject. It is just that way of understanding thesis that arises, as I indicated above, once *thesis* is understood as separate from the world (from *cosmos*) and relative to activity. The sense of 'subject' at issue here is also a sense derived from the notion of *thesis*, and *topos*, in another way, not merely as 'positioning', but of 'place' or 'placing' understood as that *in* or *on* which something *is placed* – which is why 'subject' is also to be understood as *sub-jectum* (from the Greek *hypo-keimenon*), that which underlies, which stands beneath, which grounds.[35]

What makes Descartes so important in Heidegger's account of the development of metaphysics, and in the movement towards nihilism, and that connects Nietzsche directly to him,[36] is the way in which Descartes, through taking certainty as the objective of scientific and philosophical inquiry, already gives a certain priority to the human, but in a way that also privileges the purely 'objective'. He does this, not in the sense of the human as that from which everything is causally or substantively derived, but as that which provides the fundamental and all-encompassing *criterion* (the 'measure') of what is – being thus becomes that which can be represented to a knowing subject, that stands over against the knowing subject, and whose existence can be ascertained by a knowing subject.

What occurs here is perhaps complicated by Heidegger's own description of this development as 'metaphysical'. The way in which thinking is re-oriented to the human subject is certainly a development within metaphysics, but it is also a development in which there occurs a bifurcation within metaphysics between the epistemological and the ontological. What occurs in Descartes is actually a shift within metaphysics from subjectivism as the attempt to identify a single underlying foundation, or *sub-jectum*, for both what is *and* what is known (the two being held together in both ancient and medieval thought), to a modern form of bifurcated subjectivism (based in the primacy of the *cogito*, but in a way that uncovers the world as essentially *materia* and *extensio*), that consists in an epistemological foundation located in the human *as subject* and an ontological foundation located in the world *as object*.

In this context, it should be noted, the terms 'subject' and 'object' appear as quite particular metaphysical designations that rest within subjectivism as a more general phenomenon (although understood in a way specific to the 'modern'), but which also give rise to the more generally recognized and specific forms of *both* 'subjectivism' (in the sense of 'idealism', 'emotivism', 'constructionism' or whatever) *and* 'objectivism' (including 'scientism', 'materialism', 'physicalism'

and so forth).[37] Significantly, even when this tendency towards subjectivism, in all its various forms, is understood, it is often understood within a narrowly subjectivist frame, and so is understood as something *brought about* by the human subject (a tendency characteristic of much contemporary discussion of our current situation), and so as a result, for instance, of the particular interventions of specific thinkers (the privileging of the name 'Descartes' here itself encourages such a view). To repeat a familiar Heideggerian formulation, although to a slightly different point, subjectivism is not something subjective, but is instead a mode of presencing, a mode of the happening of truth, a mode of *Ereignis* – subjectivism as a general tendency of thought is thus already given in the very character of being, of presence, of place.

Subjectivism, both as the desire for an underlying foundation and as the modern bifurcation of that desire into forms of 'subjectivism' and 'objectivism' (the latter being Heidegger's main target in *Being and Time*), is, according to Heidegger, that which underlies and is expressed in nihilism. The devaluing of even the highest values that Nietzsche identifies as characteristic of nihilism is itself a consequence of the reduction of the human to mere subject and of the world to object. Thus Heidegger writes, in 1943, that:

> The human uprising into subjectivity makes beings into objects. However, what is objective is that which, through representation, has been brought to a stand. The elimination of beings in themselves, the killing of God, is accomplished in the securing of duration [*Bestandsicherung*] through which man secures bodily, material, spiritual and intellectual durables [*Bestände*]; however, these are secured for the sake of man's own security, which wills the mastery over beings (as potentially objective), in order to conform to the being of beings, the will to power.[38]

While the death of God is a complicated idea in Heidegger and in Nietzsche, we can nonetheless view it, in the frame established here, as itself an assertion of modern subjectivism, and so also as the completion and culmination – the 'end' – of metaphysics. Heidegger's identification of Nietzsche as the last metaphysician is thus well-founded: it is in Nietzsche that the nihilistic essence of metaphysics becomes fully evident in thought (even though it is only in the following century, perhaps, that it can be said to become fully evident in the concrete formations of world history). The death of God thus appears as the consequence, even as identical with, the triumph of the human (it is, as Nietzsche declares, 'we' who have 'killed' God), and yet this apparent triumph is also the very obliteration of the human – what appears, if at all, is only the subject that stands against an object, or, even more radically, the human is transformed, along with the thing, into that which merely 'stands ready' (what Heidegger calls *Bestand*). Place itself disappears into even less than this: nothing more than a point or mere 'site' within a globalized network of relations that are themselves in constant 'flow'. One might say that here *topos* and *thesis*

have become completely disconnected from one another, with *topos* replaced by *thesis*; but one might also say that *topos* is now understood as nothing but *thesis*, while *thesis* has itself been reduced to a pure 'position' within a system of such positions defined relative to each other.[39]

Dwelling and the Fourfold

The examination of the relation between 'subjectivism' and nihilism, and also between *topos* and *thesis*, as these emerge in Heidegger's thought, and in the history of philosophy more generally, is a complex task, and especially as it relates to the idea of a topology of being, a task that requires much more attention than can possibly be given to it here. What the brief discussion undertaken here has done, however, is to sketch out some of the issues at stake, and to substantiate, in part, the claim concerning the topological character of Heidegger's approach to those issues, including the issue of nihilism, as well as of the issues themselves. In Heidegger's post-war thinking, his approach to these issues undergoes further development, and while, once again, there is not the time or space to do justice to that development here, it is worth providing some brief indication of its nature and direction.

By the late-1940s and 1950s, the focus on nihilism that is such a feature of Heidegger's essays from the late-1930s and early-1940s, has largely been incorporated into the questioning of the essence of technology that is *Gestell*. The relation between being and human being, or, as we might also understand the matter, between *place* and human being, is itself addressed largely through the exploration of what Heidegger calls 'dwelling', together with an analysis of the character of the Fourfold (earth, sky, mortals, gods) as encompassing, and yet not simply determined by mortals. Mortals *build*, and such building can be construed as constituting a positionality of its own, but building is itself founded in dwelling, while dwelling is itself based in the prior belonging of mortals to the Fourfold that also encompasses earth, sky and gods, and so in a prior belonging to world and to place – moreover, inasmuch as the happening of the Fourfold requires mortals, the coming to presence of mortals also requires the Fourfold.

While the account of place, presence and being that emerges in these late essays[40] is clearly in continuity with the earlier writing (including 'The Origin of the Work of Art'), it also constitutes an attempt to think these in a way that does not succumb to the 'inadequacy' that seems constantly to plague much of Heidegger's earlier thought – it seeks to think presence and place in a way that does not look to found them in something apart from and independent of them. The saying of place – the *topology* – that increasingly comes to the fore in Heidegger's later thinking is the name Heidegger gives to the task at issue here. It is also a task that can be understood in terms of an attempt to rethink the concept of *thesis*, and its relation to *topos,* in a way that does not fall victim to

'subjectivism' or to nihilism. In this respect, it is especially significant that the foundational role given to the work of art in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' has disappeared from the later writings – the thing gathers the elements of world in a single place, but no one thing does this in an epochal or unique fashion. The gathering of place that is the happening of presence and of world is a constant and multiple occurrence rather than a single founding or positing whether by any human act or in any single pre-eminent element or thing.[41]

While *Gestell*, as the essence of technology, cannot be understood as if it were some form of anthropologistic instrumentalism, *Gestell* cannot be separated from the prior implication of being with the human, nor from the entanglement of *topos* with *thesis*. An adequate thinking of being, of presence, and of *topos* (and these three can only be thought together), has to acknowledge the implication of the human here without allowing that implication to be misunderstood. Whether Heidegger's later thinking achieves this, and whether, in accord with its intentions, it provides a fully adequate account of *topos* as such, is a question that cannot properly be addressed here.[42] Nevertheless, it is only in the direction of the thinking of *topos*, which is itself an essential form of questioning – of holding open a free-play of possibility (a 'play-space')[43] – that any proper response to the overpowering movement of nihilism can be found. Any such response must take the form of a re-turning to place, a re-finding of oneself, a re-orientation (even, perhaps, a re-positioning) – it must take the form of that to which we may also refer, with Heidegger himself, as a form of *homecoming*, although in speaking thus, we open up another direction in the thinking of place.[44]

Notes

[1] The phrase 'a desolate time' is used by Heidegger in 'Why Poets?' (Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 200 – GA5). The phrase is taken from Hölderlin's elegy 'Bread and Wine', and provides the guiding question for the essay as a whole: '. . . and why poets in a desolate time?'

[2] For a more detailed account of the way such a topology figures in Heidegger's thinking as a whole see J. Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[3] See, for instance, J. Malpas, 'Heidegger, Geography, and Politics', in *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2009), pp. 185–213.

[4] See my discussion of this point in Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, pp. 10–16.

[5] See Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, pp. 138–47, 229, 224 (GA8).

[6] To some extent this is already suggested in 'On The Essence of Truth' from 1930 (in Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, pp. 136–54 – GA9), as well as in other essays and lectures, but it is only in 1935–36 that the direct focus on the thing and its 'placement' first comes properly to the fore.

[7] See Gadamer's comments in his autobiographical essay, 'Reflections on my Philosophical Journey', in L. E. Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Library of Living Philosophers XXIV (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 47.

[8] Elsewhere Heidegger writes: 'According to ordinary usage, the word *Gestell* [frame] means some kind of apparatus, e.g., a bookrack.', Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* p. 20 (GA5).

[9] In his 1952 essay 'Language in the Poem', Heidegger makes particularly clear the sense of gathering that he takes to be contained in the German *Ort*, 'place', by reference to the etymology of the word: 'Originally the word "*Ort*" meant the point [*Spitze*] of a spear. In it everything flows together. The *Ort* gathers unto itself into the highest and the most extreme' – Heidegger, in *On the Way to Language,* p. 159 (translation modified) (GA12).

[10] 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in Heidegger, *Pathmarks,* p. 53 (GA9). It is worth noting that while the translation takes *Setzen* and *Besetzen* as 'setting and taking possession', this rendering is not entirely accurate. As Ingo Farin has pointed out to me, *Besetzen* can also mean placing into a setting as one would a jewel (*mit Edelsteinen besetzen*) or the filling of a position (*eine Stelle besetzen*) – senses that seem more directly relevant, given the context, than 'taking possession'.

[11] In Heidegger, *Pathmarks,* p. 53 (GA9).

[12] 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* p. 154 (GA7).

[13] In Heidegger, *Pathmarks,* p. 53 (GA9).

[14] In Heidegger, *Pathmarks,* p. 53 (GA9); see also Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?,* p. 201 (GA8).

[15] See, for instance, Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy – First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, translated by F. Kersten (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), §117.

[16] See Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist,* §15, pp. 69–83 (GA19).

[17] See Aristotle, *Physics,* IV, 208b8.

[18] As Heidegger emphasizes in his discussion of Aristotle in the *Sophist* lectures, the geometrical is distinct from the arithmetical in that, while both are abstracted from place, position is retained in geometry, but not arithmetic – see Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist,* p. 76 (see also p. 72 where Heidegger notes that the full elucidation of this matter requires an inquiry into the question of place and space – GA19). The way in which the relation between the geometrical and the arithmetical develops in the history of philosophy, and the way in which *thesis* itself undergoes a transformation through the transformation of the geometric in relation to the arithmetic and the algebraic, is another part of what might be thought of as the philosophical 'history' of topology, although not one that can be dealt with here.

[19] The relation between *topos* and *thesis*, and the general relation between place and 'position', is both highly significant and yet also often overlooked. There can be no position without place, but much of the history of Western thought can be seen as a move towards the gradual obliteration of place by position, and the rise of a sense of 'position' that is itself entirely 'positive' or 'constructivist'. This is so not only in the sense in which the human determination of position is often taken to be determinative of place, but also in the understanding of place as itself a matter of relative spatial position. To some extent, it is this overtaking of place by position that underpins Edward S. Casey's account of the philosophical decline of place in Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

[20] In fact, the ambiguity may be thought to be even more problematic than I have allowed here, since what Heidegger does not acknowledge is that even the Greek *thesis* can carry connotations of 'positivity' in the sense of the 'conventional' (see Edward Hussey, *Aristotle's Physics, Books III and IV*, p. 101), and was sometimes used, admittedly in a way more common among later Greek writers (especially some Hellenistic thinkers), in a way that placed it in direct contrast to *physis* – *thesis* was that mode of *nomos* (the conventional) that was distinct from the *nomos* deriving from *physis*.

[21] In Heidegger, *Pathmarks,* p. 55 (GA9).

[22] In the Le Thor seminar from 1969, Heidegger comments that *Being and Time* deploys the concept of 'project' in relation to 'meaning' in a way that makes it possible 'to understand the "project" as a human performance. Accordingly, project is then only taken to be a structure of subjectivity – which is how Sartre takes it, by basing himself upon Descartes' – 'Seminar in Le Thor 1969', in Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, pp. 40–1 (GA15). Heidegger's concern in the Le Thor seminar to preserve a sense of 'project' and 'projection' that is not subjectivist in this way can be read as an argument for the same 'anti-subjectivist' reading of *thesis* that is evident in his comments from the 1950s.

[23] 'Science and Reflection', in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* p. 159 (GA7).

[24] In Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, pp. 40–1 (GA15).

[25] But see Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* for a more detailed account.

[26] See, for instance, Heidegger's comments in *Contributions to Philosophy*, p. 208 (GA65); see also the comments in his chapter entitled 'European Nihilism', in Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol IV (Nihilism), p. 141 (GA48).

[27] As James Phillips argues (in *Heidegger's Volk*), Heidegger's engagement with Nazism is itself partly derived from his attempt to think Da-sein as the existence of a historical people, and of his attempt to re-think such existence in the face of the challenge of modernity. This project is continuous with the project of *Being and Time* even though it is also in certain respects divergent from it. The divergence is itself grounded in his attempt to re-think Da-sein in terms that will address the issues of subjectivism that still seem to trouble the account in the earlier work (in particular, projection is now understood as grounded in the historicality of a people and is understood in terms of the projecting of the history in the form of destining of world). A view that can still be discerned in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (something suggested by, for instance, Taminiaux's reading in *Poetics, Speculation and Judgement: The Shadow of the Work of Art from Kant to Phenomenology* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 153–69.).

[28] The *Contributions* should be read as a stage in Heidegger's attempt to work out the difficulty at issue here, although nevertheless still enmeshed in that difficulty, rather than offering a definitive solution.

[29] I would argue that this is a problem that can only be adequately addressed topologically, and that only as topology can thinking begin adequately take up the problematic at issue here.

[30] Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen 'Germanien' und 'Der Rhein'*, GA39, p. 214.

[31] See Taminiaux's discussion of this in *Poetics, Speculation and Judgement,* pp. 153–69, and especially the way Taminiaux sees this as reflected in the differences between the various versions of the essay that were actually delivered.

[32] Notice that what occurs here is a movement in which place is first transformed into the positional, which is itself understood in relation to the human, but in which the positional so construed then overtakes, not only place, but also the human. Concurrent with this is a tendency to think the positional in terms a notion of spatiality as homogenous extension – as an abstracted mode of space (one that is also essentially determined by *number).* Place remains only inasmuch as it can be thought as identical with a simple location within an extended spatial manifold (and so as essentially arbitrary).

[33] Even the distinction between subject and object is no longer present in its original form, but is instead radicalized: 'The subject-object relation thus reaches, for the first time, its pure "relational", i.e., ordering, character in which both the subject and the object are sucked up as standing-reserves [*Bestände*]. This does not mean the subject-object relation vanishes, but rather the opposite: it now attains to its most extreme dominance, which is predetermined from out of Enframing [*Gestell*]. It becomes a standing-reserve to be commanded and set in order' – 'Science and Reflection', in Heidegger, *The Question Regarding Technology and Other Essays,* p. 173 (GA7).

[34] See Heidegger, *Being and Time,* H89–101, pp. 122–35; see also H361–2, pp. 412–14 (GA2), in which Heidegger notes the way in which, understood in relation to the present-at-hand, the place of a thing 'becomes a spatio-temporal position'.

[35] See, for instance, Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?,* p. 200 (GA7) – this passage is also notable in that in it Heidegger makes clear that the Greek thesis 'does not mean primarily the act of setting up . . . but that which is set up, that which has set itself up, has settled, and as such lies before us. Θέσις is the situation in which a thing is lying'.

[36] See, for instance, Heidegger's discussion in the 'Appendix' (§9) to 'The Age of the World Picture', in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* pp. 147–53 (GA5) (in the preceding section, Heidegger is at pains to explain how it is that subjectivism of the sort to be found in Descartes is not present among the Greeks, not even in the figure of Protagoras). It is no accident that Descartes not only plays a crucial role in the development of 'subjectivism', but that he is also pivotal in the development of geometrical thinking, and in the shift towards an increasingly spatialized conception of place as well as a 'positive' conception of the spatial itself.

[37] Notice that modern subjectivism, although predicted on the bifurcation of epistemology and ontology, can give rise to what might be thought of as a forgetting of ontological issues in the face of the dominance of the epistemological.

[38] 'Nietzsche's Word: "God is Dead"', in Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track,* p. 195 (GA5).

[39] In the Le Thor Seminar Heidegger tells us that 'the concept of place (τόπος) . . . itself disappears before the positing of a body in a geometrically homogenous space, something for which the Greeks did not even have a name' – 'Seminar in Le Thor 1969', in Heidegger, *Four Seminars,* p. 53 (GA15).

[40] Notably in 'The Thing' and 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* GA7), as well as 'Art and Space' (in G. Figal (ed.), *The Heidegger Reader,* pp. 305–9 – GA13).

[41] Once again, see my discussion of this matter in Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology,* pp. 219–51.

[42] In fact, it seems to me that even Heidegger's later thinking remains somewhat tentative and uncertain in exactly how this issue is to be resolved and in the details of its resolution. Heidegger is clear on the need to refuse any account of *topos* that founds it in something other than itself (including the human) , and yet he is also reticent in regard to the explication of the 'structure' of *topos* and the exact manner in which the human relation to place is to be construed. See, however, Malpas, *Place and Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999) for an exploration of this issue from a somewhat broader perspective.

[43] The most essential questioning is that in which what is at issue is *our own place* – and in which the very possibility of questioning arises.

[44] A direction that would lead to a reconsideration of the topologically oriented notions of *Heimat* and homeland, of belonging and identity, of memory and nostalgia. Some of this is explored in Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), but also in a number of my other essays (for instance, 'Philosophy's Nostalgia', forthcoming), as well as in a volume, currently in preparation, titled *Ethos and Topos*.

Chapter 9

What Gives Here? Φρόνησις and *die Götter*: A Close Reading of §§70–71 of Martin Heidegger's *Besinnung*

Susan Frank Parsons

Endings come upon us all unready. Accustomed as one becomes to the ways of a world and familiar as its appeals sound upon the ear, the arrival of an end brings perplexity and danger. Of a sudden the most obvious things are no longer reliable as they show themselves in a new and uncanny light, and what once was heard to be consoling fills now with dread the ones who hear what is being said. How is one to be in this time, the time of an ending, when what it is to be at all seems entirely at risk in the undertaking? Something of this mood informs Martin Heidegger's 1940 lectures on Nietzsche, and especially as he draws attention to ours as 'the age of the fulfilment of metaphysics'.[1] A deeper shudder takes hold here. For this is to name a kind of ending, a closure that took place in Nietzsche's words as the Western trajectory of reason arrived at its final destination, the completion of an undertaking from which nothing further is to be expected. Heidegger offers in his lectures the close readings of Nietzsche in which the character of our epoch is so painfully disclosed, as too he considers the consolidation of reason's paths into the essence of technology and the voice of the moral whose domination fills today the whole world with its apparently obvious conclusions. Such is the character of the movement of nihilism.

Heidegger himself, however, presses on, for his investigations do not turn away from the danger that lies in this event but relentlessly search out what remains hidden that cannot be brought to light within the terms thus far provided and so that has yet to be thought. This exploration indeed is path-breaking, opening the way towards what might become another beginning, not bound by the first beginning already accomplished but rather, in its very being-uncovered, a beginning that is freed for what is to come, for what lies ahead. This is the mood one finds in two of Heidegger's previous and related works in both of which it is the possibility of this other beginning that compels thinking forward into an altogether strange terrain for which none is as yet prepared. It is this movement of thinking into what awaits it that is to be found in the sections under consideration in this chapter.

Heidegger's text, entitled in English, *Mindfulness*, was written during 1938–39 immediately following his completion of the text of the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. It comes to us edited by his own appointed editor of the *Gesamtausgabe*, Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, who combined both Heidegger's own manuscript with a typescript prepared under Heidegger's direction, and without any editorial intervention such as copy-editing. A number of stylistic parallels are to be found between the two texts, not least the division into sections which Heidegger himself characterized as 'a list of leaps'. This key word from the central §4 of the *Beiträge*, entitled '*Der Sprung*' (a section that Heidegger especially mentions when giving direction in 1937–38 for the publication of his works), is in the *Besinnung* text more fully opened out as, in his words, 'a series of short and long leaps of enquiring into the preparedness for the enowning of be-ing'. As careful readers of Heidegger expect, style is never merely superficial but is entirely a matter of being led into thinking, so that one is directed towards that which Heidegger is himself pursuing by the very manner of his pursuit, 'Still mostly a running after and considering/pondering'. Indeed he teaches his readers to understand that this is so with every thinker; it matters *how* a thing is said. He himself explicitly said that here is not a system, not a doctrine, not aphorisms, but rather a series of so-called 'repetitions' in each of which the whole is Being said.[2] If we are to take Heidegger at his word, strenuous demands are made upon thinking that are precisely what is at issue.

For what is being enquired into in these two texts (and the others that follow on and are closely related to them) is that which is ownmost to the being of being human, namely our being-historical. To undertake such an enquiry is for oneself to undergo what is being enquired into. The crucial distinction between the historiological, *Historie,* and history as *Geschichte* lies here. Heidegger shows the prevalent understanding of *Historie* as an account of things past by reference to which human beings may locate and identify themselves within an objective timeline, explain some features of their current situation and its development, and attempt to make predictions or offer prescriptions concerning what is to happen next. This is history as technicity of representation and production, tolerating itself by dealing only with the self-evident.[3] To take up a philosophical stance with respect or in opposition to such theories is no part of Heidegger's concern here. Nor is he interested in situating his own viewpoint within some range of perspectives however discriminated and previously laid out. Nor yet is his thinking the idle game of postmodern make-believe that opens with the familiar, 'what if'. Rather does he set about the work of *Auseinander-setzung* – literally, a setting-apart of one thing from another, often translated as 'confrontation' – a word that he hyphenated to indicate no simple confrontation or rejection, not a debate with or discussion of what has already been decided, but a 'dissociative exposition', a critical engaging with in order that what lies within what is said and is unknowable in its terms may be disclosed. And upon that disclosure things open up anew. Here it is that *Geschichte* takes hold, for the being-historical of *Dasein* is disclosed precisely at

these moments when what is to be grasped and so spoken is what comes about in the being of the speaker. To unfold *this* phenomenon is not to reflect upon being as a thing, nor to represent it so that it can be either handled or evaluated, but to enter into 'mindfulness'. As he says earlier in the *Beiträge* text, '*Inceptual thinking* is enacted as historical, that is, co-grounds history through a self-joining injunction.'[4]

In the centre of the text under discussion appear two sections that take the reader right into the middle of this exercise of *Besinnung* as a thinking that is transformative of *Dasein*. Heidegger begins these sections by considering the most question-worthy possibilities of the thinking of being that lie before us today, possibilities that bear an unsettling dismay to those who become attuned to them, for they are the occasion of our being set free and displaced into being-historical. The way by which one enquires into these possibilities is named 'fundamental knowing-awareness', and the one who would know must enquire into each of them *by being decided*. It is at this point, he suggests, one may begin to try to allude to the realm wherein gods are named, forgotten or remembered, 'here only the attempt is made to allude to the realm wherein gods are named, forgotten or remembered.'[5] Three questions arise from these opening sentences, and I want in this chapter to try to follow them for the purpose of bringing to light what Heidegger is directing his readers to in his consideration of gods. First, what is it to enquire 'by being decided'? Second, what part does 'fundamental knowing-awareness' have to play in relation to the decisive? And finally, why is there a section on gods in this text? In what way does the question of gods belong to being-historical, to the mindfulness of being that is now being decided from out of the movement of nihilism?

I

The distinctiveness of *Besinnung*, this 'mindfulness', is that its manner of thinking is self-disclosive and thus formative of the thinker. It is thinking that reveals what it would understand together with the being of the one who is thinking, and this is the point of 'the decisive'. Already in the first prose §8 of the text, entitled *Zur Besinnung*, and again in §13, Heidegger introduces what he calls 'the one decision', and points the reader to what lies there. It seems that to prepare the grounding of the one decision, the *Besinnung* text as a whole is written. Heidegger's word, 'the decisive', suggests the separating out or distinguishing of something, in process of which judgement or sentence is passed. The word brings to mind some situation that calls forth this distinction to be made and which is thus some crisis, or critical situation or crucial point, from out of which something is to be determined, resolved, decided. He does not here draw attention to an individual choice for which one might then be held to account; for this, the word *entschließen* would be more appropriate, although it is clear that what he has to tell does entirely implicate and concern individuals,

and that resolve too (which is implied in *entschließen*), will play its part in what Heidegger discloses.

Already in the previous *Beiträge* text, §§43–49, Heidegger had considered more fully the character of decision or of the decisive, and once again early on in that text, for these sections come under the first heading, *Vorblick*. There he says that be-ing (*das Seyn*) is 'to be grasped as the origin that first decides and enowns gods and men'.[6] As one's attention is directed towards being, it is turned away from the self, for Heidegger says, 'When we speak here of decision, we think of an activity of man, of an enactment, of a process. But here neither the human character in an activity nor the process-dimension is essential.' Immediately he acknowledges how difficult it is to think in this way. 'Actually', he writes,

> it is hardly possible to come close to what is ownmost to decision in its being-historical sense without proceeding from men, from us, without thinking of 'decision' as choice, as resolve, as preferring one thing and disregarding another, hardly possible in the end not to approach freedom as cause and faculty, hardly possible not to push the question of decision off into the 'moral-anthropological' dimension . . . [7]

Yet everything depends on our coming to understand just what is meant here.

For what follows upon our beginning to grasp that decision is to do with being, is that a whole list of so-named 'decisions' can be given out, each one opened with the subordinating conjunction, 'whether'. Each item in the astonishing presentation of Heidegger's (given in the *Beiträge* §44) is indicative of a fundamental event in which the grounding of being in the being-historical of *Dasein* takes place. Each *could* be presented in a history of ideas but then nothing would be understood. Instead, each is presented as a dependent clause without a main clause provided, but under the opening sentence, 'whether man will remain a "subject" or whether he grounds *Dasein*'.[8] So that although these are indeed 'decisions', *who* or *what* decides is not yet said, nor is a main active or transitive verb provided that would give an easy clue as to *what is to be done* to reach a satisfactory conclusion. These decisions are said to arrive as 'necessities that belong to our epoch', and they themselves 'must create *that time-space*, the site for the essential moments, where the most serious mindfulness . . . grows into a will to found and build'.[9] What is essential in decision here, what, Heidegger says, 'is necessary in *it* [is] what lies *before* the "activity" and reaches beyond it', and for this to be understood, 'decision is to be grasped being-historically. Making room in preparation is, then, indeed not a supplementary reflection but the other way around.'[10] What is fundamental happens in preparation for receiving how it is that the truth of being is already at work.

The *Besinnung* text is opened in §§8 and 13, by presenting the decisive as twofold,[11] so that attention is drawn to the decision that lies therein 'between the truth of being of any possible being and the machination of "beings in the whole" that are abandoned by being'.[12] At the beginning of §70, this critical

decisive situation is rendered more complex for there are three possibilities described, possibilities that are not mutually exclusive in that they may be simultaneously in force, but are interwoven strands determinative of one's own being and manifesting themselves in one's thinking and speaking.[13] *Besinnung* is fundamental thinking of the meaning of being because it goes to the roots of this decisive in pursuit of its truth, but also and at once because that which it is pursuing is already determinative of the thinking and being of the one who thinks. The truth of being so shapes the enquiry itself that it may be said, human beings are the ones who are encircled, elevated and undergirded by these sites of decision that are quietly disseminated hitherto.[14] Thus is the enquirer brought into the service of, or made available to that which is sought, which in its turn seeks or perhaps rather, awaits, its own being made known? This is the foundational work of philosophy, uncovering and so preparing the ground in order that the one who would know and what is there to be known are discovered to each other.

II

If this discussion of 'the decisive' has indicated the *character* of the enquiry concerning gods, the subtitle of §70, *Fundamental Knowing-Awareness*, points out the *way* of knowing by which the decisive may be entered into. His early indication is that this way of knowing is not about achieving certainty; nothing is needed lying outside fundamental knowing-awareness upon which its own certainty can be independently based. 'Certainty', he writes, 'is always only the additionally [?] reckonable warranty in accord with which the "not-knower" at first consents to accept "knowing" and its advocacy.'[15] The quest and provision for certainty, like the appearance of the human being as subject, is another of those phenomena that highlight the interweaving of philosophy and theology from out of the first beginning of thought in the Western tradition. Certainty, as Heidegger understands it, is an assurance to the knower that what is claimed may be proven, and thereby any doubt brought to an end. To be certain is to be sure of one's ground, but here, Heidegger suggests, there is 'consent', letting this be, bringing oneself into proximity with this ground such that the one who is not yet knowing comes to be 'in the know'. On that basis, after it has been laid down, what happens next becomes reckonable, for there is something against which to check or verify what comes to be known.

At least since Plato, certainty has shaped the guiding question for philosophical reflection according to the Greek understanding of *idea*. For beginning there, beings are taken to be what are shown forth to be seen and are present in and to their seen-ness, and the being of beings is 'set up' as that common or most general being-ness in which all beings as things or objects share. This stable ground of knowledge provides the basis for determining what is and what is not, and it is grasped as this ground, it can be seen as this *koinon* by rising or

being taken up to know what is above being overall, what is beyond, '*epekeina tes ousias*'. This knowledge, as is well known, is assured and upheld by the light of the good, the 'idea of the good' which yokes together beings and beingness. Insofar as this 'beyond being', this transcendent, has been taken up as the determination of the Christian God, theology too has fallen under its sway. In thinking through Nietzsche's word, *God is Dead*, Heidegger would have us consider the 'other way round' that 'gods and their godhood arise from out of the truth of be-ing, which is to say that, for instance, the thingly representation of god and the explanatory reckoning with god as the creator are grounded in the interpretation of beingness as produced and producible presence'.[16]

This is the certainty that does not belong to fundamental knowing-awareness.[17] In the only explicit reference to Aristotle in these sections, Heidegger indeed considers this 'coupling . . . of *prote philosophia* and *theologike episteme*' not only to have been no accident in that the most general being comes to be understood as the highest, but that it constitutes, or rather has been decided already, as a deprivation of the possibility of grounding the truth of be-ing.[18] So too since Plato, 'being and its truth have been buried under "propositional" thinking and surrendered to the *idea* through objectification'.[19] Heidegger undertakes not simply to show how the presumption of certainty has been at work in thinking thus far from out of the first beginning, but further and crucially to think through the way in which this very dismissal of being, and the reticence of being that withholds itself from mere representation, may be the originating point of the other beginning. For a knowing to be essential is for the one who knows to be laid open to what is most fundamentally happening with being, to be receptive to the deepest questions that arise from out of a tradition as these come to be articulated, and to let oneself become the ground upon which what is to be made known finds a place to dwell. Where one is to look for *this* origin is not above, but under, for 'underlying this process is what is being-historically deciding . . . ',[20] and in this looking, we 'leave ourselves behind'.[21]

What is needful then, if not certainty, is for the distinction between beings and be-ing, the ontological difference, to be kept open still through questioning, through the pursuing enquiry into possibilities.[22] It is at this point, I think, that Heidegger's text shows the closest and most attentive relation to the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle. For this keeping open of the decisive is what being-historical comes to; being-historical is being in the midst of possibilities whose discernment depends both upon 'what gives here' and upon the way of knowing that Dasein pursues. In his lectures on Plato, *Sophistes*, delivered in Marburg in 1924–25, Heidegger examines closely how Aristotle sets out the intellectual virtues, the ways of knowing available to man, especially in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The central distinction he sees to be at work in Aristotle's outline is that between ways of knowing relating to things permanent in presence or enduring and ways of knowing relating to things that can be otherwise. Indeed by means of this distinction and by clarifying what is at stake

in the matter, Heidegger would show that Aristotle provides the best way into a proper understanding of Plato's ontological research.

In these sections of the *Besinnung*, Heidegger takes up both *phronesis* and *techne*, the two ways of knowing that arise in the midst of things changing, that are appropriate to the disclosure of the truth of being that belongs to being-historical. He does so aware that, in consequence of the first beginning, the latter has so overwhelmed the former that it is in danger of being lost altogether as a way of human knowing. So the phrase, 'since long ago', repeats itself almost as an entreaty, an invocation of what has gone. His critique of calculation, *Rechnung*,[23] of the search for 'ever-newer arrangements and ever-faster controllability',[24] and of 'rational plannability',[25] – all these phenomena of modern life reveal Heidegger's disquiet about the way that *techne* has come to stand in for *phronesis*, offering what seems to be a self-evident ethics that will guide human life to its full happiness. Thus is pragmatism simply taken for granted today amidst a supposedly unavoidable pressure for workable solutions to problems? An ethics that would recover the virtues is one response to this situation, although in its own effort to set things right again, it reveals yet more poignantly the loss of *phronesis* as a distinctive way of knowing: 'man has long been without attunement'. [26]

The 'fundamental knowing-awareness' is just such an exercise in *phronesis*, by which Heidegger would draw out the fundamental determinations of this way of knowing from Aristotle. *Phronesis* is an attentiveness to that for the sake of which something is to be done (*hou heneka*) which it seeks to discern through deliberation about possible ends of action until the decisive moment (which Aristotle designated with the word *haplos*) arrives, when what is in and of itself (*kat' autou*), what is the most final becomes transparent to the *phronesis*.[27] What Heidegger especially notes in Aristotle's description of this way of knowing is that its object is both 'something which can also be otherwise, but from the very outset it has a relation to the deliberator himself'.[28] The end or *telos* of the deliberation is not over against (*para*) the deliberation, as is the case with the works of *techne*. What is made or fabricated is set apart from, distinct from, the way of knowing by which it came to be so. The end sought by *phronesis* concerns the proper way of being of the deliberator himself; it concerns *Dasein* in the promotion of the appropriate modes of its own being. By showing how in Aristotle the end of this way of knowing has the same ontological character as the way by which it is to be known, Heidegger has drawn out the self-referential character of *phronesis*. What it would disclose, what is disclosed in its knowing, is what is right and proper to *Dasein* and so most belongs to the being of *Dasein* as distinct from the being of a thing that is fabricated or produced.[29] How to enter into this kind of thinking in an age of technology when it falls so easily to us to think of our very selves as a production of will, as something fashioned in consequence of intention, is one of the most challenging and decisive questions that comes upon ethics in our time.

In these sections of the *Besinnung*, Heidegger speaks of this ontological character as attunement or as grounding-attunement (*Stimmung* and *Grundstimmung*). Attunement to being is the very going under whereby the destiny and truth of being is disclosed to *Dasein*. This is deliberation that awaits the disclosure of being, for attunement 'comes upon him from be-ing', until the moment when what is happening with being makes itself known to *Dasein* in the opening up of being's own possibilities – whether this is to be, or whether that is to be. At the same time, the very disclosure of this 'for the sake of', in which the most decisive has arisen, takes place in *Dasein* itself as a mood, a mood not understood in a merely psychological sense, but as that which is transformative of *Dasein*, turning it itself into the ground for the truth of being.

Earlier in the *Beiträge* text, Heidegger set out the contrasting moods of 'deep wonder' and 'startled dismay', that belong to the first and then the other beginnings: 'The grounding-attunement of the first beginning is *deep wonder* that beings are, that man himself is extant, extant in that which *he* is not [sic].'[30] And of the other beginning,[31] *Erschrecken* is also called *Er-ahnen*, deep foreboding,[32] but here in §71, it is called *das Ent-setzen*, 'unsettling dismay', or 'dismay that sets free'. The prefix *ent-* indicates abandonment of an old state and entry into a new one, while *setzen* means 'to place', 'to set out', 'to position'. The word then carries a complex meaning that is not only active, 'to displace', or 'to depose', but also reflexive, 'to be horrified', 'to be amazed', 'to dread'. The hyphen emphasizes the movement from one place to another, the 'setting free' as the translators suggest, while the verbal form of the noun suggests dismay. Thus it names that mood which brings about the very transformation by which *Dasein* becomes the being to whom the care of being most belongs.

> . . . attunement throws from out of itself the 'time-space' of fundamental decisions and throws the attuned one into this 'time-space' and surrenders the attuned one unto the 't/here', which *to be* amounts to nothing less than bearing up the care for the truth of be-ing in fundamental saying, in fundamental thinking and in fundamental acting (fundamental in the sense of belonging to the 't/here' and its swaying) and protecting the attunement of be-ing in the attunedness of Dasein as the site for the countering of gods and man.[33]

In the way of knowing that is *phronesis*, *Dasein* is thrown into the decisive and at once into its own freedom as abyss (*Abgrund*), to become the 'there' where something is to happen anew.

III

Which brings us to the question of gods. Thus far, I have tried to understand in these sections how Heidegger's attention to the decisive draws away from the

modern notion of the human being as a deciding subject by showing how human being is already taken up by and determined from out of the truth of being in any given time. Yet still the meaning of being and its truth are utterly dependent upon the attunement of Dasein and its transformation into being the ground for being's disclosure. For the other beginning that is needed 'begins only when man, out of his doings that covet success and are fixed since long ago, has found the way back to his pride in his still hidden-sheltered ownmost, and decides for be-ing against the machination of mere beings. Thereupon he is the one already rent into the beginning'.[34] How is it then that Heidegger understands the being-historical that is *Besinnung* to involve thinking and speaking of gods?

He is explicit in opening §70 that this thinking and speaking requires instanding-ness in '*a fundamental knowing-awareness*'[35] following which so many of his sentences hold together things that would appear to be opposites, by which he forces anew the thinking of their essential meaning. What does it mean to be steadfast in a way of thinking that is wholly suited to change, which is then ever at risk of falling into easy certainties on the one hand or of just 'going with the flow' in an attitude of determined uncertainty on the other? What does it mean that 'to name an empty site' is to make room in thinking for something that is truly question-worthy, for rooms are there to be filled up and once full to be satisfied so that nothing will not threaten them again. Why is it that the question concerning the ontological difference, the question that has most occupied the lovers of wisdom since the beginning, is now to be *held in question* for the sake of what is yet to come, for the sake of a 'transformation into what is to be inceptually grounded', for the sake in other words of what is only most preparatory?[36] These and many other so-called paradoxes fill the pages of these sections if we but see them. And through them Heidegger is himself 'errantly traversing', meandering through, 'the realm wherein the gods are still nameable, even if out of the remotest forgottenness'.[37]

In Heidegger's further investigation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he shows where the meaning of steadfastness comes to be determined from out of the first beginning as Aristotle works out which is the highest mode of human knowledge. Given the essential relation that *phronesis* bears towards *Dasein*, the promotion of its most proper modes of being and its very completion, it would seem that this way of knowing would be the highest. *Phronesis* provides direction for that which is of most concern to *Dasein*, namely *eudaimonia* in which it attains its full completion, and it renders Dasein transparent in carrying out those actions that will lead man to this good life. Surely, Heidegger says, that would make it the gravest and most decisive knowledge of all.[38]

Aristotle however gives the highest place to wisdom, *Sophia*, and he does so for the reason that it is autonomous – it does not depend upon any action to be completed, and what it concerns is the eternal, and thus it has nothing to do with *genesis*, *praxis* or *kinesis*. It has nothing to do with time nor is implicated in time, but what it discloses to *Dasein* and the way by which it allows *Dasein* to

enjoy in contemplation its objects (*theorein*), Aristotle took it to be the highest possibility of knowing. *Sophia* is related to the everlasting and is the purest way of comportment to and of tarrying with the everlasting, and as a genuine positionality towards this highest mode of being, it carries Dasein itself into its own highest possibility of being (Heidegger's words).[39] Yet this highest mode of knowledge Aristotle said is divine; it belongs to *theos*, not so much to be concerned with the kind of virtuous actions that concern human beings, for this would be unworthy of the gods. Rather 'the activity of God, which is transparent in blessedness, is the activity of contemplation; and therefore among human activities that which is most akin to the divine activity of contemplation will be the greatest source of happiness.'[40]

A consistent strand of thinking the essence of human being takes root here, as it is believed to be through man's rational activity that he most approaches the divine in his nature, a way of thinking, some would call 'humanism', whose path is ever accompanied by anxiety about or struggle against the things that would threaten human fulfilment, that would dehumanize or be dehumanizing. In these sections, Heidegger uses a perplexing word, *Vermenschung*, rendered as 'dis-humanisation', a phenomenon distinct from either humanization or dehumanization, by which he points up the loss of *phronesis* and the corresponding godlessness of gods.[41] The way of the overcoming of *Vermenschung*, and so the way back into what is ownmost to *Dasein*, which has still as in Aristotle to do with the becoming divine of human being, is through fundamental knowing-awareness, for in 'the enquiry into be-ing – the knowing-awareness of what is most question-worthy prevails – the knowing namely that the same ground that gives rise to the sway of the godhood of gods also gives rise to the beginning of the respective fundamental worthiness of man by virtue of which he overcomes the "dis-humanisation" as the most acute danger to his ownmost'.[42]

Because Heidegger has suggested that god and man are bound together in this struggle for their ownmost, here too then is the word of Nietzsche still heard. For accompanying *Vermenschung* has been the word *Vergötterung*, about which Heidegger has a good deal more to say in these sections. For this phenomenon, the translators use the word 'divinisation', which they explain as used 'in the strict technical sense of raising a being – nature, man, a historical figure – to divinity'.[43] If the passage from Aristotle concerning what most belongs to the divine is an indication of the way that god comes to be determined from out of a determination of beings, by the discernment between beings – as changing or eternal – and by the question of which are the most beingful of beings, it is yet a further step along the way of the first beginning to shape God into a means of explanation. This is Heidegger's reading of what takes place in theology especially although not exclusively, as the Christian God comes to be that highest authoritative being overall, that ultimate or final explanation of why beings are, that superior will by which all beings are assessed and judged. He calls this a *Vergötterung* 'of the most crude, namely the *Vergötterung* of

"being-a-cause" for "effects", which the "idea" of the creator God and interpretation of beings as *ens creatum* reveal'.[44]

The movement of nihilism and the overcoming of metaphysics which it portends give rise to another possibility in which *Vergötterung* as divinization and the *Entgötterung*, de-godding, that is in consequence of it, both 'become null and void'; they come to nothing.[45] What Heidegger calls the 'illusion' concerning them – that gods are cause, support, ground, apex and disfiguration of beings, that gods dominate beings – in fact says quite the opposite, that gods have been and continue to be reckoned out of and according to beings. Yet is this an illusion that is 'so often and in so many ways proved by metaphysics as the truth that (it) dissolves itself into metaphysics and becomes identical with what is self-evident but unnoticeable'.[46] Philosophy in this vein cannot bring god to mind. Indeed, the loss of the gods or godlessness is said to be the highest loss for gods themselves, not leaving man bereft of his own comforts or explanations although it may do so, so much as depriving gods of their ownmost as they are buried under beings and responsibility for beings, as they are determined from out of an ontology rather than themselves from out of being. It becomes possible then for the now empty place to be disclosed as a site, for 'in being-historical thinking the name "gods" merely names the empty site of the undeterminedness of godhood that arises out of man's lack of attunement . . .'.[47]

The path of mindfulness is then a way of return to 'godding', to where 'godhood enowns itself solely out of be-ing', which for *Dasein* means letting gods be, letting gods appear from out of themselves and not from out of our selves.[48] Beyond that, what can be said? For there can be no reasonable certainty that the name 'god' applies to any beings at all.[49] Nor can they be made to appear by philosophical cunning or sleight of hand. Gods will announce themselves . . . or not. They do not need man,[50] but rather are they 'distressingly in need of bei-ng whose truth – insofar as man is enowned in *Da-sein* – has to be grounded in *Da-sein*'?[51] Heidegger would then leave us with what is most difficult to think. In an echo of Plato that at once exposes what Plato has bequeathed to Western thinking and dissociates itself in thinking from this way, Heidegger says of being that it is 'the longest bridge of the "between" whose bridgeheads are hidden in darkness of the "not-yet-honoured" and the "not-yet-decidable" '.[52] To think in this way of being as the origin (*Ursprung*) across from the first to the other beginning, and to begin to grasp how this is the way in which the gods need being, is to be decided as being-historical and so to prepare oneself for what is to come.

Notes

[1] Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. IV (European Nihilism), trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 196: 'Das Weltalter der Vollendung der Metaphysik . . .', *Nietzsche II* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske Verlag, 1961), p. 256.

[2] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 434: [or in English, Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 383.] 'Die "Wiederholungen" nötig, da jedesmal das Ganze zu sagen.'

[3] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 234: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 207.] 'Die Historie als Technik des Vor-stellens des Vergangenen und Gegenwärtigen und die Technik als Historie – her-stellende – der Naturvernutzung . . . Die Historie duldet und erträgt sich selbst nur noch als die Erkundung des im voraus Selbstverständlichen.'

[4] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 61: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning),* p. 43.] '*Das anfängliche Denken* als geschichtliches, d.h. in der sich fügenden Verfügung Geschichte mit gründendes' (Heidegger's emphases).

[5] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 229: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 204.] 'Zumal jetzt nur eine Hinweisung versucht ist in den Bereich, innerhalb dessen die Götter genannt, vergessen oder erinnert werden.'

[6] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 87: [ET: p. 60.] 'Als den Ursprung begreifen, der erst Götter und Menschen *ent-scheidet* und *er-eignet*' (Heidegger's emphases).

[7] 'Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 87: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning),* p. 60.] 'Wenn da von der Ent-scheidung die Rede ist, denken wir an ein Tun des Menschen, an das Vollziehen, an einen Vorgang. Aber weder das Menschliche eines Aktes noch das Vorgangsmäßige ist hier wesentlich. Zwar ist es kaum möglich, dem seynsgeschichtlichen Wesen der Entscheidung nahe zu kommen, ohne nicht doch von Menschen, von uns, auszugehen und bei der "Entscheidung" an Wahl, Entschluß, an die Bevorzugung des Einen und die Hintansetzung des Anderen zu denken und am Ende auf die Freiheit als Ursache und Vermögen zu stoßen und die Frage nach der Entscheidung in das "Moralisch-Anthropologische" abzudrangen . . .'.

[8] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 90: 'ob der Mensch "Subjekt" bleiben will *oder* ob er das Da-sein gründet' (Heidegger's emphases).

[9] Heidegger, *Beiträge* (GA65), pp. 92, 98: [*Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning),* pp. 63, 68.] '. . . dann sind sie Notwendigkeiten unseres Zeitalters . . .'; 'Die Entscheidung *muß jenen Zeit-Raum*, die Stätte für die wesentlichen Augenblicke schaffen, in der der höchste Ernst der Besinnung in eins mit der größten Freudigkeit der Sendung zu einem Willen des Gründens und Bauens aufwächst . . .' (Heidegger's emphases).

[10] Heidegger, *Beiträge* (GA65), p. 103: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning),* p. 71.] 'Das *Zeit-raum-hafte* der Entscheidung als aufbrechende Klüftung des Seyns selbst, seinsgeschichtlich zu fassen . . . Vorbereitende Einräumung, dann eben auch nicht nachträgliche Reflexion, sondern umgekehrt' (Heidegger's emphases).

[11] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), pp. 15 and 45: '. . . ob die Machenschaft des Seienden den Menschen übermächtige und zum schrankenlosen Machtwesen loslasse, oder ob das Seyn die Gründung seiner Wahrheit als die Not verschenke . . .', or '. . . ob das Seyn in das Wesen seiner Wahrheit erfragt wird oder ob das Seiende seine Machenschaft behält und eine Entscheidungslosigkeit verbreitet, die verhindert, daß je noch einmal ein Einziges bevorsteht und ein Anfang ist' [in Heidegger, *Mindfulness*: '. . . whether machination of beings would make man exceedingly powerful and transpose him into an unbridled being of power, or whether be-ing would gift the grounding of its truth as distress . . .' (p. 11);

'. . . whether be-ing is inquired into in terms of the sway of its truth or whether beings retain their machination and pursue a lack of decision that prevents that which is sole and unique from ever again coming forth and beginning' (p. 37)].

[12] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 230: '. . . zwischen der Wahrheit des Seins eines jeglichen und möglichen Seienden und der Machenschaft des vom Sein verlassenen Seienden im Ganzen', Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 46: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 38].

[13] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 230: 'Ob das Seinde noch einmal, anfänglich gegründet in einer Stiftung des Seins, in der Einfachheit seines Wesens erscheint.' '. . . Ob das Seiende in den Fesseln und Geläufigkeiten der bisherigen historisch immer unentwirrbar durcheinandergemischten Seienheit verharrt und ein völlige Entscheidungslosigkeit erzwingt.' '. . . Ob die erste ausbleibt, die zweite zwar sich behauptet und dem allein zugelassenen Anschein nach das Seiende alles Sein beherrscht und dennoch ein Andres geschieht: ob in der unkennbaren Verborgenheit die Geschichte des Seyns (die Gründung seiner Wahrheit) in der Kampffolge der Einsamen anfängt und das Seyns in die eigenste und befremdenste Geschichte eingeht, deren Jubel und Trauer, deren Siege und Abstürze nur in den Herzensraum der Seltensten überschlagen'. [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 204.] '. . . whether in laying claim on being, beings once again are grounded inceptually and appear in the simpleness of their ownmost'; 'whether beings hold on to the chains and conventionalities of the hitherto historically mixed up and inextricable beingness and compel a total lack of decision'; 'whether the first possibility stays away, and though the second one does assert itself, and given their admitted appearance, beings dominate all being but still something else happens: whether the history of be-ing (the grounding of its truth) begins in the unknowable hiddenness-shelteredness within the course of the struggle of the "alone ones" and whether be-ing enters its ownmost and strangest history whose jubilation and sorrow, triumphs and defeats beat only in the sphere of the heart of the most rare ones'.

[14] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 252: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 222.] 'Die stille Ausbreitung dieser Entscheidungsstätte untertieft, überhöht und umringt das bisherige Menschenwesen'.

[15] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 229: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 203.] '. . . denn jede Gewißheit ist immer nur die nachrechenbare Versicherung, der zufolge der Unwissende erst zur Annahme und Verfechtung des "Wissens" sich herbeiläßt.'

[16] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), pp. 235–6: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 209.] '. . . die Götter und ihre Gottschaft entspringen aus der Wahrheit des Seyns; d.h. jene dinghafte Vorstellung des Gottes und das erklärende Rechnen mit ihm, z. B. als dem Schöpfer, hat ihren Grund in der Auslegung der Seiendheit als hergestellter und herstellbarer Anwesenheit'. See the fuller exposition of ἰδέα in Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), especially §110.

[17] A further complexity to be mentioned here is that *das Gewissen* is the German translation of *conscientia*, knowledge-together-with, and while it bears no direct linguistic relationship with *das Gewißheit*, in view of inherited theological difficulties, Heidegger undertakes a careful explanation of how and why 'becoming certain' of what one has or has not done 'has *by no means* the character of a conscience-phenomenon'. 'Das Gewißwerden des Nichtgetanhabens hat *überhaupt*

nicht den Charakter eines Gewissensphänomens' Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (GA2), p. 292 [in English, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 338] (Heidegger's emphases).

[18] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 241: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 213.] '. . . hier endgültig innerhalb der abendländischen metaphysisches Geschichte das Seyn der Möglichkeit einer Gründung seiner Wahrheit beraubt wird.'

[19] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 255: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 224.] '. . . das Sein und seine Wahrheit der Verschüttung durch das aussagende Denken (λόγος) und durch die Vergegenständlichung in der ἰδέα preisgegeben wurde. . . .'

[20] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 241: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 213.] 'Vielmehr liegt dem seinsgeschichtliche das Entscheidende zugrunde'.

[21] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 7: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 5.] 'Wissenden *sind* wir zwar nie, doch im Wissen Seiende, fragend über uns weg die Lichtung des Seyns.' 'Certainly we *are* never the knowing ones, yet in knowing-awareness we are those who are [sic], we leave ourselves behind in questioning the clearing of be-ing.'

[22] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 229: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, pp. 203–4.] 'Dieses Wissen erfragt zumal drei Möglichkeiten, durch die je anders die Unterscheidung des Seienden und des Seyns als *die* Entscheidung offengehalten wird.' 'Specifically this knowing-awareness inquires into three possibilities through which, and in different ways, the differentiation between beings and be-ing is kept open as *the* decision' (Heidegger's emphases).

[23] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), pp. 250–1: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, pp. 220–1.]

[24] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 230: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 204.] '. . . immer neuen Einrichtungen und immer schnellerer Beherrschbarkeit. . . .'

[25] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 234: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 207.] 'die vernünftige Planmäßigkeit'.

[26] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 238: 'Stimmungslos ist seit langem der Mensch.'

[27] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1097a22 – 1097b2.

[28] Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), p. 48 [in English, Heidegger, *Plato's* Sophist, p. 34]: 'Der Gegenstand der "φρόνεσις" ist also zwar bestimmt als etwas, was auch anders sein kann, aber er hat von vorneherein *Bezug auf den Überlegenden selbst*.' The relevant passages of Aristotle are in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a25–1140b30.

[29] '. . . das τέλος ist vom selben Seinscharakter wie die "frovnhsi" ' Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), pp. 48ff.: [Heidegger, *Plato's* Sophist, pp. 34ff.] ὥστ᾽ ἀνάγκη τὴν φρόνησιν ἕχιν εἶναι μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆ, περὶ τὰ ἀνθώπινα ἀγαθὰ πρακτικήν, which Heidegger translates as φρόνησις is a ἕχις of ἀληθεύειν [a disposition of human *Dasein* such that in it I have at my disposal my own transparency]; it is εὖ insofar as it comports itself in such a way that deliberation measures up to the οὗ ἕνεκα; it is ἀληθεύειν in service to πρᾶξις, making action transparent in itself of its own end (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, 1140b20–22).

[30] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 46: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*: p. 32.] 'Die Grundstimmung des erstens Anfangs ist das Er-staunen, daß Seiendes ist, daß der Mensch selbst seiend, seiend ist in dem, was er nicht ist'.

[31] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 46: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* p. 32.] 'Die Grundstimmung . . . ist das

Er-schrekken. Das Erschrecken in der Seinsverlassenheit . . . und die in solchem Erschrecken als einem schaffenden gründende *Verhaltenheit*' (Heidegger's emphases).

[32] Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (GA65), p. 20: [Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, p. 15].

[33] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 238: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 211.] 'Stimmung aber wirft aus sich heraus den Zeitraum wesentlicher Entscheidungen, indem sie den Gestimmten selbst in diesen Zeit-Raum wirft und ihn in das "Da" preisgibt, das zu *sein* nichts Geringeres bedeutet als in wesentlichenm (d.h. dem Da und seiner Wesung gehörigem) Sagen, Denken und Tun die Sorge um die Wahrheit des Seyns auszustehen und die Stimmung des Seyns in der Bestimmtheit des Daseins zu behüten als die Stätte der Entgegnung der Götter und des Menschen.'

[34] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 253: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 222.] 'Doch der "Beginn" solchen Bedenkens hebt erst an, wenn der Mensch durch die Entscheidung zum Seyn gegen die Machenschaft des nur Seienden aus der Erfolgsgier seines längste festliegenden Treibens in den Stolz auf sein noch verborgenes Wesen gefunden hat. Dann aber ist er schon ein in den Anfang Gerissener.'

[35] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 229: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 203.] 'die Inständigkeit in einem *wesentliche Wissen*.'

[36] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 232: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 206.] 'Nur dort bleibt ja Wissen wesentlich, wo es das Gewußte zue Verwandlung in anfänglich zu Gründendes bereitstellt.'

[37] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 231: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 205.] 'Dieses wesentliche Wissen allein durchirrt jenen Bereich, in dem noch Götter – wenngleich aus der fernsten Vergessenheit – nennbar sind.'

[38] Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), p. 135: [Heidegger, *Plato's* Sophist, p. 93.] 'Wenn demnach die φρόνησις die ernsthafteste und entscheidenste Erkenntnis ist, so wird diejenige Wissenschaft, die sic him Felde der φρόνησις bewegt, die höchste sein.'

[39] Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), §§24–25.

[40] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 1178b22–24.

[41] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 239. [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 211.]

[42] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 245: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, pp. 216–17.] '. . . das Erfragen des Seyns . . . [H]ier waltet das Wissen des Fragwürdigsten, daß aus demselben Grund, aus dem das Wesen der Götter zu ihrer Gottschaft entspringt, auch der Anfang der jeweiligen Wesenswürde des Menschen stammt, kraft deren er die Vermenschung als die schärfste Wesensgefahr überwindet.'

[43] Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. xxvii.

[44] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 240: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 212.] '. . . Vergötterung des Gröbsten, des Ursacheseins für Wirkungen, wie es in der "Idee" des Schöpfergottes und der Auslegung des Seienden als ens creatum sich bekundet.'

[45] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 241. [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 213.] The word he uses here is *hinfällig*.

[46] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 255: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 224.] 'Doch dieser Schein ist durch die Metaphysik so vielfach als die Wahrheit bewiesen,

daß er dadurch mit dieser zusammen sich aufgelöst und einer unbeachtbaren Selbstverständlichkeit sich gleich gemacht hat.'

[47] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 249: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 219.] 'Der Name "Götter" nennt im seynsgeschichtlichen Denken nur die leere Stelle der Unbestimmtheit der Gottschaft aus der Stimmungslosigkeit des Menschen . . .'.

[48] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 239: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 211.] '. . . die ihm zeigt, wie aus dem Seyn nur die Götterung sich ereignet . . . '.

[49] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 249. [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 219.]

[50] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 255. [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 224.]

[51] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 255: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 224.] 'Die Götter brauchen nicht den Menschen, aber sie benötigen das Seyn, dessen Wahrheit im Da-sein – so der Mensch in dieses er-eignet wird – gegründet warden muß.'

[52] Heidegger, *Besinnung* (GA66), p. 254: [Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, p. 224.] 'Das Seyn – die längste Brücke des Zwischen, deren Brückenköpfe im Dunkel des Nochnicht-Gewürdigten und Nochnicht-Entscheidbaren sich verhüllen.'

Chapter 10

‘Myth means: the saying word’ / ‘The Lord said that he would dwell in thick darkness.’

Johan Siebers

In *Was heißt Denken?* (*What is called thinking?),* as in many other places, Heidegger links the mythical, in the sense of original, disclosive speech, to religion.[1] Perhaps we can say that, for him, the openness which lies at the ground of truth is one of disclosed meaning, of the disclosed meaning of being (*der Sinn von Sein*). This is what he calls the mythical. This disclosed meaning, the language in which we live, as Heidegger also likes to say, is at once a gift – we do not invent it ourselves – and a withholding – *Sein* hides itself in the unconcealment (*Entbergung*) that is given with the bestowal of the ‘saying word’, *das sagende Wort*. We are always likely to forget what withholds itself, and thus to go astray – to think, as it were, it is we that say, rather than, before that, the words, language itself. The reign of technology is the *Irre*, the ‘astray’, that *Sein* in a way prepares for us. In other words, for Heidegger, the mythology that is given to us, today and since long, is that of the technological. It is not as much possible for us to actively free ourselves from this mythology (that would be a double *Irrweg*) and embrace another one, as it might be possible to understand the movement of *verbergen/entbergen* and thus see technology for what it is. Engaging with this possibility would be what Heidegger calls *Denken* and *Gelassenheit*. In it, we would see myth as *Anspruch* (and without doing that we do not see myth for what it is), which lets us think of ‘*das Scheinende, (. . .) das Wesende*’ (Sein), and experience the sameness of *logos* and *mythos*. Experiencing mythos as *Anspruch* would be to move beyond our entanglement in technology and metaphysics; it might also be interpreted as allowing us to see religion for what it is.

Heidegger’s student Ernesto Grassi has interpreted rhetoric, and its archaic and imaginative way of speaking, as a level of speech preceding the rational, the ‘metaphysical’, and as essentially prophetic or evangelical, precisely in that, most clearly in the dimension of pathos, it shows and discloses, and does not prove or demonstrate. He refers to Heraclitus, fragment B93, ‘The lord to whom the oracle of Delphi belongs says nothing and conceals nothing; he indicates, shows.’ For Grassi, rhetoric is the original form of speech and religion has to be seen as a form of rhetoric in this precise sense.[2]

Both Grassi and Heidegger have interpreted the *Phaedrus*, and the way in which in it Plato brings together rhetoric and philosophy. Obviously, the place of myth and religion in the Phaedrus (as in other dialogues) is central as well, although it needs to be clarified in what way. Also, both Heidegger and Grassi acknowledge that rhetoric has a tendency to collapse into its travesty – the persuasive techniques of the orators here, technology there.

Yet, Grassi and Heidegger cannot easily be brought together in their thoughts on the nature of rhetoric and myth as *das sagende Wort*. Grassi's interpretation of rhetoric as fundamental ontology takes place in an explicitly humanistic context. For Heidegger, the humanism inherent in the rhetorical tradition is part and parcel of its travesty. How does humanism relate to myth? What can this relation tell us about nihilism as movement?

Metaphor and the Movement of Thought

The view of myth that Heidegger characterizes as inadequate is the idea that myth and logos (reason) are opposed to each other. A myth is either a not-yet-reasonable attempt at metaphorical explanation of natural affairs, or an at most pedagogic and propaedeutic imaginative rendition of an idea that can, and should, also be formulated in conceptual language. The divergence of myth and reason characterizes philosophy as metaphysics. Contrary to this, Heidegger interprets myth as an originally disclosive, revealing, address (*Anspruch*). For example, in *Was heißt Denken*, the mythical origin of Mnemosyne, memory, as the daughter of heaven and earth, is taken not as a pre-rational attempt at causal explanation, but as a disclosing of the essence of memory, begotten between heaven and earth, as that which lets us think of what appears, of what is, of being as unconcealment. Even in the previous sentence, we execute the parallelism of myth and conceptual language in order to shed light on both of them, rather than rescue a mythical implicit content in the security of precisely cut concepts. Yet it seems hard to deny that the 'address' of myth is also its 'appeal'. The story appeals and speaks to us more directly, more fully, than the conceptual analysis and so it seems to be natural to suppose that this aspect of myth is what makes it a useful and primary vehicle in conveying abstract notions. In rhetorical terms, myth combines the persuasive appeals of pathos and logos (and even ethos) and thus addresses the human being in its totality. Can we understand this aspect of myth as the original, disclosive address that Heidegger has in mind?

This question is intimately related to the nature and movement of European nihilism. The mythical appeals of pathos and logos point in the direction of the primacy of metaphor in the nature of meaning: pathos itself is a movement, a transference. Ernesto Grassi has shown that rhetorical speech must be understood as speech that articulates original images, *archai*, which define the space within which rational deliberation and argumentation becomes possible.

In that sense, rhetorical language precedes rational argumentation. Any rational demonstration relies on principles that cannot themselves be rationally demonstrated. Moreover, these principles or axioms are only available in metaphorical language – this holds even for the fundamental notions in mathematics, such as the concepts of 'demonstration' and 'axiom' themselves, for example.[3] It also applies to the principles of logic, such as the 'laws' of identity and non-contradiction, and the principle of sufficient reason.

The metaphorical nature of originally disclosive speech resides in the movement, transportation or transference it embodies, and this is its pathetic quality: it shows something to be something, or it shows something *as* something – Mnemosyne (memory) is seen as the mother of the muses, and as the daughter of heaven and earth (themselves shown as gods). It is this 'seeing as', of which Heidegger was well aware, which constitutes not just myth but thought as well.[4] In the movement character of original speech, which is also original thought insofar as the one who heeds to the address of myth is the one who thinks in accordance to, or thinks of (*andenken*) the original images, which later, with Aristotle, became the differentiated means of persuasion of pathos and logos, the two retain their original unity. Logos refers to transportation, and so does pathos – the original unity of the two lies in movement.

The structure of seeing-as can be found in being itself. Heidegger gives the following examples: 'there is a flood in China'; 'the cup is not made of silver'; 'the dog is in the garden'. The copula means something different in each case. In terms of classical ontology: 'being' is said in many ways, and remains paradoxical: it is the same in each case, for everything is; it is different in each case, because everything is different from everything else. Moreover: it is ultimately 'in being' that all things are the same and different. Being is the most empty as well as the most richly concrete concept – it is always said and at the same time it always resists its full articulation. 'Being remains for thought a riddle, which appears to solve itself in every enunciation, and yet always again escapes its solution.'[5]

Metaphor and being, the unity of pathos and logos as movement, are what Heidegger hints at in his remark that mythos and logos are the same, and despite his own diagnosis of Plato as the onset of the rationalistic view of myth, it is easy to see that the unity of reason and desire in Plato – the articulation of which is precisely the point at which Plato resorts most powerfully to myth, as in the myth of the soul in the *Phaedrus*, or the myth of the cave in the *Republic* – is rooted in the same constellation, even if in Plato's thought the constellation is eclipsed.

Philosophy insofar as it articulates or remains with the address of being, myth, is rhetoric, and rhetoric is philosophy, when it does not deteriorate into a mere technique of persuasion. That deterioration is the other side of rationalism; the European dissociation of rhetoric and philosophy is its nihilism:

> Thus philosophy is not a posterior synthesis of *pathos* and *logos but the original unity* of the two under the power of the original *archai*. Plato sees true

> rhetoric as psychology which can fulfill its truly 'moving' function only if it masters original images (*eide*). Thus the true philosophy is rhetoric, and the true rhetoric is philosophy, a philosophy which does not need an 'external' rhetoric to convince, and a rhetoric that does not need an 'external' content of verity. (Grassi, p. 28)

Here we have the 'sameness' of mythos and logos, which is not a surrender to an overpowering revelatory word as it provides the basis for rational discourse, including the critique of false myths and false reasoning. We could even say that part of the rationalistic interpretation of myth as totalitarian discourse (Adorno) remains accessible here, for the stringent interpretation Heidegger and Grassi offer resists the instrumentalization of mythical language right from the start. The address of myth is an address to think, understand, interpret, which is incompatible with the canonical reading enforced by totalitarian discourse.[6] Myth itself shows it is prior to the literal; like being, it remains a riddle which appears to solve itself at every step, but always escapes that solution again. The sameness of mythos and logos has another consequence for Heidegger: in an implicit equivocation, Heidegger links myth and 'the religious': 'it is (. . .) a prejudice (. . .) to think, that *mythos* has been destroyed by *logos*. The religious is never destroyed by logic, but only ever by the withdrawal of the God' (*Was heißt denken?*, first lecture, my translation). If the religious is 'destroyed', reason is affected as well and loses its grounding in the originally disclosive unity of pathos and logos.

European Nihilism

In the fragment entitled (in Nietzsche's manuscript) '*Der Europäische Nihilismus. Lenzer Heide, den 10. Juni 1887*' Nietzsche writes that it is the will to truthfulness, raised in us by morality, that has made us see the lie of morality.[7] The insight has become an impetus towards nihilism, the '*umsonst*' of all things, now that life is no longer so 'uncertain, accidental, meaningless' in contemporary Europe. It is no longer necessary to trump up the worth of man, or the meaning of evil, as it was before: '"God" is much too extreme a hypothesis.'[8] Nihilism is the other extreme, a necessary psychological affect when the belief in a moral structure of reality can no longer be upheld. Nihilism is the 'most *scientific* of all hypotheses', the 'European form of Buddhism' (aphorism 6). Nietzsche appears to mean the 'european' in a disparaging way: nihilism is a symptom of the realization that the 'losers' (*die Schlechtweggekommenen*, aphorism 12) will find no comfort. They have to acknowledge there is no difference between them and the strong, that both want power and power only. Their destruction presents itself as a deliberate act, a 'doing-no' (*Nein-Thun*, aphorism 12) in the face of the meaninglessness of all things. The strong are those who do not need extremism of faith, who can embrace chance, who can 'think of man with a significant

moderation of his worth, without becoming small and weak because of it'; people who are 'certain of their power and who represent the achieved strength of man with conscious pride' (aphorism 15).[9]

God is too strong a hypothesis and European nihilism is its other extreme. This statement only makes sense if we have first accepted the rationalist view of myth – indeed, what is Nietzsche doing other than unmasking the 'religious', the 'mythical', as a 'hypothesis', a more or less useful supposition? Language, including mythical language, is 'a host of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms', not Heidegger's speaking word.[10] Heidegger will view Nietzsche as caught up in the rationalism of metaphysics he apparently tries to negate. It is not the supposition that has to be abandoned because it is too strong; God himself has withdrawn even from the darkness he dwelled in myth. Ironically, both might accuse each other of hanging on to 'metaphysics'. Nietzsche remains within its rationalism, despite his unmasking of the pretence of reason; Heidegger remains within its transcendence, although he dispels it with the onto-theological horizon of transcendence. Accordingly, their interpretations of nihilism are irreconcilable although, for both, nihilism consists in a transportive 'movement', as pathos or metaphor.

Humanism

Heeding the call of language is everything but labour or work. In this way, we might sum up part of what Heidegger claims in the 'Letter on Humanism'.[11] Thought commemorates the appearing and the being and as such it is the way into the stewardship of the shepherd of being which man may come to occupy (again). The eclipse of the attitudes involved, which might be called 'wisdom' if that word were to speak to us once more, is precisely the abandonment implied in technology, the essence of which is '*Arbeit*', labour. Although the temptation is great to counter these ideas immediately with a the injunction of a reactionary return to premodern contemplativeness, we must resist that temptation for the moment. For while Heidegger and Grassi share the view of myth as originally disclosive language, Grassi uses the rhetorical-metaphorical understanding of language as the basis for his interpretation of humanism, and of the nature of human activity, of *work*:

> The metaphor lies at the root of our human world. Insofar as metaphor has its roots in the analogy between different things and makes this analogy immediately spring into 'sight,' it makes a fundamental contribution to the structure of our world. Empirical observation itself takes place through the 'reduction' of sensory phenomena to types of meanings existing in the living being; and this 'reduction' consists in the 'transferring' of a meaning to sensory phenomena. It is only through this 'transference' that phenomena can be recognized as similar or dissimilar, useful or useless, for our human

> realization. In order to make 'sensory' observations we are forced to 'reach back' for a transposition, for a metaphor. Man can manifest himself only through his own 'transpositions,' and this is the essence of his work in every field of human activity. (Grassi, p. 31)

For Grassi, Hercules is the – mythical – personification of human activity, of labour as civilization; the rhetor is the one who performs the Herculean labour of making the *archai* accessible to the community in its historical setting; by transpositions, by the rhetorical word, which corresponds to these archai, his function in the polis is essential. This idea forms the core of a conception of humanism resistant to the Heideggerian equation with technology. But for this humanism, too, a movement remains necessary – without the transposition which is the essence of work, there is no humanity: man 'manifests himself' by and in his work, understood as originary metaphorical activity, as creativity. Perhaps we have to distinguish conceptually between steward and shepherd, and say that the shepherd of being can only be a shepherd if he is also its steward, who works the 'flock' and realizes both it and himself in this creative, metaphorical activity. The *archai* themselves have not withdrawn, and have not been unmasked as reifications of human interests. Within human creative activity they light up now and again in the metaphorical transportations, uncalled for and unexpected – uncertain and by accident. Their direct thematization is as impossible as it is impossible to avoid them: we learn that all human thinking, acting and speaking speaks of them, shows them, but does not directly state them.

The affective access, however, remains also here. The differences in the interpretation of nihilism which we have indicated are connected to the affective experience of it. For Nietzsche, it is the pain of individual existence which leads either to resentment or the whole-hearted, affirmative triumph of *amor fati*, via the insight that what we call truth and morality are deceptive services to the will to power, the will to life. For Heidegger the experience of boredom more than anything else provides access to the abeyance of God. In Grassi's mode of thought, speaking of nihilism is warranted or even necessary because the withdrawal and the death of God are as little available as an integral, positive conception of transcendence.[12] The idea that access to an understanding of reality – we should say of being – runs via the affective domain is present in both; in Heidegger's analytic of Dasein it appears as *Sorge*.[13] It is, again, the recognition of the original unity of pathos and logos. Nietzsche's authorship testifies more clearly to it than Heidegger's – or it would have to be in the boredom or repulsion we can experience when reading Heidegger.[14] The philosophical text, on account of it, is a movement, and moves – it transports from one place to another, rather than remaining with one *templum*, within which things have been brought together. This movement of thought can be accessed and can even be practised – in the sense in which the approach to wisdom is a practice; do we experience boredom and *das Nichts*, affirmative *amor fati* or the fragmented traces of an '*Überhaupt*' within it, or is there even a sense in which

all three experiences are part of human existence? This question can be posed; it is not an arbitrary question or one to which an answer can be conceptually retrieved. The question hands us over to existence itself and it may be that no more is possible for philosophy than pointing the way to the possibility that this question begins to move us.

In contrast to a methodological view of philosophy that sees the activity of philosophy as lying in providing conceptual foundations for, or conceptual analyses of, general ideas at work in science, evaluation or self-referential description, or indeed in contrast to a methodological view of philosophy that sees the activity of philosophy as lying in the articulation and clarification of (contingent or universal) moral and metaphysical *de facto* intuitions, the mode of thought for which the question regarding the meaning of nihilism as specified here can be a question contains more than just this question. For the requirement of self-reflective consistency, which all philosophies must fulfil on pain of senselessness, means that if what philosophy exposes us to is a question – the question that we do not know what the meaning of nihilism is even if we do accept the need for the word, the binding force of the word – the possibility of an answer cannot be denied beforehand. The question has a double implication: (1) It opens up a *docta ignorantia*, a learned ignorance, which is a contrary of scepticism; the question itself is truly open, and in the light of its openness it now turns out that meaning can reappear. In the discovery of the prior unity of pathos and logos of rhetorical-philosophical language, nihilism becomes a human condition. (2) The question shares with myth its darkness, it reflects it in the medium of thought. It is that by which and in which nihilism is an unsettled matter.[15]

From *Amor Fati* to *Docta Spes*

We return to philosophy as a *psychagogy*, a leading of the soul, the term Plato uses to signify a properly philosophical rhetoric.[16] We can agree with Heidegger's remark, in the *Sophistes* commentary, that the text of the *Phaedrus* speaks to the fundamental mistrust of logos the Greeks had, for whom speech must be grounded in a prior apprehension of beings in their appearance (unconcealment) and is not itself that by which being comes to be known.[17] The fundamental semantics of rhetorical language have shown us what that psychagogy amounts to. It is not an art of influencing on the basis of a scientific knowledge of psychological profiles, but the practice of pointing in speech towards the dark question of thought as it is present at the centre of the individual life of a person, which is at the same time a pointing towards freedom, towards the space where a creative response is required and possible. In this sense we can say that the truth will set us free. A possibility for human life opens up in the heart of nihilism, one that is not addressed in the familiar discourses of health nor of abeyance and not-doing, both of which arise in the face of the initial

appearance of nihilism as meaninglessness. They are sublated and overcome once the movement of nihilism has displaced the urge to answer meaninglessness and we can see that the loss of meaning, of God as the much too extreme hypothesis, releases us into the apprehension of the, always fragmented, traces of the unconditional, and into the transformative, metaphorical nature of human activity, work, as the questioning response to them. History is no longer only the eternally indifferent sea of possibility that Nietzsche could experience, which, undoubtedly, in the pathos of *amor fati* remains meaningful for us. After the columbine ship has run its course, only oblivion remains for it.[18] A self-chosen oblivion, forgetfulness, is here the final fading out of life after the freely giving affirmation of creativity has outlived its particular individual instance. But there is no price to pay, no resentment or revenge lies behind the horizon – and it seems not too unlikely to suggest that a life lived this way has departed with the interhuman coldness that characterizes morality precisely because it has freed itself from the spirit of revenge.[19]

But desire and hope have not drowned. Is the enunciation that they have (see note 18) not the best proof of it? The infinite blue of possibility, the withdrawal of the gods and even oblivion itself, escape facticity and as such refer to orientation, to protention if not to tendency, to creation. Oblivion is the extreme of creativity, not its demise, as Schopenhauer already knew. Much more needs to be said, but it seems as if *amor fati* leads to hope, but to a hope that needs to be corrected, interpreted and practised, to 'docta spes' as Ernst Bloch called it.[20] That hope is not a guarantee and it requires the movement of nihilism which is its 'heaven and earth'. But it opens up a space for philosophy in which the questions of metaphysics, of ethics, of philosophical anthropology, of nature and of – an old word – wisdom, can be asked again in their full depth, questions which more and more challenge philosophy, humanity itself, in the times in which we are thinking now. 'Those who have not hope of the hopeless will never discover it, for it is unfathomable and there is no way leading to it.'[21]

Notes

[1] M. Heidegger, *Was heißt Denken?*, (GA8) / *What is called thinking?* The reference here is to the first lecture.

[2] E. Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), pp. 18–34.

[3] Grassi, *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, p. 23.

[4] The relation between the particular and the universal is of this nature: seeing 'this-here' *as* a chair, dog, man.

[5] Heidegger, Der Europäische Nihilismus (GA6.2) as discussed in: M. Riedel, *Nietzsches Lenzerheide-Fragment über den Europäischen Nihilismus* (Zollikon-Zürich: Kranig Verlag, 2000), p. 45 (quotations are my translation).

[6] A similarity to the use of dreams and images in psychoanalytic practice seems to present itself. We must note that Schelling's reading of mythology is substantially

nearer to the 'unifying', imperialistic and anti-individualistic (and hence alienating) function of myth as Adorno, following Bachofen, sees it, and we must not forget that Schelling's *Philosophy of Mythology* plays a significant role in Heidegger's thought. However, we cannot examine this relationship in more detail here.

[7] This is of course not the only place where we can find this idea. It is mentioned in very similar terms in '*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*' (1873). See F. Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe* vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999 [1968]), pp. 873–90.

[8] The text is quoted from the edition in Riedel, *Nietzsches Lenzerheide-Fragment über den Europäischen Nihilismus* (see note 5), aphorisms 2 and 3. Riedel shows how the fragment, from Nietzsche's notebooks, found its way into the *Wille zur Macht*-volume edited by Elisabeth Foerster-Nietzsche, which Heidegger used in his lecture on European nihilism, but without the reference to Buddhism, which had been deleted by Nietzsche's sister. The fragment is not only interesting because of the reference to Asian thought, but also because we encounter Nietzsche at work in a conceptually very structured, almost analytical manner. All translations of this fragment quoted here are mine.

[9] Nietzsche acknowledges another option, that of 'a god "beyond good and evil"' (aphorism 7) – spinozist pantheism which has not been made impossible with the impossibility of morality, and in which each moment in being is 'affirmed and triumphed over' as a logical necessity (aphorism 7). But Spinoza is 'an exception' (aphorism 8).

[10] *Wahrheit und Lüge*, p. 880 (my translation).

[11] Heidegger, *Brief Über den Humanismus* (GA9).

[12] Although we cannot go into this here, it appears as if the approach to the problem of nihilism I have sketched on the basis of Grassi's remarks about the unity of pathos and logos in rhetorical language has Kantian overtones, in that a positive conception of the absolute is refused, but the absolute speaks in the requirements for rational discourse and practical action.

[13] Other philosophers of the era have seen this point as well. Whitehead even uses the word 'concern' in his discussion of the nature of experience: 'The occasion as subject has a "concern" for the object. And the "concern" at once places the object as a component in the experience of the subject, with an affective tone drawn from this object and directed towards it' (*Adventures of Ideas*, 1967 [first edition 1933], p. 176). Ernst Bloch held that '[K]ategoriale Grundbegriffe (Gründlichkeiten) einzig durch die Affektlehre hindurch zugänglich gemacht werden.' [*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, (GA5), p. 357]. I will give references to Bloch's works by volume number in the collected edition (GA – *Gesamtausgabe*) and page number). Today, the distinction between knowledge and the affective, seizing encounter of truth (which requires a response of *fidelity*) in the thought of Badiou must be mentioned in this context.

[14] An experience a Heidegger-reading can indeed bestow forcefully on some: 'ich brauchte nur eine Zeile von Heidegger zu kennen um abgestoßen zu sein' (T. Bernhard, *Alte Meister, Komödie* [Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988]). The experience forces an interpretative choice: either in the direction of a dismissal of the work (as is the case with Bernhard), or in the direction of a consideration (*Besinnung*, in Heidegger's words) of this experience itself. Ernst Bloch, whose experience was similar to the one Bernhard describes, made the second choice, up to a certain point. For Bloch, we can learn about certain aspects of experience

from the 'professor for *Angst* and worry' as well as about the nihilism of the 'hopeless situation of late bourgeois society' (Bloch, GA10, pp. 311f.). He also, as will be clear from this reference, did not accept the presupposition of absolute adequacy of Heidegger's rendition of the meaning of being, which a strong reading of the experience of boredom and repulsion, as that which brings us in touch with nihilism, or even with the 'nothing', would require. It is this implicit absolute requirement (which Heidegger injects into the genetic make-up of language itself) to take the word of the thinker without qualification, which makes an engagement with Heidegger, still, so difficult. The drive to 'simply say Being' permeates more than just the *Beiträge*. It is this requirement which even today would allow for the Nietzschean rebuttal that Heidegger's reading of nihilism is the crafty last shot of the *Schlechtweggekommenen* at an ontologized, pietist and particularist moralism: 'Die Heideggerepisode ist aber doch als Beispiel für den Philosophenkult der Deutschen aufschlußreich. Sie klammern sich immer nur an die falschen, sagte Reger, an die ihnen entsprechenden, an die stupiden und dubiosen' (Bernhard, *Alte Meister*). There seems to be no final resolution to this dilemma, which has determined the Heidegger reception for so long.

[15] It is instructive here to consider the ambiguity, lost in the English translation, in the title '*Was heißt Denken?*' (which is also a question). It means both 'what does it mean to think?' as well as 'what does thinking dictate?' Myth is the 'saying word', which gives itself to thought to commemorate. The manner of this commemoration is that of questioning ('questioning is the piety of thought', Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre* (GA7), p. 36 (my translation)). While the stale and banal notion that in philosophy questions are more important than answers has to be refuted, there is a sense in which answering and questioning coincide in philosophy, or in which the answer to what thinking dictates is precisely exposing oneself to the questioning that is the adequate response to myth as the saying word. The manner of questioning itself is an *archè*, a principle, that remains in the centre of thought from beginning to end. It is itself an example of the fragmented traces of *archai* we spoke of above, and can itself only yield a manner of answering that is just as much a stammer – which means, a form of silence.

[16] Plato, *Phaedrus* 271D.

[17] Heidegger, *Platon: Sophistes* (GA19), par. 54. It seems that the eclipsing of what Heidegger calls 'ontological difference' during the course of Greek thought is the reason, on his understanding, for this view regarding the relation between speech and knowledge or truth.

[18] The reference to Columbus is, among others, in the poem 'Nach neuen Meeren' ('Towards New Seas'): 'Offen liegt das Meer, in's Blaue / Treibt mein Genueser Schiff.' ('The sea lies open, into the blue / drifts my Genoan ship'; my translation). Oblivion follows in the *Dionysos Dithyramben*, in the poem *Die Sonne Sinkt* (*The Sun Sets*):

> Only playing of waves all around.
> Whatever was hard
> Has sunk into blue oblivion –
> my boat now lies idle.
> Storm and voyaging – all forgotten now!
> Desire and hope have drowned,
> smooth lie soul and sea. (Nietzsche, *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*, p. 51)

[19] 'Denn *daß der Mensch erlöst werde von der Rache*: das ist mir die Brücke zur höchsten Hoffnung und ein Regenbogen nach langen Unwettern' ('For that man be redeemed from revenge: that is for me the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long thunderstorms' (my translation)), *Von den Taranteln*, in: Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, *Kritische Studienausgabe* vol. 4, p. 128. It has always appeared to me that seeking liberation from the spirit of revenge is the central motivation of Nietzsche's thought, and the key to understanding his collapse in Turin; a dramatic instance of access to ontological fundamentals via a culturally mediated affect, of myth and of a stammering response.

[20] Bloch, GA Band10, pp. 395–401; Bloch, GA Band 13, p. 375.

[21] Heraclitus, Fragments, Diels-Kranz 22 B 18.

Chapter 11

Coming to Terms with Nihilism: Heidegger on the Freedom in Technology

Mark Sinclair

In Heidegger's attempt to delimit and develop Nietzsche's conception of European nihilism there is much that is worthy of thought and questioning. Yet, for some, there seems to be little incentive to engage with this attempt due to the limited practical and political possibilities that it appears to offer. Under the headings of 'Transvaluation of all Values' and the 'Overman', Nietzsche hopes to provide a practical and remedial response to the nihilism he diagnoses. The later Heidegger, in contrast, not only brings into question the idea that nihilism can be overcome or cured,[1] but also comes to assert that no endeavour or reflection on our part can immediately alter our destiny in the contemporary, technological world; the contemporary world that is an epoch of complete or 'consummated nihilism'. Instead, as Heidegger infamously asserts, 'only a God can save us now.'[2]

Such remarks, at least at face value, might seem to legitimate claims that Heidegger's reflection on our technological age amounts to a rejection not just of modern or traditional conceptions, but of any conception of human freedom. An apparently voluntarist conception of freedom in *Being and Time* has simply been inverted, it is argued, within a thinking of historical destiny in Heidegger's later work. As Michael E. Zimmermann, for example, puts it in concluding his lengthy and by now classic study *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, the later Heidegger offers a 'deterministic conception of history', one that was influenced by 'Hegel and other German thinkers', on the basis of which he concluded that 'those who spoke about human "agency" or "autonomy" or "freedom" were victims of what Marx would have called "false consciousness" '. This deterministic conception of history, to compound matters, 'systematically concealed' the true possibilities of human agency and politics in the present age.[3] Heidegger, on this account, is not merely in error, but he might also be guilty of suppressing the truth. Yet even a cursory reading of Heidegger's work indicates that such a verdict has not, at the very least, weighed all the evidence in the case: as Heidegger announces in the first lines of 'The Question Concerning Technology', the very purpose of his reflection is to

'prepare' a 'free relation' to technology;[4] and thus if we do not yet have such a relation it at least stands as a possibility that may be realized. Moreover, if technology is in some sense our destiny (*Geschick*), this notion of destiny is to be distinguished from 'the talk that we hear more frequently, to the effect that technology is the fate (*Schicksal*) of our age, where "fate" means the inevitableness of an unalterable course'.[5]

How to understand, then, the idea of freedom, and thus of destiny, at stake in Heidegger's reflection on modern technology? This chapter aims to respond to this question, and it does so by means of what might be understood as a *via negativa*. For I intend first of all to situate Heidegger's thinking with respect to the sociological thinking of Jacques Ellul, which is customarily taken to be the most acute expression of a deterministic position – the sort of determinism which Zimmermann seems to ascribe to Heidegger – within the philosophy of technology. Comparing Heidegger's approach to that of Ellul is not merely a negative heuristic device, since there is much common ground in the 'diagnoses' and 'prognoses' that both thinkers offer. Yet in distinguishing these two approaches, my aim is to address and explore Heidegger's claim, a claim which is certainly difficult and ambiguous, that a principle of human freedom is to be located, not *without*, or on the outside of modern technology, as Ellul supposes in the final analysis, but rather *within* the essence of modern technology itself.

Ellul and the Autonomy of Modern Technology

The claim that those who speak about human agency, autonomy or freedom are victims of 'false consciousness' can be ascribed more easily to the work of Ellul than to that of Heidegger. Ellul offered scathing remarks on the voluntarism of the existentialist philosophy fashionable in France during the post-war years, and he deliberately rejects traditional philosophical reflection on the question of human freedom, since he argues that this question, at least in the present age, can be answered only with respect to the nature of modern technology.[6] Moreover, although an anti-communist of both a Christian and anarchist persuasion, Ellul was a committed interpreter and teacher of Marx's work. The sort of 'technological determinism' at which he arrives is, in fact, at least prefigured in Marx's work, for it is the latter who writes in the *Poverty of Philosophy* that 'the hand mill gives you the feudal lord, the steam mill the capitalist'.[7] The idea of technological determinism, in its most minimal sense, thus amounts to the claim that technological development is the primary motive force of socio-historical change. Acknowledging this primacy does not, of course, commit one to denying voluntary human agency and freedom: human beings construct their technological artefacts, it will be argued, and any social superstructure is capable of steering its own productive forces. Yet Ellul challenges, first in *The Technological Society* (1964), the instrumentalism of such arguments, at the same time as articulating a critique of the rationalization, standardization, automatism,

and destruction of tradition and nature that modern technology has brought about.

If much of this critique has now become commonplace, Ellul's account of the nature of modern technology is more unsettling: far from being autonomous in relation to technology, we are increasingly subject to a technological world that becomes itself increasingly autonomous. What Ellul terms *la technique* – in preferring to safeguard the proper meaning of *technologie* for study of technical systems and processes – has been transformed in the modern age, and that is to say, from at least the eighteenth century onwards; it 'has taken substance, has become a reality in itself. It is no longer a means and an intermediary. It is an object in itself, an independent reality with which we must reckon'.[8] This new quality and independence proper to modern technology does not simply issue from modern machine technology, even if the machine is 'deeply symptomatic of technique' and 'the ideal towards which technique strives'. Ellul's provisional definition of what he considers to be a broader technological phenomenon, a definition informed by Max Weber's analyses of rationalization, is that technique is the 'totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency'.[9] Technology comprises not only the work of the techno-sciences in a narrow sense, but also, and more generally, methods of organization, management, education, information and communication. Such a broad conception of technology may seem imprecise, but with it Ellul seeks to establish a fundamental point: as long as technology is conceived solely as a matter of machine technology then it might still be possible to conceive of the human being as external to it, and thus as the master of it, whereas in truth technology has become the 'very substance' of the human being.[10]

The stakes of this claim are drawn out in Ellul's 'characterology' of technology, which he presents in *The Technological Society* and then develops in *The Technological System* of 1977. To name four of these characteristics, there is an *automatism* of technical choice in the sense that technological development is self-directing: ultimately, decisions are made on the basis of one criterion, namely efficiency, and technologies are implemented solely because they can be actualized. Overwhelmed by the criterion of efficiency, the human being, for Ellul, 'is no longer in any sense the agent of choice'.[11] Second, this automatism of modern technology is *self-augmenting* in the sense that it comes to encroach on domains of human life, which were previously spontaneous, nonrational and a matter of tradition. Moreover, technological innovation, to whichever domain it is applied, comes to depend less on the acts and inspiration of individual researchers than it does on an automatic growth inherent in technology itself. It is in this sense that the physicist Werner Heisenberg could argue that 'the word "guilt" does not really apply' to atomic physicists after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, since as individuals they have only played their part in the fulfilment of the modern scientific project instigated many centuries ago, which would inevitably have attained the heights, or depths, of atomic physics without them.[12]

The automatic self-augmentation of technology possesses a certain *monism* or *unicité*, on the basis of which Ellul argues that it is abstract to isolate good from bad, or proper from improper uses of particular technologies. For example, to lament the impoverished state of modern journalism as an accidental deformation of the positive educative possibilities inherent in the printing press is to fail to see the full picture; it is to fail to see that 'tabloid journalism' has a necessary function in the mass society that printing technology helps to establish.[13] Of course, with a knife we can choose to peel a pear rather than kill someone, but Ellul's claim is that what we might evaluate as improper consequences of the modern technological phenomenon generally belong to the singular essence of technique. The results or consequences are not, in the end, determined by us, and there is an inherent *goallessness* within modern technology. Particular technologies might be brought into being in order to resolve specific problems and thus for a specific, clearly determined purpose. Yet when we distinguish between the 'ultimate aims, mid-range objectives and immediate goals'[14] of modern technology, the ultimate aims or ideals as a whole of modern technological civilization are much less clear: ideas of human happiness and even of refashioning the human being struggle to justify what is meant by happiness and of what sort of human being we are to create. Ultimately, a goal remains to be provided, and on this point Ellul might have cited Nietzsche's: 'the aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer'.[15]

According to these characteristics, Ellul presents technology as a totalizing, monolithic phenomenon, with its own internal, and ultimately purposeless, logic and necessity: far from being the vehicle of our liberation, modern technology alienates us from our own most proper possibilities. To be sure, it is often argued that Ellul overstates his case in relation to some, if not all, of the phenomena he highlights: contemporary subservience to efficiency criteria may express political weakness and ideological blindness rather than a sociological necessity of the present age. Moreover, those advancing a 'social constructivist' theory of technology point to instances of choice and decision in the development of particular technologies. In response to these arguments, however, it is necessary to note that Ellul's thinking is informed by a particular, Durkheimian sociological method: if 'in discussing technique today it is impossible not to take a position', his position attempts to isolate a 'collective social reality' that is 'independent of individual choice'.[16] A technological and collective social reality precedes and shapes individual choice, and increasingly so, as Ellul argues, in the contemporary world. In adopting such a methodological stance, Ellul does not simply reject the possibility of individual actions that would run counter to the central characteristics of technique. It would be absurd to deny the reality of political struggles against certain forms of modern technology, and Ellul was himself involved, for example, in resistance to the 'development' of the Aquitaine coastline near his native Bordeaux. Yet he does argue that such events of resistance are increasingly merely surface phenomena, that human freedom with regard to modern technology is ultimately – and

that means viewed from a certain historical and sociological level – not visible, and that we should not imagine that this is solely on the basis of humanist assumptions.

The humanist assumptions in question here are based on an instrumental conception of technology. For Ellul, modern technology is not simply a set of instruments allowing us to realize our aims, but rather a '*milieu*' and a system with its own momentum and movement;[17] and in this sense, we have to recognize that technology itself is not simply neutral.[18] Consequently, the idea that we can and should take modern technology back in hand, making it serve our purposes, is an illusion, in the Freudian sense of the term. Of course, such a diagnosis of our technological condition renders all the more problematic any possible response to it: the recognition that modern technology is a danger because it essentially escapes complete human control compromises any attempt to do something to transform the situation. Nevertheless, what should compel us to engage with Ellul's work is his basic claim that the more we consider ourselves to be masters of technology, the more – and the more unconsciously – we will be dominated by it.

It is against this background that in concluding *The Technological Bluff* of 1988 – and thus in concluding his grand trilogy of works on technology – Ellul addresses the idea of human freedom. Here he responds in the first instance affirmatively to the question of whether we are 'closed in, blocked in and chained up by the fated inevitability' of modern technology: 'we are radically determined, caught up in the chains without any hope of escape if we pretend to any extent to master the apparatus.' Yet this pessimistic response does not preclude at least the premonition of a more positive or optimistic thinking, and it often seems that Ellul states his case concerning the humanistic illusions of contemporary political discourse so starkly in order to stir us into action, a different kind of action. Thus, in the final lines of the text, and in response to the question of whether in the present age we are 'radically determined', he states:

> In the end, and in truth, no, . . . if knowing the limitations of our room for manoeuvre, we take advantage, but never from above or by power, of the fractal existence of spaces for freedom . . . and install in them a trembling freedom (one that is effective and which is not attributed to or mediated by machines or politics), so that we may truly invent the new thing for which humanity is waiting.

La technique should not, then, be understood as a wholly totalizing phenomenon, and it has not yet entirely taken over the society in which it has established itself.[19] The 'fractal spaces' in question here are a matter of a 'margin of chaos' and 'errors' inherent in the imperfect development of that system;[20] and it is in such spaces that a principle of freedom disinvested of humanistic illusions could gain ground and insert itself. For Ellul, freedom and thus the possibility of resistance exist outside of the technological system, and yet the inbuilt

limitations of that system might allow that freedom to be realized. To be sure, Ellul does not account philosophically for the nature of the freedom whose possible realization he discusses. Moreover, insofar as he considers freedom to be a principle residing outside of the technological system, and to be the ground of the possibility of an 'invention' of the 'new thing' for which we are waiting, it might be thought that ultimately he has done little to bring into question the dualist ontological underpinnings of the modern voluntarism and humanism that he opposes. In any case, there are severe limitations to this more optimistic stance concerning the realization of our freedom, particularly insofar as Ellul accepts that any contemporary attempt to conceive a non-technological new beginning would be abstract and idealistic, all the more so if it is true that 'man in our society has no intellectual, moral or spiritual reference point for judging and criticising technology'.[21]

Freedom and the Essence of Technology

We find, then, a particular form of the idea of technological determinism in Ellul's thesis concerning the autonomy of modern technology. Although, as we have seen, in the final analysis he does not reject at least the possibility of human freedom: philosophical conceptions of human autonomy, insofar as they abstract from the social reality and historical force of modern technology, are indeed expressions of a 'false consciousness', which he analyses at length as expressions of *le bluff technologique*. In contrast to Ellul, Heidegger's reflection on technology involves a direct questioning of the essence of human freedom, but this philosophical reflection on freedom in relation to technology is a function of his more philosophical or ontological concern to illuminate the essence or *Wesen* of technology itself.[22]

In this connection, it should be noted that in establishing his provisional definition of modern technology in *The Technological Society*, Ellul shares Heidegger's aim to challenge the common idea that technology is simply applied modern science. He argues that the interrelation of the sciences and practical technology, not just in contemporary techno-scientific research, but already at the beginning of modern science itself, is such that it is impossible to maintain a precedence of one over the other.[23] Yet Heidegger goes much further on this point: the modern scientific project is intrinsically technological not simply because it required certain devices in order to be possible, but because modern science is an apprehension of beings that allows them to manipulated, utilized and controlled. At its origin, modern science can be understood to be intrinsically technological in that it is a manner of grasping nature that is supposed, as Bacon and Descartes claimed, to enable us to become the 'masters and possessors of nature'.

We should not, however, think of the modern sciences as simply a mode of 'technological' theory that can be put into practice with spectacular results.

It can be said, in fact, that modern technology is as much a radically transformed praxis that has put the modern mathematical sciences to use, as it is an application of those sciences.[24] Here praxis has been radically, and that is to say, ontologically transformed from what it originally was, to use Heidegger's reference point: ancient Greece. According to Aristotle, the carpenter addresses wood in which the form of the finished product is already hidden, that is, potentially present.[25] The task of the producer is thus simply to extract or to unearth this still hidden form.[26] Hence Aristotle can analogically compare the relation of the craftsman to his wood, and, more generally, the relation of the 'agent' to the 'patient' as such and in general, to that of a teacher and her pupil.[27] Only in our darkest moods might we be able to entertain the idea that teaching consisted of action upon an inert matter. This is to say that the craftsman does not merely act on his material, nor does he simply force it to become what it is not; the craftsman is rather co-responsible, with the matter, form and *telos* of the finished product, for the bringing of a latent shape into presence.[28] For a Greek of the fourth century BC, then, if Aristotle's testimony is anything to go by, *praxis* in the most general sense is much more revelatory than it is creative.

Modern *praxis*, however, knows little of this. The modern-day practical worker, in the words of Marx, stands before a 'raw material', making use of 'the mechanical, physical and chemical properties of some substances in order to set them to work on other substances as instruments of his power, and in accordance with his purposes'.[29] This *praxis* is not merely a mechanically modified version of praxis, if by that we mean only that machines increasingly come to stand as an intermediary between man and the world upon which he now acts. What has changed in modern *praxis*, it might be said, is rather our conception of things, and, at the same time, our real relation to them. All has become, indeed, an issue of action, calculated force and the essential inertia of things, whereas once it was a question of being responsive to their ability to come into presence from a prior state of hiddenness.

On Heidegger's account, then, modern technology amounts to a transformation of what we have come to separate as 'theory' and 'practice' in their very essence; and it is the unity, and the prior ground, of this changed theory and practice that is to be thought as the essence of technology. This essence is 'a mode of revealing', which Heidegger names *das Gestell* [VA 22]. In distinction to ancient Greek *techne*, which Aristotle describes explicitly as a mode of revealing or being-in-the-truth,[30] the predominant form of revealing in modern technology, as Heidegger argues, is a provocation, a challenging. Where once it was a question of responsibility and letting-appear, it is now a question of a 'challenging which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored'.[31] Through such scientifically mediated challenging, things present themselves to us as a resource of energies that can be quantified, ordered, captured and stored. They present themselves to us, no longer even as independent objects, but rather as a mere standing-reserve or

Bestand [VA 20], as 'things' which have significance only in relation to the network of production and consumption in which they appear.

Clearly, much more can be said concerning the meaning and possibility of such an account of the essence of modern technology; essence here being understood verbally as a way in which things, for us, come to presence. Yet on the basis of the argument that the essence of technology is a mode of revealing, we are led to the idea that technology is no merely human enterprise and concomitantly that modern technical artefacts are not the neutral vehicles of our intentions. Technology is a mode of being, the manner in which things are, a manner in which they show themselves – a revelation which is no mere human feat. For all that we might pretend to be lords of the earth, technology, *in its essence*, is not of our own making. On this point, it might be said that the miracle of the modern world is that the seventeenth-century mathematization of nature actually works, that it has come to grant us such apparent power over the world.[32] Yet this miracle or mystery belongs originally to being itself. It belongs to what we are called to think as destiny, as a sending or a destining of being, *ein Geschick des Seins*, precisely because we have not decided – the efforts of the early modern natural philosophers do not constitute such a decision – that nature is able to present itself in such a manner to us.

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, Heidegger is at great pains to distinguish this conception of destiny from an ineluctable fate that would reduce human freedom to nought. Certainly technology is, in modernity at least, the primary motive force of socio-historical change – and particularly of globalization, or the 'Europeanisation' of the world – and we might ultimately have as little control over technological development as Ellul claims. The 'forces', as Heidegger writes in his discourse of 1955 entitled '*Gelassenheit*', that 'drag along, press and impose man under the form of some technological contrivance or another' have 'long since moved beyond his will and have outgrown his capacity for decision'; but this has been able to occur because these forces, and the essence of technology itself, were not made by man in the first place.[33] To think, however, the granting of the essence of technology as a kind of necessary and ineluctable fate opposed to and completely overwhelming a principle of human freedom is to think it '*zu absolut*', too absolutely.[34] According to 'The Question Concerning Technology', destining 'is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so become one who listens, though not one who simply obeys'.[35]

That destining is a fate that never compels means, first of all, that it is not to be thought as the activity of an object that would be passively received by a human subject. Heidegger certainly wants us to think beyond the philosophical idea of self-grounding subjectivity, even to the point where some of his formulations might suggest a mere inversion of modern metaphysics. Yet no such inversion is, in the end, possible or meaningful since being and the understanding of being are not two things that we can separate in order to concern ourselves with their 'relation'.[36] We are, in fact, invited to think our freedom as somehow

rooted in destining itself: we can live freely and, that is to say, act intelligently in a world only insofar as beings are given to us, only insofar as being has dispensed beings to and for us. Yet in order to begin to think the inherence of freedom in destining, and the sense of this dispensation itself, we have first of all to recognize, as Heidegger argues, that: 'the essence of freedom is *originally* not connected to the will or even with the causality of human willing.'[37]

This sentence, whose pivotal importance is signalled by the fact that it occupies a paragraph of its own in 'The Question Concerning Technology', is the result of a long and sinuous trajectory of Heidegger's thinking concerning the will and freedom. Already in 1930, in the lectures *On the Essence of Human Freedom*, Heidegger had critically delimited Kant's thinking on this point. Kant's distinction between causality by freedom and natural causality is offered on the basis of a general conception of causality drawn from the interrelation of the things of the world, present-at-hand inner-worldly beings. This becomes explicit when Kant, in the third antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason,* examines the possibility of causality by freedom as, in fact, a cosmological idea: the idea of an originary, unconditioned, and thus free causality posited by reason describes and denominates not only the origin of the world but also human freedom. Thus, as Heidegger argues, 'the existence of man, as a result of the characterisation of freedom as causality – even if it is a determinate type of causality – comes to be fundamentally conceived as present-at-hand' and hence is transformed into what it is not, *ins Gegenteil verkehrt*.[38] Kant's approach thus serves to reify and objectify the human being, and Heidegger's critique on this point furthers an essential aim of the destruction of the history of ontology that he had projected in *Being and Time*: to diagnose the 'fallen-ness' of a philosophical tradition which, from Plato onwards, tends to interpret human being from the perspective of the being of things.

It could of course be objected, as Heidegger acknowledges, that in accentuating the heterogeneity of natural and free causality, Kant aims to underline the '*specificity* of the acting person *vis-à-vis* the natural thing and to establish firmly this difference'. It might be argued that the account of freedom as a function of personality and the autonomous will that Kant goes on to offer in his practical philosophy by no means necessarily involves reification in that autonomy is precisely what sets us apart from and raises us above all other beings. In response to such an objection, Heidegger notes briefly that 'the very least that one can say . . . is that man's mode of being, in these circumstances, remains ontologically indeterminate or under-determined' and that this lack cannot be compensated by an external and post-hoc 'complement'. Kant's thinking lacks, in other words, an adequate ontology of *Dasein*, but this is not to say that his determination of autonomy is simply to be rejected. On the contrary, for the Heidegger of 1930, it is only on the basis of such an account of *Dasein* that a thinking of the will can be properly grounded and that Kant's thinking can be radicalized; and, in fact, the final sections of the lecture course offer an interpretation of the will – the will interpreted, against Kant, as bound only to be a

'willing of will' rather than to any formal categorical imperative – as inherent to the essence of human freedom.[39]

From the perspective of the later Heidegger's reflection on technology, however, we are compelled to offer a different and a much stronger response to the objection that Kant's practical thinking safeguards the specificity and dignity of the human being. For, in reality (and that is to say, in our contemporary reality), this voluntarist humanism and the objectivism to which it is opposed are essentially bound to each other. Both describe the nature of our contemporary technological situation: a situation in which we pose as lords of the earth while increasingly becoming a human resource, according to the peculiar logic that the cleverer, the more technically proficient we become, the less we actually value ourselves.

Both, in their different ways, are expressions of what we can call 'technological thinking'. Technological thinking is, on the one hand, the idea that the world is simply a matter of manipulable beings; and, on the other hand, that these beings can be controlled, mastered and subjected to our will. We are thinking technologically, therefore, when we are concerned to re-establish the freedom of our will, to regain our autonomy in relation to technology by getting the latter 'back into hand'. And we are still thinking technologically in this sense, even if only in a negative or indirect manner, when, following Ellul, we challenge the humanism of modern philosophy by asserting that the modern technological phenomenon essentially escapes our control. Technological thinking in this context is, to be sure, an expression of 'nihilism'. Insofar as nihilism is 'most profoundly at work',[40] as Heidegger already argues in 1935, when its nihilating power affects not merely beings or our highest and most cherished values, but rather being itself, it can be understood to attain its consummation in the wilful assertion of the autonomous and self-grounding human subject in the present age. This is an assertion which we have seen Ellul describe as *le bluff technologique*, and which Heidegger characterizes as the 'need of needlessness', as a danger which is not seen as such.

Both the objectivism and this humanist subjectivism described above 'nihilistically' fall short of apprehending the granting of being which makes any human purposiveness possible. Both, in other words, do not see that freedom or *Freiheit* has the 'closest and most intimate kinship' with the *Freie*, understood as an open region in which beings are revealed, and thus in which truth comes to pass:

> The freedom of the open consists neither in unfettered arbitrariness nor in the constraint of mere laws. Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that hides the essential occurrence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils. Freedom is the realm of destining that at any given time starts a revealing upon its way.[41]

For Heidegger, freedom has such a kinship with the open region in which the granting and revealing of beings occurs that it is even possible to speak of destining occurring within its realm. Insofar as the essence of modern technology is such a mode of destined revealing, we are to think, contra Ellul, that there is a freedom to be found within, or that is at least essentially bound to, technology itself.

Yet the enigma still remains: what positive sense can we give to this idea of freedom as intrinsically bound to the *Freie*, the open region of destining? This freedom can be understood neither as a 'freedom to' in the sense of a mastery over technology, nor as a 'freedom from' in the sense of an escape from it. Moreover, we are accustomed to thinking freedom as a matter of will and choice to such an extent that it is all too easy to wonder whether Heidegger veils an essentially negative insight with mere empty verbosity.[42] We certainly find ourselves, once again, in a paradoxical impasse: the more we recognize the non-neutrality of modern technology, the more we find the meaning and possibility of a response to its dangers brought into question. Concerning these dangers, for Heidegger, the fact that the powers unleashed by modern technology escape our control certainly constitutes a danger, as is the possibility of nuclear conflagration or environmental destruction by other means. The greater danger which underlies this is the possibility that we have or will come to understand ourselves and the world purely technologically; that we only have 'purely technical relationships' left open to us.[43] Yet ultimately, for Heidegger, being destined as *Gestell* is 'in itself, from itself and for itself the danger as such',[44] since 'it' delivers beings over to us while almost entirely withholding itself, thus concealing the possibility of other modes of revealing.

How, then, to respond to this danger, and how might the response involve a positive conception of our freedom? It is instructive in this regard to compare Heidegger's thinking to the three 'decisions' that Ellul proposes in his 1972 text translated as *Hope in a Time of Abandonment*: an absolute 'realism' concerning technology and the possibilities it grants us; 'indolence', understood as a rejection of the values of a technological culture of work; and finally 'prayer' as an appeal, in a Christian mode, to a divine saving power.[45] 'Indolence' recalls Heidegger's thinking of the attitude of *Gelassenheit* or releasement, and yet according to the latter we are to say both 'yes' and 'no' to technology, in that we can happily use technological devices while, without becoming absorbed by them, recognizing that they are granted by something 'higher'.[46] That *Gelassenheit* involves saying both 'yes' and 'no' to technology is an expression of the fact that, for Heidegger, there can be no simple escape from technology, and this not only because it seems extremely idealistic to imagine that we will discard our modern devices, but also because to attempt to turn our backs on the history that we are by pretending to construct a non-technological future would be a move akin to Descartes' attempt to be non-medieval and

non-Greek – an attempt which makes the task of historical inheritance an unconscious subjugation. An assertion of our freedom in this manner, if it were even possible, could only amount to its negation.

The idea of 'prayer' points us directly to Heidegger's own pronouncement in his interview with *Der Spiegel* that 'only a God can save us now', even if, for Heidegger, the God (or Gods) in question cannot be worshipped as a creator. It might be tempting to read this statement, following Thomas Sheehan, as the 'ironic' statement of an aging thinker, who never lost his taste for philosophical radicalism, that salvation from the dangers he earlier diagnosed is, in fact, impossible.[47] Yet, and without directly entering here into the ambiguities of the later Heidegger's reflection on the divine, a minimal interpretation of these words is that they express the need for a new *pathos* or attitude that would enable us to recognize that there is more in this world than man and the things he finds disposed to manipulation.

Preparing for the advent of a God to come is, as Heidegger underlines, a function of what he terms being-historical thinking; and it is this thinking that can be understood to supersede Ellul's demand for realism. Heidegger certainly shares Ellul's concern to disabuse ourselves of modern voluntaristic illusions concerning modern technology, but an understanding of the present situation can only be achieved by reflecting on being in its current dispensation, and concomitantly, on the history of the modes of its dispensation. This reflection is far from being 'realistic' in that it does not simply record what is given. Our first task is certainly to understand how being holds sway in the epoch of modern technology, but this understanding can only be achieved, as we have seen, by means of an interpretative appropriation of the past, and, ultimately, by means of a return to the horizons of Greek thinking. Our reception of being is thus – as Heidegger, after Nietzsche, had shown concerning history in 1927 – always a task. It is in taking up this task that we can enter into and make a claim to the region of destining, which is freeing or liberating precisely because, as Heidegger argues, 'another beginning', the 'new thing for which we are waiting', can come only from the same source as the danger itself.

Thinking, then, can be the highest enactment and realization of freedom. This, to be sure, is not to claim that within the spontaneous 'mind' it is possible to think what one likes, but rather that thinking, now understood as the highest form of praxis, might enable us to receive technology as a mode of revealing, to prepare to receive another mode of revealing and thus to exist in a different way. Thinking is that which will enable us to 'leap into *Dasein*' as Heidegger writes in the 1930s. This praxis will certainly fall short of the demands made by those aiming for an immediate transformation of the world. Yet there is no 'determinism' or mere negation of freedom involved in Heidegger's thinking, and coming to terms with nihilism does not preclude the idea that the new thing for which we might be waiting, if it cannot simply be 'invented' by us, will nevertheless not occur without us.

Notes

[1] Heidegger, *Zur Seinsfrage*, p. 153: 'Bezuglich des *Wesens* des Nihilismus gibt es keine Aussicht und keinen sinnvollen Anspruch auf Heilung'/'On the Question of Being', p. 297.

[2] See 'Spiegel Gespräch Mit Martin Heidegger' in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges* (GA16), p. 671/'*Der Spiegel* interview with Martin Heidegger', p. 326.

[3] M. Zimmermann, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, pp. 250–1. It is perhaps these claims in particular that lead Richard Rojcewicz, within a more recent and sustained reading of Heidegger's actual writings on technology, to offer the following verdict on Zimmermann's book: it 'is an exemplary work of scholarship regarding the historical and political context of Heidegger's philosophy of technology. It says very little about the actual content of that philosophy, and I disagree strongly with what it does say about the content' (*The Gods and Technology*: *A Reading of Heidegger*, p. 187). For a useful survey of claims that there is an inversion or reversal from voluntarism to fatalism in the course of Heidegger's thinking, see pp. 242–8 of Brett E. Davis' *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, 2007.

[4] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 9/ *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* p. 3.

[5] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 29/ p. 25.

[6] In the concluding lines of *Le système technicien*, Ellul cites not only Sartre but also Heidegger as exponents of a naïve philosophical humanism. Ellul thus seems not to have read Heidegger's own critique of Sartre in his letter to Jean Beaufret which was first published in French as '*Lettre sur l'humanisme*'. Nevertheless, some of Ellul's formulations within his reflection on technology are, however, so close to those of Heidegger that it seems difficult to imagine that he was as ignorant of the latter's thinking as the above comment might indicate. Ellul certainly came to encounter it, at least indirectly, by means of Dominque Janicaud's *La puissance du rationnel*, a work which is cited with approbation several times in *Le bluff technologique* of 1988.

[7] K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 'Second Observation', p. 102. Definitions of 'technological determinism' vary but I follow here Val Dusek in his *Philosophy of Technology*: *An Introduction*. For an Anglophone – and 'analytic' – reading of Marx as a technological determinist, see Jerry Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence.*

[8] J. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, p. 8. Like most Anglophone commentators, I do not follow Ellul in his attempt to safeguard the proper meaning of the word 'technology', since the word 'technics' is rather abstract to the ear of an English speaker and 'technique' cannot be used in the general sense he intends.

[9] Ellul, *Technological Society*, p. xxv.

[10] Ellul, *Technological Society*, p. 6.

[11] Ellul, *Technological Society*, p. 80.

[12] On this point, see L. Winner, *Autonomous Technology*, p. 69.

[13] Ellul, *Technological Society*, p. 95.

[14] Ellul distinguishes between '*finalités* dernières, *objectifs* à moyenne distance et des *buts* immediats' (*Le système technicien*, p. 263).

[15] Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, VIII, 2, 14; *The Will to Power*, p. 9.
[16] Ellul, *Technological Society,* pp. xxviii, 62.
[17] Ellul, *The Technological System*, p. 45.
[18] Ellul, *Le bluff technologique*, p. 284.
[19] See Ellul, *Technological System,* p. 18: 'A technological society is one in which a technological system has been installed. But it is not itself that system, and there is a tension between the two of them.'
[20] All quotations so far in this paragraph: Ellul, *Technological System*, pp. 730–1.
[21] Ellul, *Technological System*, p. 318.
[22] The terms 'ontology' and 'philosophy' are always to be used with a certain reserve in relation to the later Heidegger, given his decisions concerning the meaning of, first, 'ontology' in the 1930s and subsequently 'philosophy' in the 1950s.
[23] Ellul does not develop his 'provisional' definition of technology of 1954 and in *The Technological System* (p. 45) he simply refers back to it. From a Heideggerian perspective, its limitations reside it does not question the ontological foundations of the modern sciences.
[24] On this point, see also Jean Beaufret 'Le "dialogue avec Marxism" et la "question de la technique" ' in *Dialogue avec Heidegger – La Philosophie Moderne.*
[25] Cf., for example, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ, 1048a32–3.
[26] Aristotle, *Metaphysics Θ*
[27] Aristotle, *Physics* III, 202a33–4.
[28] For extended elucidations of Heidegger's interpretations of Aristotle's thinking on these points, see Jean Beaufret, 'Energeia and Actus' in *Dialogue With Heidegger: Greek Philosophy*, the fifth chapter of my *Heidegger, Aristotle and the Work of Art* and Rojcewicz's *The Gods and Technology: A Reading of Heidegger.*
[29] K. Marx, *Capital*, p. 285.
[30] Cf., in particular, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.
[31] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 9: 'ein Herausfordern, das an die Natur das Ansinnen stellt, Energie zu liefern, die als solche herausgefordert und gespeichert werden kann'/ *The Question Concerning Technology,* p. 3.
[32] As Heidegger says in the *Spiegel* interview: 'Es fonktioniert alles. Das ist gerade das Unheimliche, dass es funktioniert' (p. 669/p. 325).
[33] Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (GA16), p. 524.
[34] G. Figal and J. Veith, *The Heidegger Reader:* 'Spiegel Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger', p. 677/p. 330.
[35] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 28: 'Aber es ist nie das Verhängnis eines Zwanges. Denn der Mensch wird gerade erst frei, insofern er in den Bereich des Geschickes gehört und so ein Hörender wird, nicht aber ein Höriger'/ *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 25.
[36] On this point see, in particular, the appendix to the 'Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes'/'Origin of the Work of Art' in Heidegger, Holzwege (GA5)/ *Off the Beaten Track.*
[37] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 28/ *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 25.
[38] M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Menschlichen Freiheit* (GA31), p. 191.
[39] On this voluntarism in Heidegger's thinking of the early 1930s, a voluntarism which seems to have prepared the ground for Heidegger's political misadventure in 1933/34, see the third chapter of Brett W. Davis' admirable and illuminating

Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit. On Heidegger's reading of Kant see also Hans Ruin's 'The Destiny of Freedom in Heidegger', which offers a synoptic account complementing Davis' analyses of the idea of freedom in Heidegger's *Denkweg*.

[40] Heidegger, Einführung in die Metaphysik (GA40), p. 155.

[41] Heidegger, *Die Frage nach der Technik* (GA7), p. 28/*The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 25.

[42] In what is generally a patient and illuminating study, Rojcewicz (*The Gods and Technology: A Reading of Heidegger*, p. 135) argues that the freedom granted by the destining of being is still a matter of choice, albeit one 'made at the level of feeling rather than will'. This is a choice to 'be involved in the world of beings at all, rather than encapsulate oneself in one's ego'. Yet given that the latter would be nothing other than the life of the 'madman', and also that the idea of insanity as a choice in any sense is at the very least problematic, the choice destining might offer amounts to no real choice at all.

[43] Figal and Veith, *The Heidegger Reader:* 'Spiegel Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger', p. 670/p. 325.

[44] Heidegger, *Die Gefahr* (GA79), p. 54.

[45] On this appeal, and on the theological aspects of Ellul's reflection on technology in general, see G. Pattison, *Thinking about God in an Age of Technology*, p. 55.

[46] See Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (GA16), pp. 527f.

[47] See T. Sheehan, 'Nihilism: Heidegger/Jünger/Aristotle', p. 315.

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