

FROM  
BEING

TO  
Heidegger's *Polemos*

POLITICS

GREGORY FRIED

## Heidegger's *Polemos*



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From Being to Politics

Gregory Fried

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*For my parents*

*Charles Fried and Anne Summerscale Fried*



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## Acknowledgments

At the outset of his 1934–35 lecture course on Friedrich Hölderlin’s poem “Germania,” Martin Heidegger said, “Wer vieles beginnt, kommt oft nie zum Anfang” (*GA* 39, 3); loosely translated: “Whoever starts many things often never gets to the beginning.” This dictum might well serve as a warning, if not as an epitaph, for anyone so incautious as to embark upon a study of the work of Martin Heidegger.

And so there are many to whom I owe debts of gratitude for helping me bring this long beginning with Heidegger to a close. This book grew out of a dissertation project at the University of Chicago, and I am grateful to the Committee on Social Thought, which provided the intellectual home within which my work could take place. A National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship in the Core Curriculum at Boston University has given me the opportunity to finish the book. I must thank Leszek Kolakowski, the chair of my dissertation committee, whose questions always went to the heart of the matter and ensured that I kept my sights on what is really important. Robert Pippin and David Tracy, the two other members of my committee, provided essential critique, commentary, and support for my work. Many other

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## Note on Translation

Contributing to the problem of making a start with Heidegger, as many have experienced, is the difficulty and idiosyncrasy of his language. In this study, I have endeavored wherever possible to provide my own translations of his writings. I have often sought assistance from existing translations, but the responsibility for the outcome is my own. This work of translation is necessary both as a matter of scholarship and as a way of providing the reader with terminology as consistent as possible. Furthermore, there is as yet no English translation for many of Heidegger's lecture courses and manuscripts published over the last decade or so. Nevertheless, I am particularly indebted to the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time*, despite the frequently substantial departures of my own. In the case of Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, I have employed the translation by Richard Polt and myself, with modifications to suit the purposes of this study. In other specific instances, I shall indicate in a note where I have relied on another translator's rendering. For authors besides Heidegger, I have adopted the translations of others, amending them at times. The reader should assume that all emphasis is original to quotations unless otherwise specified.



## Abbreviations of Frequently Cited Works

Following is a list of abbreviations for the texts frequently cited, arranged by author. Most of the volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* of Heidegger's collected works are editions of his lecture courses; the abbreviation "WS" indicates a winter semester course and "SS" indicates a summer semester course. Occasional departures from the regular academic calendar are duly noted. In the case of essays found in well-known collections, I have given the title of the title volume.

### MARTIN HEIDEGGER

BH	"Brief über den Humanismus," in <i>Wegmarken</i>
BP	<i>Beiträge zur Philosophie, Gesamtausgabe</i> , vol. 65
BZ	<i>Der Begriff der Zeit</i>
DB	"Drei Briefe Martin Heideggers an Karl Löwith"
EHD	<i>Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung</i>
EM	<i>Einführung in die Metaphysik</i>
G	<i>Gelassenheit</i>

<i>GA</i>	<i>Gesamtausgabe</i>
<i>GA 13</i>	vol. 13, <i>Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens</i>
<i>GA 15</i>	vol. 15, <i>Seminare</i>
<i>GA 24</i>	vol. 24, <i>Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie</i> (SS 1927)
<i>GA 26</i>	vol. 26, <i>Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz</i> (SS 1928)
<i>GA 29/30</i>	vol. 29/30, <i>Die Begriffe der Metaphysik: Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit</i> (WS 1929–30)
<i>GA 33</i>	vol. 33, <i>Aristoteles: Metaphysik Theta</i> (SS 1931)
<i>GA 34</i>	vol. 34, <i>Vom Wesen der Wahrheit: Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet</i> (WS 1931–32)
<i>GA 38</i>	vol. 38, <i>Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache</i> (SS 1934)
<i>GA 39</i>	vol. 39, <i>Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein’</i> (WS 1934–35)
<i>GA 40</i>	vol. 40, <i>Einführung in die Metaphysik</i> (SS 1935)
<i>GA 42</i>	vol. 42, <i>Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit</i> (1809) (SS 1936)
<i>GA 43</i>	vol. 43, <i>Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst</i> (WS 1936–37)
<i>GA 44</i>	vol. 44, <i>Nietzsches metaphysische Grundstellung im abendländischen Denken: Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen</i> (SS 1937)
<i>GA 45</i>	vol. 45, <i>Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte ‘Probleme’ der ‘Logik’</i> (WS 1937–38)
<i>GA 47</i>	vol. 47, <i>Nietzsches Lehre vom Willen zur Macht als Erkenntnis</i> (SS 1939)
<i>GA 48</i>	vol. 48, <i>Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus</i> (Second Trimester 1940)
<i>GA 49</i>	vol. 49, <i>Schelling: Zur erneuten Auslegung seiner Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit</i> (First Trimester 1941)
<i>GA 50</i>	vol. 50, <i>Nietzsches Metaphysik</i> (announced for WS 1941–42 but not delivered); <i>Einleitung in die Philosophie—Denken und Dichten</i> (WS 1944–45)
<i>GA 51</i>	vol. 51, <i>Grundbegriffe</i> (SS 1941)
<i>GA 52</i>	vol. 52, <i>Hölderlins Hymne ‘Andenken’</i> (WS 1941–42)
<i>GA 53</i>	vol. 53, <i>Hölderlins Hymne ‘Der Ister’</i> (SS 1942)
<i>GA 54</i>	vol. 54, <i>Parmenides</i> (WS 1942–43)
<i>GA 55</i>	vol. 55, <i>Heraklit: 1. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens (Heraklit)</i> (SS 1943); <i>2. Logik: Heraklits Lehre vom Logos</i> (SS 1944)

- GA 56/57 vol. 56/57, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie: 1. Die Idee der Philosophie und das Weltanschauungsproblem* (Emergency Wartime Semester 1919); 2. *Phänomenologie und transzendente Wertphilosophie* (SS 1919); 3. *Anhang: Über das Wesen der Universität und des akademischen Studiums* (SS 1919)
- GA 61 vol. 61, *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles: Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (WS 1921–22)
- HB Martin Heidegger, Elisabeth Blochmann, *Briefwechsel 1918–1969*
- Hw *Holzwege*
- ID *Identität und Differenz*
- N 1; N 2 *Nietzsche*, vols. 1 and 2
- NH *Nachlese zu Heidegger*
- PIA “Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles”
- RR *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität; Das Rektorat 1933–34*
- SD *Zur Sache des Denkens*
- SG *Der Satz vom Grund*
- Sp “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten”
- SZ *Sein und Zeit*
- TK *Die Technik und die Kehre*
- UK “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in *Holzwege*
- VA *Vorträge und Aufsätze*
- VR “Vorwort” to Richardson
- VS *Vier Seminare*
- Wg *Wegmarken*
- WHD *Was heißt Denken?*
- WW “Vom Wesen der Wahrheit,” in *Wegmarken*
- ZS “Zur Seinsfrage,” in *Wegmarken*

#### JOHN D. CAPUTO

- DH *Demythologizing Heidegger*

#### JACQUES DERRIDA

- D “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*
- Ends “The Ends of Man,” in *Margins of Philosophy*
- FL “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’”



HE	“Heidegger’s Ear: Philopolemology ( <i>Geschlecht</i> 4)”
IJD	“An Interview with Jacques Derrida”
LI	<i>Limited Inc</i>
OG	<i>Of Grammatology</i>
OS	<i>Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question</i>
P	<i>Positions</i>
PH	“Heidegger, the Philosophers’ Hell,” in <i>Points</i> . . .
PMW	“Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man’s War”
RLW	“Racism’s Last Word”
RU	“Reading Us,” in <i>Margins of Philosophy</i>
SM	<i>Specters of Marx</i>
SSP	“Structure, Sign, and Play,” in <i>Writing and Difference</i>
WIP	“The Work of Intellectuals and the Press” in <i>Points</i> . . .

**REINER SCHÜRMANN**

HBA      *Heidegger on Being and Acting*

**LESLIE PAUL THIEL**

TM      *Timely Meditations*

**GIANNI VATTIMO**

EoM      *The End of Modernity*

## Introduction: How to Read This Book

### CONFRONTING HEIDEGGER

Over a decade has now passed since the eruption of *l'affaire Heidegger* in 1987. The drama of this affair lay in the alleged discovery that Heidegger had been a committed Nazi and in the subsequent explosion of scandal in intellectual circles, and even among the wider public in Europe, especially in France. I say “alleged” because much had already been known to scholars about Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism; however, this information simply had not been assembled and presented effectively to the general public.<sup>1</sup> But the publication of Victor Farías’s *Heidegger and Nazism* in French in 1987 precipitated the scandal, to be followed by a proliferation of articles and books examining the relation of Heidegger’s thought to his politics. This Heidegger affair risks generating, if it has not already generated, yet another academic cottage industry.

Do we really need another book on this topic, then? Has not everything worth saying already been said? One might argue that the passing of a decade offers enough distance on the matter to permit a more balanced treatment of Heidegger’s own role as well as the ensuing in-

terpretations of his political life and thought. But this study does not pretend to any such comprehensiveness. For one thing, until the Heidegger archives are opened up to free and thorough examination by independent scholars, the complete account of his political involvements, through both his writings and his actions, must be postponed. Furthermore, while the notoriety of the Heidegger affair turns in large part on the revelation of disturbing or even outrageous facts concerning his conduct (the nearly salacious obsession with the story of Heidegger's affair with Hannah Arendt being a case in point), this study will not make biography its principal concern. The subject matter will be Heidegger's thinking, and we shall turn to the man's life only when this can help illuminate his thought.

But if all the evidence is not even available, one might well ask whether the endeavor has any point at all. First of all, in response, a great deal of the Heidegger corpus has in fact been published in the past fifteen years or so. The previously unavailable lecture courses of the 1930s provide an especially important source of insight into Heidegger's political thinking. But more important, this study holds that the question of Heidegger's politics has produced so much discussion quite simply because there remains something still very much at issue for us in the "Heidegger case." At issue, and unresolved—and not just for academic specialists interested in the obscurities of one thread in the tradition of thought known as Continental philosophy, but *for us*, the human beings who reside in the era of late modernity, or, as the fashion would now have it, "post-modernity."

The continuing fascination with the Heidegger case serves as a window onto what may be designated as the problem of identity and difference. Identity and difference—not simply as the subject matter for abstract metaphysical investigations, but also as a designation for perhaps our most pressing political problem: How do "we" understand ourselves? How do we—but also how can we, how will we, and how should we understand ourselves? At issue when we examine Heidegger's politics is the enduring question of political and cultural identity and difference, of the scope of inclusion and the exigencies of exclusion, from the so-called ethnic cleansings of the former Yugoslavia and the genocide of Rwanda to the "identity politics" and the battles over multiculturalism and immigration policy raging in the United States and Europe. The continuing fascination with Heidegger's philosophy and politics points to the unresolved problem of how human beings can or will cope with the tension between an exclusive belonging to a particular group (identity) and a universalizing respect for diversity and otherness (recognition of difference). Heideg-

ger's thought has become a staging ground (one among many) for attempts to work through this question in the epoch of globalization. This goes well beyond the shock at discovering that a supposedly "great" philosopher could have been a Nazi and the subsequent need to explain (or perhaps to explain away) this disturbing fact. What was at issue for Heidegger in politics remains so for us, and, as a problem and a question, it is one of the few things that can be truly said to unite "us": the process of identification and differentiation at work in any assertion of community, of any belonging-to. This is what we face: at issue is the Being of our politics.

In this study I shall attempt to confront, through Heidegger, the Being of our politics with respect to belonging and shall do so through a confrontation with Heidegger's thinking. In this sense, I shall be doing no more than what Heidegger at his best would have asked of us: to address a thinker's work as an occasion, an avenue, to respond to what genuinely calls for thinking. In any serious engagement with the relation between Heidegger's thought and his politics, not only response is called for, but also responsibility. I do not seek to excuse Heidegger, but if I err, it will be on the side of generosity toward his thinking, not as an attempt to save Heidegger's thought from his biography, but rather to preserve his thinking for a productive confrontation.<sup>2</sup> To treat Heidegger neither as hero nor as villain, nor as a mere scholar, but rather as a thinker and a human being whose legacy we may fruitfully explore in asking questions that still demand response, will be my goal.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, I propose to confront my own interpretation of Heidegger's politics with the readings of the broad school of thought known as postmodernism. Postmodernists take much of their inspiration from Heidegger's characterization of modernity as the decisive culmination of the nihilism inherent in Western history. They tend to agree with his characterization of Western thought as subjectivism—obsession with the subjugation of an objective nature. To the extent that in the Western tradition "nature" includes human nature, postmodernists also agree that politics has been as "totalitarian" in its ambition as the sciences in the quest for a complete knowledge of Being, understood as reality, nature, or truth. Against this totalitarianism (in the larger sense) of modernity, postmodernists practice a deconstruction of the hegemonic schemes of identity, and they urge a respect for difference as that which cannot be homogenized; at the same time, horrified by Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism, they have attempted to reconcile that allegiance, which they find reprehensible, with those aspects of his thought which they have admired. I contend that in the postmodernist readings of Heidegger's

work and politics, the problems raised by Heidegger's thinking remain timely, transcending the traditional boundaries of Left and Right.

In case the reader requires a justification for why yet another work on Heidegger's politics deserves a hearing on purely scholarly grounds, I can claim to have identified in this study a theme in Heidegger's thought that has gone largely unnoticed but that unites various periods of his work and offers us perhaps the key to understanding his politics. This compelling theme is *polemos*, a Greek word usually translated as "war" but that Heidegger transforms into a profound ontological concept through his interpretation of a single fragment from Heraclitus. *Polemos* for Heidegger, I argue, must be understood as *confrontation*; only in confrontation do we most fully become what we are: beings summoned to an ongoing interpretative struggle with the meaning of the world—and with the meaning of Being itself. In this study, I trace the development of Heidegger's *polemos*, tying it in with the major currents of his thought: his ontology and the attendant analysis of *Dasein*, his account of the history of Being, his vision of nihilism and the crisis of the West, and his hopes for a redemptive revolution.<sup>4</sup>

In this book, then, I attempt three things. First, I want to provide a new reading of the intersection between Heidegger's thinking and his politics, a reading based on Heidegger's own interpretation of *polemos*, that is, "war," *Auseinandersetzung*, or confrontation. Second, I endeavor to show that what remains philosophically interesting in Heidegger's problematic politics cannot be reduced to the specifics of his life or even of his thought. Heidegger's *polemos* addresses to us a question about the meaning of fascism, or, more precisely, about the problem *announced* by fascism, which I take to be the question of the limits of belonging and universalism in the modern age. Finally, I undertake a discussion of some contemporary readings of Heidegger's politics, in particular postmodernist ones, especially that of Jacques Derrida. This confrontation with postmodernism is crucial, not only because it forces a defense of my own interpretation, but also because very much at stake in the postmodernists' readings of Heidegger's politics is its continuing appeal. The historical moment within which fascism arose and the predicament to which it offered one response are not behind us but remain, alas, very much present.

#### ON THE "HEIDEGGER AFFAIR"

"Whoever cannot attack the thinking, attacks the thinker," Heidegger once said.<sup>5</sup> But this self-defense seems somewhat facile;<sup>6</sup> can we not ask, To what ex-

tent does the life of a thinker have bearing on the content of that person's thought? Jürgen Habermas, hardly an apologist for Heidegger, writes that the "rigorous conception of the unity of work and person seems to me inadequate to the autonomy of thought." Habermas does not want to deny that authors have responsibilities or that context may shed light on thought. "But Heidegger's work has long since detached itself from his person." Nevertheless, the case of Heidegger presents special difficulties, even if we tend to the contemporary, professional view of philosophy as separate from personality or, if we insist with Habermas on "the autonomy of thought."<sup>7</sup>

In reviving the question of Being, Heidegger claimed to have broken ground that had lain fallow for millennia, and, in so doing, to have provided decisive insight into our existence. But while Heidegger's early and best-known work, *Being and Time* (1927), discusses at great length the ontological foundations for authentic existence, it provides little indication of what the content of such an existence ought to be.<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, or a Heideggerian, might well argue that authenticity is an *existentiale*, a category of Being, and so can have no determinate content. But *Being and Time* does seem to indicate that insight into our Being demands that we *exist* authentically (*SZ*, §63). It seems reasonable to ask whether Heidegger's own choices in life illuminate the meaning of this authenticity, particularly when Heidegger made use of his philosophical language during the period of his political engagement. In a letter to Karl Löwith, Heidegger writes: "I work concretely and factically out of my 'I am'—out of my intellectual and, in general, my factual origin—milieu—life-context—out of that which is accessible to me from these as the living experience within which I live" (DB, 29). Here Heidegger announces an important theme of his thought: philosophy begins with a confrontation with one's own existence. Does his own life, then, illuminate this confrontation?

In this study, I seek to navigate a course between the extremes of dismissing Heidegger's thought on the basis of his deeds and of claiming that his life has no bearing on his philosophy. My compass will be the assumption that in coming to terms with Heidegger's thought, even if it turns down terrible paths, we can confront issues that remain vital in philosophy today. To engage with them does not require that we embrace the answers of the thinker, but only that we enter into a problematic that remains unresolved. After all, Heidegger's *questions* stand within a tradition that includes Kierkegaard, Husserl, Jaspers, Sartre, and Levinas, thinkers whom it would be indiscriminate, not to say absurd, to cast out summarily for somehow contributing to the development of fascism. I do not address the same question here as does Robert Bernasconi,

who asks whether the Western ideal of the philosophical way of life, as directly corresponding to the ethical life, can be maintained after a thinker who erred so monstrously. I agree with Bernasconi that the task of thinking through the failure of philosophy as *the* good life has barely begun; my point here, however, is simply that a thinker's life and thought cannot be neatly segregated and that we must also exercise caution in ascribing an influence of one upon the other.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, we cannot ignore biographical facts that shed direct light on the political meaning of Heidegger's thought.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that in Heidegger's case, history and biography supply an accurate lens for understanding his thinking, only that they provide a resource to which we can, and at times should, turn. Habermas's insistence on the autonomy of thought is correct to the extent that Heidegger's life per se does not explain his thinking. But I cannot go so far as Richard Rorty, who rejects the perception of any strong connection between Heidegger's life and thought as "essentialism." Rorty writes, "For those of us who wish to continue to pick over the tools in Heidegger's [tool]box, the fact that the man who designed these remarkable tools was first a Nazi and later a cowardly hypocrite is just one of history's many ironies."<sup>11</sup> This is simply too glib; Rorty refuses even to take the question of Heidegger's politics seriously, and he ignores that scavenging "tools" without examining the possible breadth of their application (beyond our own naïvely decent purposes) can be very dangerous. We must consider the philosophical dimension of his politics, as laid out in his writings, before we begin to think about whether we can, or should, make use of this thinking. Indeed, perhaps it is not so much a matter of *making use* of Heidegger as we would of a toolbox full of ideas, but rather the possibility of raising decisive questions about philosophy and politics for ourselves through a thoughtful confrontation with Heidegger's work. For this encounter with Heidegger's thought to succeed, we must treat it as a whole, at least preliminarily.

Of pertinence to my project are not the details of Heidegger's behavior or the history of the interpretation of that conduct over the years. The historical research of Hugo Ott, Bernd Martin, and Rüdiger Safransky provides us with a context in which to come to terms with his writings. It is a confrontation with the texts that I seek, but at certain moments an understanding of the historical context becomes indispensable to this endeavor (for example, in reading Heidegger's 1933 rectoral address, or his speeches of the same year in favor of Hitler's referendum on leaving the League of Nations). The "official story" that once reigned—that Heidegger made a naïve and stupid mistake that he soon retracted and deeply regretted—prevents a genuine encounter with his

thought, because this interpretation is simply false. To consider the full interpretative possibilities of a text, one must at times turn to the actions of the author. But the historical minutiae surrounding the uproar over Heidegger's life offer so little help with the philosophical issues that we would do best to avoid entering the lists of biographical combat and limit ourselves to data that are now firmly established.

The question at hand is the meaning of *polemos*, the interpretation of *Auseinandersetzung* that Heidegger lends to it, and the relevance of this interpretation for his understanding of politics. Beyond Heidegger's own thinking, what announces itself in fascism is the enduring problem of identity and difference, of belonging and exclusion, of universalism and particularity. As far as possible, the present inquiry will follow the path of *confrontation* that Heidegger himself sets out for us. Since the task is to explicate what Heidegger means by confrontation, as *polemos* and *Auseinandersetzung*, it might seem we are moving in a vicious circle. We want a confrontation with Heidegger, but confrontation is precisely what we seek to understand. But as Heidegger says of the hermeneutic circle, the problem is not so much getting around it, but entering into it in the right way (*SZ*, 153).

## OTHER READINGS

With a general sketch of what I hope to accomplish with this project in place, it may be helpful to say something about the position it occupies within the range of scholarship concerning Heidegger's politics. A caveat: the categories outlined here are not meant to be taken as definitive; many of the authors cited work on several levels at once, and I mention them and these divisions here only to offer some preliminary clarification concerning the place of my contribution in the debate.

1. *Biography*. As explained, this study will not offer new biographical insights into Heidegger's life and work. Nor will I attempt to interpret the life of Martin Heidegger the man. This research has already been done well by Ott and, more recently, by Safransky; further advances in this area must await the release of archival materials. But let me be absolutely clear: I by no means discount such historical and biographical research as irrelevant, and I shall make use of it whenever it helps to understand a text in question.

2. *Scope*. In this study I shall not attempt a comprehensive account of the development of Heidegger's thought in terms of *polemos*. For the development of Heidegger's thinking, the reader can turn to the excellent work of Theodore



Kiesel, Otto Pöggeler, Thomas Sheehan, John van Buren, and others. Although I argue that *polemos* figures prominently in the history of Heidegger's thought, we must forgo a comprehensive treatment in favor of an exegesis sufficient to allow engagement with the matter under consideration here: confrontation with the Being of our politics.

3. *Texts.* This study will not provide a textual history such as that offered by Dieter Thomä's monumental work. While relying on a wide range of texts from the Heideggerian corpus (chiefly, but not exclusively, those dating from the late 1920s to the mid-1940s), I shall not attempt to treat each of these texts thoroughly in relation to the whole body of Heidegger's work. I shall engage in detailed study of specific texts in order to examine arguments presented particularly well there. While I endeavor to respect the context from which I draw this material, my chief aim will be to develop a broad argument about the role of *polemos* in Heidegger's thinking as a whole.

4. *Context.* This study does not have as its *primary* focus an intellectual history of Heidegger's politics in the context of his time or ours. In this vein, one of the earliest responses from the English-speaking world to the "Heidegger affair" remains one of the best works on the subject: Michael Zimmerman's *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*. Hans Sluga's study *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* provides a valuable overview of the role of German academics in the promulgation of Nazi politics, as does Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism*. Tom Rockmore's *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, in addition to offering a rather unforgiving interpretation of Heidegger's political thought, also serves to locate the new debate over Heidegger's politics within the context of German intellectual history; his more recent *Heidegger and French Philosophy* does the same for the reception of Heidegger in France. More than twenty years ago, Pierre Bourdieu, in *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, sought to expose the radical and unrepentant politics of Heidegger's philosophy in the sociological context of Germany's conservative revolution. Most recently, Johannes Fritsche, in *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger's Being and Time*, sets a new standard for an appreciation of the German political and rhetorical context of Heidegger's language through an intensive study of sections 72–77 of *Being and Time* and other political texts of the 1920s.

The preceding points take into account primarily the historical dimension of Heidegger's work and politics. There have also been many efforts to interpret the relationship between Heidegger's thinking and politics strictly as a philosophical matter. Of course, many of the authors in the works just named en-

deavor to do this as well; it is impossible to make rigid classifications. It would take too long to provide a systematic account of the individual attempts to interpret Heidegger's political philosophy (if we may call it that) and to explain how the approach used in this study differs from each of them. Instead, we can sketch several broad categories.

5. *Denial.* In response to the eruption of the Heidegger scandal, efforts were made to deny any serious connection between his thought and National Socialism. A prime example in this genre is Silvio Vietta's *Heideggers Kritik am Nationalsozialismus und an der Technik*, whose title explains it all: Vietta argues that Heidegger's writings demonstrate that he developed a far-reaching and uncompromising critique of National Socialism as just one more manifestation of the essence of technology that has attained nihilistic dominion over the globe. The grain of truth in this interpretation (that Heidegger came to regard actual Nazi practice as yet another manifestation of modernity's productionist metaphysics) obscures the extent to which Heidegger never gave up his own notion of what politics (the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism) ought to be (a politics that would include a contempt for democracy and the institutions of the liberal state and civil society, an appreciation for rank order and *Führung*, and a principle of national belonging that, while not based on the conventional biological racism of the Nazis, could well be termed a metaphysical or ontological racism). Others, particularly many of the French Heideggerians, such as Pierre Aubenque, Henri Crétella, and François Fédier, in their response to the Farías book in the pages of *Le Débat* in early 1988, do not go so far as Vietta in their defense, seeking only to deny any necessary fascism at the core of Heidegger's thinking.

6. *Justification.* Heidegger's defenders have ascribed his political interlude to naïveté, to desperation, to metaphysical immaturity, even to the ambitions of his wife, but until Ernst Nolte, no one ventured to suggest that Heidegger's political option, properly understood, was somehow *right*. According to Nolte, both Heidegger and Germany faced a crisis that offered few ways out in 1933: "Insofar as Heidegger offered resistance to the [Communist] solution, he, like countless others, was in the right historically, and today this should be obvious after the manifest collapse of the centrally planned state party system. In committing himself to the [National Socialist] solution, perhaps he became a fascist. But in no way did that make him historically wrong from the outset. Just as today one can grant recognition to the pioneers of the [Communist] solution, because they were led by good intentions and correctly foresaw some tendencies of its development, so, likewise, one should today be prepared to grant

the proponents of the [National Socialist] solution their just due, even when one acknowledges that this undertaking met just as surely with collapse.”<sup>12</sup> This argument about Heidegger in particular mirrors Nolte’s argument, during the famous *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, about the Nazis in general: National Socialism arose in response to the threat of Communism and its acts of revolutionary violence in Soviet Russia, and in the context of liberalism’s inability, or unwillingness, to face that threat, even as it found expression in the Communist Party in Germany.<sup>13</sup> According to this apologia, Heidegger was neither a “social nationalist” who sought racial imperium over other peoples, nor a radical fascist who saw the world as corrupted by malign and hidden forces and thus in need of apocalyptic purification; rather, Heidegger was a “national socialist” in the literal sense of that term: he believed in reconciliation of the classes through a reorientation of Germany, in the spirit of the Greek *polis*, toward control of large capital by the state.<sup>14</sup>

Nolte thinks that everyone should be rehabilitated who in 1933 believed that a German socialism was the answer to the nation’s political, economic, social, and spiritual ills.<sup>15</sup> According to Nolte’s dubious account, the Nazi death camps arose as a response (though no more acceptable for that) to the murder-by-type conducted by the Bolshevik death machine against the bourgeoisie and its allies. The exculpation of Heidegger for his decision in 1933 thus stands as a figure for the exculpation of the whole German nation’s decision in that year. Nolte does not identify with Hitler’s crimes; he merely wants to say that *in 1933* National Socialism was the right choice, even though its promised cure for the crisis was sadly betrayed. In Nolte’s view, the Heidegger of 1933, like most Germans of 1933, cannot be called to account for the Final Solution implemented in 1941.<sup>16</sup> “Someone who in 1933 hoped to be able to realize a ‘German Socialism’ in the context of the National Socialist party, and who after June 30, 1934, distanced himself in an evident manner from the regime, does not need to take on any guilt of complicity in the later misdeeds of radical fascism.”<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, a world-renowned philosopher who lent his authority to the movement at a crucial juncture, bears *no* responsibility for its “misdeeds” (*Untaten*)? Nolte’s rhetoric and argument here verge on the abominable, but his defense also demonstrates how volatile the problem of fascism remains.

What is so striking in Nolte’s apology for Heidegger is the eager association of the philosopher with the fascist movement conceived in an ideal form.<sup>18</sup> Nolte is committed to an aggressive strategy that places Heidegger the philosopher squarely behind a *good* National Socialism,<sup>19</sup> one that would counteract

the devastation wrought by the nihilism of modernity on the simplicity of a belonging to a place, a people, and a history—a National Socialism that would grant Germany its rights and destiny as the inheritor of the spirit of the Greek polis, one in which Heidegger would lead the Führer as the nation's philosopher-king. As Thomas Sheehan tersely puts it, "With friends like Nolte, Heidegger may not need enemies."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Nolte's position here resonates with the revisionist strategy in the *Historikerstreit* to detach the National Socialism of 1939–45, and especially that of the Final Solution, from that of the national decision of 1933, and so to find something understandable, forgivable, perhaps even commendable, in the latter. That a leading German historian should—in an era of resurgent neofascism throughout Europe, of ethnic cleansing conducted as a successful war policy, and of mounting identity politics across the globe—ascribe a "good" National Socialism to one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century shows that the *problem* announced by historical fascism is still very much alive. This study evokes neither a good nor an evil Heidegger; my aim is to reflect on those elements of his thinking that remain worthy of examination. Nolte's reading both falsifies Heidegger's manifest moral and political failings and obscures what remains questionable in Heidegger's philosophy and as a consequence capable of generating productive dialogue.

7. *Condemnation.* Many authors, especially early in the cycle of debate over Heidegger that began in 1987, have endeavored to show that not only did Heidegger speak and act like a Nazi, but also his political decision and indeed his political thinking as such have their roots in the broader ambit of his philosophy. The condemnation resulting from this analysis is either categorical (in the case of Bourdieu, Rockmore, Fritzsche, Strauss, and others) or qualified (for Ward, Wolin, and others), depending on just how necessary one takes the connection to be between the politics and the wider philosophical project. His denouncers represent all points on the political spectrum: Theodor Adorno curses Heidegger's work as "fascist down to its innermost components," and Leo Strauss asserts, "There is a straight line which leads from Heidegger's resoluteness to his siding with the so-called Nazis in 1933."<sup>21</sup> A main theme of Rockmore's book is that "Heidegger's philosophical thought and his Nazism are interdependent and cannot be separated, [or] more precisely, that he turned to National Socialism on the basis of his philosophy and that his later evolution is largely determined by his continuing concern with Nazism."<sup>22</sup> Considering Heidegger's own self-serving obfuscations, Rockmore and these others justifi-

ably exercise vigilance concerning Heidegger's work and life. Nevertheless, we shall *not* set out from the assumption that Heidegger's philosophical thinking *necessarily* leads to a fascist politics. Must anyone who thinks with Heidegger about the question of the meaning of Being be led into fascism? That conclusion is too facile. What I shall try to show is that the path of Heidegger's own thinking *did* lead to such politics, and not simply accidentally.

We shall examine two further approaches in our discussion of postmodernism:

8. *Recuperation*. This approach is practiced largely by scholars whose own work was influenced by Heidegger but who came to the conclusion, after the revelations of the Heidegger affair, that they would have to engage in a careful examination of just what avenues for thinking they could and could not salvage. Among the recuperativist readers of Heidegger we may count John Caputo, Fred Dallmayr, Michael Roth, Gregory Smith, Leslie Paul Thiele, and Julian Young. Richard Rorty cannot properly be counted among the recuperativists. He is instead (and quite cheerfully) a pragmatic scavenger; for while he readily accepts that Heidegger was a committed Nazi, he believes that we can pick and choose whatever devices we wish, without any further consequences, from Heidegger's toolbox of ideas. This study shares much of the recuperativists' sense that a great deal of work has to be done first to signal the dangers along the path of Heidegger's thinking before we can tread that path ourselves.

9. *Problematizing*. The last approach closely resembles the recuperativist one, but differs in the tenor of its engagement with Heidegger's thinking. We may call this the *problematizing* approach. The difference can be broadly expressed in this way: while the recuperativists generally seek through and out of Heidegger's thinking a way to advance something resembling an organized political theory of their own, after confronting the question of Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, the problematizers tend to focus on the enormous difficulties presented by Heidegger's thinking, without offering any easy way out but also without simply dismissing Heidegger. Interpreters such as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Miguel de Beistegui, and Jacques Derrida belong to this group, and I share something with them, inasmuch as I shall not offer an independent, recuperative reading of Heidegger here. Nevertheless, I conclude with an indication of where such a recuperative reading might begin.

Let me be very explicit about the extent of my generosity toward Heidegger. I agree with Heidegger that what is important in the work of a philosopher is

*die Sache des Denkens*, the matter for thinking, and not the personality of the thinker. What I take this to mean is that the matter for thinking is constituted by a constellation of questions and that these questions call for a response as an ongoing activity, a confrontational conversation, in which we can participate along with the thinker and even beyond the thinker. No one thinker's response, then, can exhaust the matter. At the same time, I disagree that a thinker's life has no bearing at all, since a person's actions may tell us something about what he or she thinks is the appropriate response to the matter at hand. Still, a response does not in and of itself preclude other paths. For this reason, I am at least sympathetic to those who, like Fred Dallmayr, seek an "other Heidegger." Nevertheless, there are dangers to this recuperativist approach, for it has a tendency to make of Heidegger something that simply is not there, thereby failing to come to grips with what is truly perilous in his thinking. I cannot go so far as Julian Young, for example, who discerns a grounding for liberal democracy in Dasein's authentic existence: "One may accept some, or all, of [Heidegger's] philosophy without fear of being committed to, or moved into proximity with, fascism. More precisely, my claim is that one may accept any of Heidegger's philosophy, and, though Heidegger himself was far from any such commitment, preserve, without inconsistency, a commitment to orthodox liberal democracy."<sup>23</sup> The distinction between Young's approach and my own is subtle, but also crucial. My claim is that if one wishes to remain committed to both liberal democracy *and* Heidegger's philosophy, one must first of necessity engage in a thorough confrontation, a polemos, with Heidegger's thinking, because that thinking did not *accidentally* lead him into fascism.

I think *Heidegger's* response to the matter for thinking is inveterately hostile to liberalism, democracy, egalitarianism, and the Enlightenment. But this does not mean that in responding, *we* must respond as Heidegger did if we so much as refer to ontology or Dasein. Yet we do not have license to pick and choose as we like from Heidegger's conceptual toolbox—at least not without an extremely cautious appraisal of what his way of thinking entails. Responding to the matter for thinking means that we, too, must learn to think for ourselves about the philosophical questions that attracted Heidegger, and we must confront as our own the problem of fascism, in a conversation with Heidegger. It is a mark of the spirit of the age that as we think about the most pressing questions, we often insist on finding our answers in what some past "great" thinker has already thought. Philosophy ignores tradition at its own peril, but philoso-

phy also fails in its task if its responses to the matter for thinking lapse into mere ventriloquism. This study, therefore, offers a propaedeutic for making both the questions and the response fully our own.

## OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

This book invites the reader to join in a confrontation with Heidegger's thinking. Of course, this invitation evinces a certain circularity, since confrontation, understood as *polemos*, is precisely what lies at the root Heidegger's work. Furthermore, my invitation to confrontation with Heidegger assumes at least a basic familiarity with his work and that of his major commentators, especially the postmodernists among them.<sup>24</sup> My hope is that some sense of what that *polemos* involves will become apparent to the reader precisely through our own attempts to make sense of Heidegger in a critical but conscientious manner.

To give a brief overview of the contents of the book, Chapter One analyzes Fragment 53 of Heraclitus and provides a history of Heidegger's own interpretation of the fragment as a gateway into his understanding of the meaning of *polemos*. Chapter Two interprets some of the basic features of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in terms of *polemos*, proceeding to what I take to be a new interpretation of the place of the "turn" (*Kehre*) in Heidegger's thinking, which, I argue, at its deepest level describes the reciprocal relation of Being and *Dasein* in the *polemos*. This interpretation of his *Kehre* as a *turning* (not a mere turn-around in the thinker's intellectual biography) plays a role in the two subsequent chapters. Chapter Three addresses the *polemos* in *Dasein*'s own temporality; Chapter Four presents *polemos* as the key to Heidegger's understanding of the grand sweep of history and of politics.

Chapter Five confronts postmodernism, with special attention to Jacques Derrida. Postmodernism particularly calls for a response because postmodernist authors have taken Heidegger's politics seriously, and they claim to have addressed the problem of fascism by radicalizing the trajectory of both Nietzsche's and Heidegger's thinking. While attempting to do justice to the postmodernists, I shall argue that their radicalization of the assault on modernism, the liberal regime, and the Enlightenment only aggravates the dangers facing us. The postmodernists often fail to realize how much *more* radical are both Heidegger and Nietzsche than they. Postmodernists do not accept how deeply liberal they remain, and in their self-misunderstanding, they undercut what they most hope to preserve.

In the Conclusion I reflect on the possibility of continuing the *polemos*

with Heidegger and on whether it is possible at all to appropriate his way of thinking.

So much for an outline of the structure of the project. The reader may also find helpful a thematic sketch of my analysis of the role of polemos, the contribution by which I believe this work departs from other scholarship on Heidegger. This sketch, though it may provide a sense of the bearing of this study, is not meant as a comprehensive description.

My main subject is, of course, Heidegger's polemos, by which I mean at least three things: Heidegger's own interpretation of polemos in Heraclitus; the role of polemos in Heidegger's thinking; Heidegger's personal polemos with the meaning of Being, and thus with the meaning of history and politics in his (and our) era. Heidegger's preferred translation for the Greek word *polemos* is *Auseinandersetzung*, commonly rendered in English as *confrontation*. In English, we speak of confronting the world, or people, or problems, or ideas, or even things. We come face to face with them, front to front; they stand there before us in a manner that demands that we determine both what they are and who we are before, or while, we resolve the matter at hand. Even when we confront someone over a lie or a perceived insult, we must stand up for ourselves, while demanding that the other person do the same in giving an account of what he or she has said. Confrontation is both a struggle over and an account of the sense of things, but not a naked attempt to impose meaning or dominion; confrontation expects and indeed demands resistance as the catalyst for understanding. This sense of confrontation in the German *Auseinandersetzung* also ranges from outright conflict to a settling of accounts—a giving of accounts in a discussion to resolve an issue. Such an *Auseinandersetzung* demarcates and establishes a distance between contenders. In ordinary German, *Auseinandersetzung* means both a *logos* and a polemos (*EM*, 47), both a *Mitteilung* (communication) and a *Kampf* (struggle) (*SZ*, 384). In respect to its root components, *Auseinandersetzung* is a setting (*Setzung*) out and apart from (*aus*) one another (*einander*). The *Setzung* of *Auseinandersetzung* is itself a *logos*, a laying out and setting forth that establishes and differentiates. In *Auseinandersetzung* as confrontation, sides distinguish themselves from one another and take up positions confronting one another, in everything from respectful, vigorous debate to trench warfare.

I shall argue that, for Heidegger, this confronting constitutes the fundamental condition of our existence, but not in the Darwinian sense of a struggle for existence as the survival of the fittest or in a Hobbesian sense of a war of all against all (although such things may subsist as aspects of polemos). For Hei-



degger, confrontation describes our Being as *interpretative* beings, as beings for whom the meaning of other beings—and of Being itself—is at issue: “Only in Auseinandersetzung does a creative interpretation arise” (*GA* 43, 275). Our Being is hermeneutic, and polemos as confrontation pertains to this interpretative manner of our Being. Our Being is polemical, but not in the conventional, petty sense of the term, in which a “polemic” means a refusal to take the opponent seriously in a fundamental challenge to our interpretation of the matter at hand. In reviewing what follows, the reader may well ask: But what is *not* polemos, given the “ontological” breadth of this account? The brief answer is that Heidegger’s polemos has a scope as broad and as deep as his whole thinking, for it describes not only our own Being, what he calls Dasein, but also Being itself. *Polemos* is a name for Being. Hence:

1. Polemos, or Auseinandersetzung, is an *ontological* concept for Heidegger. It describes the way in which Being happens and how it concerns us, and it also describes our relation to Being as what Heidegger calls Dasein, the site, the There, in which Being manifests itself. Our Being is polemical.

2. The much-discussed Kehre, the so-called turn in Heidegger’s thought, must be understood in terms of polemos as well. This turn is often treated as a decisive “second sailing” in Heidegger’s own thought away from the subjectivistic leanings of the analytic of Dasein along a more solidly antimetaphysical path. There is something to this intellectual-biographical picture, but not enough. A further, neglected sense of the Kehre articulates the reciprocity of Being and Dasein. Polemos belongs neither exclusively to Being nor exclusively to Dasein; it is neither objective nor subjective. Heidegger frequently speaks of Being’s *needing* us for its happening, even as it destroys us. Being and Dasein belong together in polemos. Polemos takes place *between* ourselves (Da-sein) and Being (*Sein*). Polemos is Da-Sein. The polemical confrontation, in other words, is not the assertion of a subject’s will to power. Being is not the property, function, representation, or projection of a subject, but nevertheless Being *needs* the human being—not as a subject over against which Being stands as just another, if perhaps higher, object—but as Being’s There, the place of its disclosure, its Da-sein. The Kehre names the role that Dasein must stand up to in order for the essence of Being to fulfill itself as this simultaneous bestowal and withdrawal of truth in the polemical eventuations of history. The Kehre is a turning *between* Dasein and Being in their belonging-together in polemos. Only in this turning is Being wrested back from its oblivion and rescued from nihilism. Polemos, then, is never *only* a conflict between persons or peoples, nor is the Kehre merely a biographical turn or reversal in one thinker’s career.

3. *Truth*, as *Unverborgenheit* (unconcealedness) and *a-lētheia*, is polemos. For Heidegger, truth understood ontologically is the opening up of a world, the making manifest of beings for Dasein's understanding of Being. But this opening up, this making manifest, is always a struggle to bring forth from concealedness, from *lēthē*. Indeed, for anything to be at issue is dependent on truth as polemos.

4. For Heidegger, we *are* polemically; our Dasein *is* polemos just as much as, in the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger says that Dasein *is* time. In the temporal structure of its existence, Dasein engages in polemos. All interpretative activity, Dasein's Being as a hermeneutic existence, the whole temporal structure of engaging with what has already been given by the past for the sake of one's future, happen as polemos. Authenticity itself, therefore, is polemical and constantly at issue. Dasein's authentic existence as polemos is always both a deconstruction *and* a reconstruction of what is given in time. The structural joints and frame of Dasein's temporal Being-in-the-world arrange themselves in polemos.

5. Polemos, or Auseinandersetzung, may be understood not just as a mode of Dasein's authentic existence, but also as a quasi method, or even an ethic, for the interpretation of texts and authors. In his notes for his 1936 lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger writes: "Auseinandersetzung does not express itself in 'polemic,' but rather in the manner of *interpretative construction*, of the setting in place of the antagonist in his highest power and dangerousness" (GA 43, 279). Not only does polemos, as truth as un-concealedness, set forth beings (such as texts) within the distinct boundaries of their Being so that Dasein can make sense of them, it also governs what looks like the beginning of an ethic for interpreting the thinking of other Dasein. To treat such thinking with respect means to cast it in its most powerful light, so that both it and one's own position are most radically exposed to examination. But it is even more than this, for we must recognize that for Heidegger, the thinking of great philosophers moves in the current of the history of Being as an expression of this history.

6. Just as polemos defines the historicity of individual Dasein, it also describes the full sweep of history itself, including the history of thought. History is polemical, although not dialectical in the Hegelian sense. Heidegger's "interpretative construction" (*auslegender Aufbau*, GA 43, 279) must be predicated upon a *deconstruction* (*Abbau*) of one's own history. But history is never simply ours. We do not create history or control its direction. When Heidegger speaks, again and again in the *Contributions to Philosophy* and other middle period works, of an "Auseinandersetzung between the first and an other inception to

history” (not simply *another* inception), he means that history itself, through the polemos between Dasein and Being, must engage in this deconstructive re-founding of its trajectory or else slip into a nihilism, an end to history, a death of the worlding of the world. In this polemos of construction and destruction, Dasein engages with the authentic task of its destiny *as a community*. So an Auseinandersetzung with the work of a great thinker serves as an Auseinandersetzung with the history of Being as a whole. For Heidegger, Nietzsche gathers and completes this history, preparing for a crossing over to an other history, an other inception: “If, in the thinking of Nietzsche, the tradition of Western thinking hitherto is gathered and fulfilled in a decisive respect, then the Auseinandersetzung with Nietzsche becomes an Auseinandersetzung with all prior Western thinking” (*GA* 43, 5). The scope of the Auseinandersetzung extends beyond beings to the thinking of Dasein and finally to the history of Being itself.

7. Heidegger understands the proper relation of peoples to be one of polemos. Just as individual Dasein, confronting its world or another thinker, must take seriously the possibilities offered by the Other in a respectfully agonal encounter, so, too, must entire peoples set other peoples within discernible boundaries, both physical and philosophical, in order to be able to take this Other seriously *as an Other* in conversation. In “Paths to Discussion,” a lecture delivered in 1937 on the “neighboring peoples” of Germany and France, Heidegger writes that each Dasein, and each people, must confront the meaning of its own history; but to discover the Other in itself, it must confront the Other in the foreign by allowing this to force us to struggle with our own deepest convictions. “Self-understanding is . . . a struggle of a reciprocal putting-oneself-into-question. Only Auseinandersetzung sets each one of us in each case into what is most his own, provided that Auseinandersetzung commences and is withstood in the face of the impending uprooting of the West, an uprooting whose overcoming demands the commitment of every people with the strength for creation” (*GA* 13, 20). For Heidegger, true respect among peoples, as among individuals, demands that each be allowed to come into its own *while* insisting on a conversation that puts everything into question, in the face of history’s challenge. So we must emphasize that polemos by no means need manifest itself as war in the ordinary sense. But at the same time, it *may* do so; the confrontation may culminate in a genuine duel.

8. Embracing this sense of a productively confrontational conversation among peoples means rejecting an ideal of the liberal Enlightenment: global

government or some kind of federated world order, and the Kantian vision of perpetual peace. Heidegger believes that polemos with Being must take place within the compass of a finite world: that of a historical community, a *Volk*.<sup>25</sup> By confronting the trajectory of the givenness of its own history, a Volk simultaneously preserves its particularity and renews its history, while making possible a transformative conversation, that is, a polemos, with other peoples. This is what Heidegger had hoped for from the National Socialist revolution: the paradoxically transformative preservation of the community's form of life through polemos, against modernity's homogenizing and totalizing tendencies, which Heidegger designates broadly as Liberalism.<sup>26</sup> It was on these terms, for example, that Heidegger supported Hitler's effort to leave the League of Nations: each national community must remain free for the self-assertion of its historical uniqueness, its identity—and its difference.

Heidegger resists the temptation of perpetual peace with perpetual polemos. In confrontation with themselves and with each other, in setting themselves out and apart from one another, peoples might retain the singularity of their own historical destinies. For Heidegger, false universalism merely erodes the genuine respect that is possible among peoples only in polemos. To make this point as controversial as possible, it is fair to say that for Heidegger, the "inner truth and greatness" of the National Socialist movement was one of multiculturalism—but among cultures, not within them. This last point will bring us to what is at stake in contemporary political thought, particularly postmodernism. In the polemos of revolution, Heidegger sought to preserve the fluency of particular languages and histories against the homogenizing tyranny of a posthistorical universalism.

Other authors have already succeeded in showing that Heidegger was a committed Nazi. But fascism is multiple. Even if we could adequately understand *historical* National Socialism as a manifestation of fascism, it would not suffice for understanding and responding to new manifestations of such a politics. This is the error of much of the scholarship concerning the scandal: it takes the task to be either the demonstration or the refutation (or something in between) of a link between Heidegger's work and actual National Socialism. At best, such intellectual history is only a propaedeutic to the *philosophical* questions. Beyond such a history of philosophy, we need to think through what remains controversial and current in fascism and in its multiplicity—past, present, and future. To show that Heidegger was a Nazi philosophically, and not just by biographical accident, is important, but the demonstration as such serves only as

an illuminating, if disturbing, exercise in intellectual biography. A philosophical exposition of the connection between Heidegger's thought and his politics must come to grips with the matter for thought announced by fascism. We must take Heidegger's thinking seriously despite its radical faults, and, indeed, *through* these faults. Such an exposition must itself *be* a polemos.

## Chapter 1 Polemos and Heraclitus

Our task is to make sense of the role of polemos in Heidegger's thinking as part of the larger project of inquiring into what remains at issue for us in the problem of fascism. Heidegger's interpretation of the ontological meaning of polemos derives from his reading of Heraclitus, and, in particular, of Fragment 53. In what follows, I shall endeavor to provide a reading of this fragment and to show how the themes to be explored in the subsequent chapters have their enduring roots in Heidegger's reading of Fragment 53.

### FRAGMENT 53

In Greek, this fragment reads as follows: "Polemos pantōn men patēr esti, pantōn de basileus, kai tous men theous edeixe tous de anthrōpous, tous men doulous epoiēse tous de eleutheroūs." A fairly literal rendering might be: "War is both father of all and king of all: it reveals the gods on the one hand and humans on the other, makes slaves on the one hand, the free on the other."

In the opening line of the fragment, "War is both father of all and

king of all,” we cannot fail to hear a direct challenge to the traditional conception of Zeus as father of gods and men and ruler of the Olympian court. Most commentators on the fragment recognize this resonance. As father and king of immortals and mortals, Zeus represents an overarching, commanding authority in both divine and human affairs. As Greek politics evolved from tribal kingship and cities emerged, Zeus began to seem less like an arbitrary autocrat and more like an enlightened despot. As one commentary puts it, the theogony in Hesiod encompasses a transition from natural to civil right.<sup>1</sup> To Hesiod especially, war and strife, as manifestations of personal vanity, seem a frivolous and wretched disruption of the just and productive order of works and days. To name polemos as father and king, as Heraclitus does, is both to supplant Zeus in his role as ultimate authority, recognized since Homer, and to mock the bucolic sense of morality and justice that characterizes Hesiod’s conception of Zeus.<sup>2</sup> Not that Fragment 53 necessarily urges us to warfare; perhaps Heraclitus simply wishes to describe a principle operative in the world as he sees it.

Charles Kahn cites two ancient sources to establish the context for the polemic between Heraclitus and his predecessors.<sup>3</sup> Both sources refer to “the prayer uttered by Achilles in his great speech of regret over the quarrel with Agamemnon.” The first commentary is found in Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1235a25, and the second in Scholium A to *Iliad* 18.107:

Heraclitus reproaches the poet for the verse “Would that Conflict might vanish from among gods and men!” [*Iliad* 18.107]. For there would be no attunement [*harmonia*] without high and low notes or any animals without male and female, both of which are opposites.

Heraclitus, who believes that the nature of things was constructed according to conflict [*eris*], finds fault with Homer [for this verse], on the grounds that he [Achilles] is praying for the destruction of the cosmos.

Kahn agrees with the implicit understanding in these commentaries that Heraclitus reads a larger meaning into the *eris* that Achilles prays to abolish. Opposition takes place not just between king and prince or between god and god, but also between male and female, low and high note, the bow and its string (Frag. 51). We shall return to the question of the breadth of Heraclitus’ view of polemos below. Kahn goes on to observe: “This attack on Homer, which must be connected with Heraclitus’ own view of war in [Frgs. 80 and 53], is the counterpart to his criticism of Hesiod for failing to recognize the unity of night and day [Frag. 57]. Homer and Hesiod, the pre-eminent wise men and teachers of the Greeks, represent the general folly of mankind in fail-

ing to perceive the ‘unapparent *harmoniē*’ in which the tension between opposing powers is as indispensable as the reconciliation within a larger unity.” Opposition is necessary to the cosmos, for without it, the bow is unstrung; things united in the hidden harmony of conflict lose their very definition when that strife ceases.

In Fragment 53, a saying that seems to celebrate war, we find a series of clauses ranged against each other like hoplite phalanxes. Father and king oppose each other, then gods and humans, and finally slaves and the free. The first pair, father and king, is rather puzzling. Here, there seems to be no obvious intrinsic contradiction, and, indeed, the ideas of fatherhood and kingship go together in the mythological imagination. It might seem best to translate the first phrase with “War is *both* father of all things *and* of all things king.” Perhaps, then, the dialectical sense of the *men . . . de* construction in the first phrase refers, not so much to an opposition between *patēr* and *basileus*, but rather to an opposition between Heraclitus’ shocking assertion and conventional religious sensibility: war usurps the throne of Zeus, patriarchal ruler of gods and of mortals.

Turning to the individual words, we find that *polemos*, war, is given pride of place as the first word in the fragment. As no article precedes the word, we have no immediate clue whether *polemos* here is to be understood as an abstract principle, an anthropomorphized god, or simply war in its ordinary sense. Perhaps Heraclitus deliberately sought to play with this ambiguity. The *esti* that closes the first clause serves further to emphasize *polemos*, as if to say, “War, *not* Zeus, *is* the father of all.”

The word *pantōn* presents difficulties that penetrate surprisingly deeply into the meaning of the fragment. As a genitive plural for a word meaning “all,” it can be either masculine or neutral. The question, then, is whether to translate it by “of all” (allowing for an implied sense of “of all men”) or by “of all things.” Some commentators (Kirk, 246; Marcovich, 146) prefer the more ambiguous “of all.” Marcovich categorically asserts that “*pantōn* is clearly masculine,” referring to an implied meaning, “of men and gods.”<sup>4</sup> There is no further evidence to justify his certainty, but his rendering accords with an interpretation of the fragment as mainly, if not solely, a social and political comment: Heraclitus wants to describe the fundamental and pervasive effects of war on all social organization. This goes against an interpretation of *polemos* in this fragment as part of the Heraclitean philosophy of strife and the unity of opposites, which would make *polemos* a metaphysical concept, that is, a concept that goes beyond the beings themselves to account for their very beingness. Hence, Diels



and Kranz (162) render *pantōn* as *aller Dinge* (of all things), for which Marcovich takes them to task (Marcovich, 146).

Much depends on how one understands the second part of the fragment to follow upon the first. The *kai* that begins the second part indicates that it will serve as a clarification of what came before. The latter part describes only the relation of persons, not cosmological elements or lifeless objects. Yet why take this as an *exclusive* illustration? Fragment 80, after all, states: “It is needful to recognize war [*polemos*] as being general, and justice as strife [*eris*], and all things as coming to be according to strife [and necessity].” In the light of this fragment, war would simply be a manifestation, one more easily recognized by mere mortals, of the cosmological principle of strife—that is, a principle that explains the origin and dispensation of the world. Here Heraclitus asks his reader to imagine this polemos with a wider meaning, as something that is general, or common, to all things that come to be. War-as-strife would then describe the way that the logos and fire balance and order the ever-changing cosmos. Unity, or the One, must be found in the constant balancing of opposites in this polemos-eris. The gods and humans and the free and enslaved mentioned in Fragment 53 do not constitute a mere list or compilation of those affected by war; gods and humans, free and enslaved *exist as opposites* because war has its roots in the cosmological nature of strife. Nevertheless, taking this fragment on its own, we must concede that only these social opposites are mentioned. No cosmological or metaphysical pairs are introduced, and so perhaps the more ambiguous “of all,” and not “of all things,” serves as the better translation of *pantōn* here.

We have already discussed the notion that in Fragment 53 polemos supplants Zeus in his traditional role as reigning deity. Hesiod, for example, uses two words, *patēr* and *basileus*, to describe Zeus’ supreme position (*Theogony*, 468–69, 886). The assertion that Zeus is the father and king of all means that he holds an absolute, paternal power over his subjects, whether mortal or immortal. But we should not be too hasty to conflate the meanings of *patēr* and *basileus*, especially in Fragment 53. Whatever the formulaic titles associated with Zeus may have meant customarily in Greek religion, here we have a fragment where *war* is named father and king, and we should not assume that Heraclitus would carelessly allow these titles to lie fallow in his philosophical imagination when he otherwise so consciously appropriates the tradition. A father is, after all, a procreator of something that was not there before. Recall Fragment 80: “It is needful to recognize war as being general, and justice as strife, and all things as coming to be according to strife [and necessity].” “Coming to

be” in Greek here is *ginomena*, the participle of a verb whose meanings include *to be born, to become, to happen*. In this fragment, war or strife is definitely a generative principle, if not *the* prime source of beings, but without the anthropomorphization of Fragment 53. We should remain open to what this might mean in Fragment 53. Furthermore, as “king of all,” polemos holds sway not only over the generation of things, but also over their dispensation, their arrangement, their relations—their whole continuing existence or demise—just as kings have power over life and death. So we have two possible interpretations of war as father and king of all, depending on how we understand “of all.” Either war reigns supreme in a political sense alone, establishing social distinctions, or war is the source of the coming to be of all things, political and otherwise. In the latter, metaphysical, sense, “war” would denote some essential conflict among beings, both destructive and productive, through which each being becomes defined as what it is. Each being becomes, as it were, a foil for all others by taking a stand in its own existence and thereby forcing others to do the same. Hence the pairings of Heraclitus’ aphorism: each pair is united in its opposition in that each side comes to be *through* this confrontation.

The second part of the fragment, as indicated above, would tend to support the narrower interpretation on a first reading. This is Marcovich’s contention about the scope of the polemos: “The sphere is rather *social* than natural (physical). The division of the world into gods and men, into free men and slaves, etc., according to Greek ideas, was ‘the foundation of all order’” (Marcovich, 146). Certainly, the enslavement of entire vanquished populations was a common outcome of war in the ancient world. It seems a little odd, though, to regard the distinction drawn between gods and humans as part of a merely political or social observation; the theological twist might intimate a broader significance to war’s paternity. Kahn offers the reading of Diskin Clay to resolve this question: “Battle shows the difference between men and gods by revealing the mortality of the former; gods may be wounded but not killed (as in the case of Aphrodite and Ares in *Iliad* V).”<sup>5</sup> This is a nice observation, but it seems somewhat narrow. Continuing with this theme of mortality and death as the key to this problem, Marcovich cites Fragments 62 and 24 to argue that the gods in Fragment 53 are really those who have fallen in war, in the sense that the living remain men, while those who die well in battle are revered as gods (Marcovich, 147).<sup>6</sup> Fragment 62, which is rather difficult to translate, reads: “Immortals are mortals, mortals immortals, those living the deaths of the others, the others dying the life of these.” Fragment 24 reads: “Gods and humans honor those slain by Ares.” This argument allows for a fairly straightforward ac-

count for how war “reveals” (*edeixe*, a gnomic aorist, as is *epoiēse*) gods on the one hand, humans on the other: war pitilessly reveals the nature and fates of those involved; they either survive and remain among men, or they die well and become gods; either they are victorious, or they are humiliated and enslaved. This showing up of individuals for what they are reflects the significance of single combat in Homer as the true test of a man’s heroism, only now the ambit of meaning is wider. Marcovich adds that the fragment implies that other social distinctions, such as those between rich and poor, claim their provenance from war (Marcovich, 146). All such distinctions, according to this interpretation, have their ultimate foundation and justification in the trial of war (perhaps even in the sense of *class war*), rather than in some comforting, moral justice. Might makes right; polemos establishes *dikē*. This is the force of the shocking claim that polemos, not Zeus, is father and king. Force and power ultimately decide all social relations, showing each man or god his place, making each what he is. Heraclitus then becomes the predecessor of Thrasymachus.

Nevertheless, I see no grounds for limiting the meaning of the fragment to this social level alone. Heraclitus may be overlaying a social description with a cosmological, or metaphysical, principle. Also, in Fragment 53 Heraclitus employs the words *theoi* and *anthrōpoi*, gods and humans—not, as he does in Fragment 62, *athanatoi* and *thnētoi*, immortals and mortals, or even *herōes* and *andres*, heroes and men. The word *anthrōpoi* does not mean warriors or males, but rather men in the generic sense: people, persons, or human beings, and so I have translated it as “humans” (cf. Frags. 110, 119). The *theoi* are gods in the traditional sense, and even if we do not ascribe that meaning to Heraclitus, his use of this word in other fragments does not support Marcovich’s reading that gods and men are made *from* those who fight in war (Frag. 24, 30, 67, 83, 102).

But if we reject Marcovich’s explanation, then we are faced with the puzzle of how war “reveals” gods on one hand and humans on the other. How can war “reveal” the gods if, at least on the traditional understanding of the gods, such deities as Ares, Athena, and Zeus first lead mortals into confrontation and combat? Two possible answers suggest themselves, depending, again, on how narrowly one reads the fragment. On the purely sociological reading, Heraclitus has neatly summarized the fate of gods and religions in the ancient world: different peoples honor different gods, and when one people subjugates another in war, the victors’ pantheon may supplant or absorb that of the vanquished. But taking polemos as a cosmological or metaphysical principle, the Heraclitean notion of the concordance of opposites applies here to the gods as much as to humans. As a principle that gives definition to things by uniting them in

an opposition in which each opposing thing constitutes a kind of generative foil for the other, polemos indeed “reveals the gods on the one hand and humans on the other.” The nature of human or of god is fully understood only when compared with its radical opposite, and the same goes for the free and the enslaved. Even if we take polemos here to be actual warfare, and not cosmological strife, Heraclitus could still intend this as an illustration of how the metaphysical principle operates universally, even in the most common of human affairs. Because war is concerned with the fundamental limits of life and death, freedom and slavery, war sets these most extreme aspects of the human condition into their sharpest relief for the Greeks. The very confrontation with mortality in war, then, provides the unifying experience in which the gods may show themselves for what they are and in which human beings may discover their own place in the cosmos. (This is the phenomenological sense of revealing that Heidegger seeks to capture in his interpretation of *alētheia* as unconcealment.)

Finally, we turn to what may seem a minor consideration. Heraclitus employs not one but two verbs, *edeixe* and *epoiēse*, to describe war’s activity as father and king of all. War *reveals* gods and humans and *makes* slaves and the free. Why use these two different verbs? What difference in generative power and authority does Heraclitus seek to convey, if any? Several commentators (among them Kirk, 247, and Kahn, 208, 326) observe that *edeixe* echoes the traditional image of Zeus, citing *Iliad* 13.244: “*deiknus sēma brotoisin*” (showing a sign to mortals). By giving omens, Zeus reveals to mortals his ordering and governance of the cosmos. This usage would then be appropriate too for the usurpation of Zeus by polemos. Marcovich argues that because the verb *esti* in the first phrase of the fragment is atemporal, we should indeed read *edeixe* and *epoiēse* as gnomic aorists, that is, as having not a past but rather “a continuous, present sense” (Marcovich, 147). This seems a reasonable point, but when Marcovich in addition seeks to assimilate the meaning of *epoiēse* to *edeixe*, Kahn rightly observes that to do so ignores the question of “why Heraclitus uses *both* verbs” (Kahn, 326). To say it was simply for the sake of poetic variation is all too facile; the Greeks did not consider repetition a literary flaw. We could interpret the second phrase to mean that first gods and humans must be revealed, revealed phenomenologically as what they are, and only then can humans be further differentiated into freemen and slaves by the action of war.<sup>7</sup> But the word here for slave is *doulos*, which, according to Liddell and Scott, indicates someone who is a slave by birth, in contrast to someone enslaved in war, an *andrapodon*. This distinction may be overly subtle, but if Heraclitus really does mean those natu-

rally slavish by temperament, rather than those taken in war, then the revelation of humans' freedom or enslavement would be more a psychological fact than a historical event. In any case, the distinction between *edeixe* and *epoiēse* remains unclear.

#### HEIDEGGER AND THE INTERPRETATION OF FRAGMENT 53

We have noted two strategies for interpreting Fragment 53. In one, the aphorism is read as belonging to the group of cosmological, or metaphysical, fragments of Heraclitus, providing further illustration for how strife engenders the world through the unity of opposites. According to the more modest interpretation, the fragment reads as a challenge to prevailing superstition and as a hard-bitten observation on the human condition. I have argued that both levels of meaning can be present in the fragment without the one excluding the other.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger cites Heraclitus in reference to his own discussion of logos and truth as *alētheia* (SZ, 219). But the first specific mention of Heraclitus' polemos fragment comes in the summer of 1933. Carl Schmitt had sent Heidegger a copy of his book *The Concept of the Political*. That spring, both Heidegger and Schmitt had joined the Nazi Party after its accession to power. Schmitt, to ingratiate himself with his new political colleagues, had published a new edition of his book; he sent a copy to Heidegger, now rector of the University of Freiburg, with a note. In his letter of thanks to Schmitt, Heidegger writes, "Your quote from [Fragment 53 of] Heraclitus particularly pleased me in that you did not forget the *basileus*, which gives the fragment its full meaning, if one interprets it completely. I have had such an interpretation with respect to the concept of truth set down for years. . . . But now I myself stand in the midst of the polemos [that is, in his role as Rector] and all literary projects must give way."<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that Heidegger emphasizes the *basileus* at a time in Germany when *Führung* has become a central issue, both in national politics and in his own ambitions as Rector of his university. Heidegger also claims here to have an interpretation of Fragment 53 "set down for years," but if so, it has not yet been made available to scholars by the archives.

The first treatment by Heidegger of Fragment 53 to which we have access occurs in his 1934–35 lecture course, "Hölderlin's Hymns 'Germania' and 'The Rhine.'"<sup>9</sup> In these lectures, delivered the semester after his resignation as rector at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger turns to Hölderlin for insight into

the destiny of the German people. Heidegger's devoted choice and reading of Hölderlin has struck many as idiosyncratic to the extreme, but I should emphasize a principle of interpretation employed by this study in examining Heidegger's readings in general: for *our* purposes, what is of interest is not whether Heidegger's interpretations are philologically correct, but rather how these readings shed light on his own way of making sense of history and of politics. Certainly gross error or distortion may reflect on the validity of a reading, but we must nevertheless remain open to *what Heidegger is attempting to express through* his interpretation; this is, as it were, a Husserlian *epochē*, an "interpretative reduction," applied to an author for the sake of what is at issue in his interpretation by bracketing the question of scholarly truth and rectitude.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, as Robert Dostal has cogently argued, Heidegger turns to Hölderlin because of Heidegger's very particular understanding of what it takes to forge a Volk, that is a genuine, historically rooted community, rather than the inauthentic, shallow "public" of liberal civil society.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, Heidegger identifies Hölderlin as the genuine basileus, as well as patēr, of the Germans. The Volk is constituted by language, and more specifically, by the historically decisive *questions* and *tasks* posed *to* the Volk through language. The conduit for this voice, calling a people to its destiny, is the great poet. In the case of Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin, this German poet had broken past the bonds of metaphysics with his poetry, making way for a new advent of the sacred and showing a way to an understanding of one's own destiny through an encounter with the radically Other. Heidegger also regards Hölderlin, the poet of the departure and the return of the gods, as deeply wedded in spirit to Heraclitus, the philosopher of the unity of opposites bound together in strife (*GA* 39, 123). In short, Heidegger is seeking a new language for political community, one which does not rely on the liberal conceptions of citizenship, civil society, and the public that he associates with the deracinating homogenization occasioned by the history of metaphysics and the crisis of nihilism.

In the course of his first lectures on Hölderlin, Heidegger quotes Fragment 53 and translates it as follows: "Der Kampf ist allem Seienden zwar Erzeuger, allem Seienden aber auch Beherrscher, und zwar die einen macht er offenbar als Götter, die anderen als Menschen, die einen stellt er hinaus als Knechte, die anderen aber als Herren." (Struggle is indeed the sire to all beings, but for all beings also ruler, and some he makes manifest as gods, the others as humans, some he sets forth as servants, the others as masters.) Heidegger then characterizes the Diels and Kranz rendering—"Der Kampf ist der Vater aller Dinge" (War is the father of all things)—as "a wretched garbling" (*GA* 39, 125). Never-

theless, he follows in the tradition of reading the *pantōn* as “of all things,” although Heidegger uses the German word for “beings” and not “things.” This variation has to do with his understanding of the fragment as an *ontological* insight.

Struggle is the power of the generation of beings, but not in such a way that struggle, after things have come to be through it, then draws itself back from them. Rather, struggle also preserves and governs beings precisely in their essential condition. Struggle is indeed progenitor, but also ruler. And where struggle as the power of preservation and standing true [*Bewährung*] ceases, there begins standstill, compromise, mediocrity—and harmlessness, atrophy, and decline. But such struggle . . . is not arbitrary quarreling and discord and mere disturbance, but rather the strife of the great opposition between the essential powers of Being, so that in such struggle the gods as gods, and humans as humans first come to appearance against each other, and thereby to an inner harmony. In themselves, there are no gods or humans, nor are there masters and servants in themselves who then, because they are what they are, come into strife or harmony. Rather the reverse: struggle first creates the possibility of decision about life and death. Through proving true to a test [*Bewährung*], a being in one way or another first becomes in each case what it is and how it is. And this “is”—Being—essentially unfolds only as standing true to a test [*Bewährung*]. [*GA* 39, 125–26]

We shall have more to say about Heidegger’s analysis as we proceed. For now, we should notice, for example, that Heidegger translates *doulous* and *eleutheros* as *Knechte und Herren*, servants and masters. We also find here two of the words that Heidegger employs in an attempt to render the Greek *polemos* in German—*Kampf* (struggle) and *Streit* (strife); we shall see that whereas *Kampf* drops out of Heidegger’s vocabulary in favor of *Auseinandersetzung*, *Streit* remains a rendering he employs at least through the period of our study, that is, to about the end of the Second World War. Furthermore, we can see that Heidegger reads Fragment 53 as having a wider and deeper meaning than simple sociological observation. But he also goes beyond the more traditional reading of the fragment as illustrating Heraclitus’ cosmological or metaphysical ideas.

Heidegger attributes an ontological meaning to the fragment, a meaning that he regards as having been overlooked entirely, and not accidentally, in the history of philosophy. Note the parallel between his emphasis on “this ‘is’ [*ist*]*—Being*” and the fragment’s own emphasis on the *esti* of polemos. Rather than seek an origin to the world, as in cosmology, or a being or principle that explains all beings, as in metaphysics, ontology strives to understand Being itself. *Polemos* is “the strife of the great opposition between the essential powers

of Being.” Being takes place, it has its temporality and its locus for Dasein, through the polemos: “And this ‘is’—Being—essentially unfolds [*west*] only as standing true to a test.” When Heidegger cites Heraclitus in *Being and Time*, he does so as part of a discussion of the ontological foundations of the traditional conception of truth (§44a), and in the same section he criticizes Reinhardt, whom he otherwise praises, for not having grasped this foundation in his reading of the pre-Socratics (SZ, 223n.). Our task will be to gain some understanding of how Fragment 53 provides Heidegger with an insight into “the essential powers of Being,” and, in turn, how this insight informs Heidegger’s engagement with politics.

In his examination of the thinker “to whom Hölderlin knew he belonged” (GA 39, 123), Heidegger considers the saying ascribed to Heraclitus that “*panta rhei*,” (everything is in flux): “This does not mean that everything is set forth into continuous change and inconstancy; instead, it means that you cannot stand fast on either side alone as such, but that, through strife [*Streit*] as opposition [*Widerstreit*], you are carried over to the other side. Only in the back and forth of the movement of struggle do beings have their Being. Here, flux does not mean simply the stubborn and constant dissolution and annihilation of things, but rather the opposite: the flow of opposition, which is the oppositional harmony, is precisely what conveys duration and stability—Being” (GA 39, 127). For Heidegger, if Being is to be understood *ontologically*, and not as some metaphysical first principle, a being that explains all other beings, then Heraclitus’ saying about polemos cannot be interpreted as a mere description of the inexorably continual flux of things. Polemos describes how beings in some sense *endure* as present to us in time, even as they come to be and pass away. In Heidegger’s reading of Heraclitus, Being transpires *as* this temporal presencing of beings. But this presencing of beings in their Being is something that is constant only in being constantly *at issue* for us as what Heidegger calls Dasein. And this presencing of beings is at issue for each of us as Dasein in the polemos—“through strife as opposition, *you* [note the personal *du*] are carried over to the other side” (emphasis added). This will lead us to a discussion of polemos as what Heidegger calls the truth of beings: beings sustain their meaningfulness for us only so long as we engage in an interpretative confrontation with their meaning. This truth of beings itself transpires within the truth of Being, the openness of Dasein and Being to one another in the polemos, within which beings historically become manifest as what they are. For Heidegger, the task of this polemos is never merely an academic controversy, the topic of entertainment, or even victory in war, but rather that which is given to us in our



historicity as what matters to us, what *geht uns an*. This Being-at-issue of the polemos is ultimately what underlies Heidegger's ontological politics.

The next currently available discussion of the fragment comes in the 1935 lecture course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, where both Fragment 53 and polemos come up several times. The first instance appears in the context of Heidegger's analysis of the history of the grammar and etymology of the word *Sein*.<sup>12</sup> Heidegger cites the fragment and then provides his own translation and interpretation: "Auseinandersetzung is allem (Anwesenden) zwar Erzeuger (der aufgehen läßt), allem aber (auch) waltender Bewahrer. Sie läßt nämlich die einen als Götter erscheinen, die anderen als Menschen, die einen stellt sie her(aus) als Knechte, die anderen aber als Freie." (Auseinandersetzung is indeed for all [that comes to presence] the sire [who lets emerge], but (also) for all the reigning preserver. For it lets some appear as gods, others as human beings, some it produces [sets forth] as slaves, but others as the free. *EM*, 47).

Heidegger's translation here of Fragment 53 is very difficult to render in English, because he is endeavoring to put it in his own ontological idiom. In his translation from the lecture on Hölderlin of just a semester before, Heidegger had rendered *polemos* as *Kampf* (struggle). Now he renders it as *Auseinandersetzung*, a word that can mean a confrontation or struggle but that also means a debate or discussion, a coming to terms and a settling of accounts, an explanation.<sup>13</sup> Throughout this study, we shall leave this word in German; for the significance that Heidegger bestows upon it, by taking up these more conventional meanings of the word within his own appropriation of it, eludes all efforts at translation. Heidegger does not tell us why he makes this change (which is not immediate, as he still makes use of *Kampf* in his interpretation of 1935), but it may have something to do with a discomfort with the use of *Kampf* as a favorite word of hack Nazi Party jargon. Using *Auseinandersetzung* would allow him to work out his own language of ontological politics. Also, in ordinary German, *Auseinandersetzung* has an ambiguous sense, ranging in meaning from physical combat to a thoughtful settling of accounts, a discussion that vigorously airs an issue; as such, *Auseinandersetzung* itself is *both polemos and logos*. Etymologically, *Auseinandersetzung* also has a structure that Heidegger finds helpful in conveying the ontological meaning of the polemos. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, for example, he begins breaking up the word—*Aus-einander-setzung*, a setting out and apart from one another—to describe polemos as the truth of Being.<sup>14</sup>

Another important change between Heidegger's two translations of Frag-

ment 53 is that, while he again renders *patēr* as *Erzeuger* (sire, progenitor), in the later course he translates *basileus* (ordinarily, king) as *waltender Bewahrer* (reigning preserver), which implies a role as custodian, rather than simply as *Beherrscher*, a word that has the sense of “master,” as someone who possesses unquestioned and complete dominion. Moreover, and in a parallel manner, while he lets stand his translation of *doulous* as *Knechte*, he changes his translation of *eleutheros* from *Herren*, which has the sense of ruler and master, to *Freie*, the free. To be sure, *Herren* is a rather loose interpretation of the Greek *eleutheros*, which ordinarily would be rendered as an adjectival noun in the masculine plural accusative meaning “the free.” By moving away from the language of *Beherrscher* and *Herr*, Heidegger distances himself from a stark master-and-slave interpretation of the fragment. “Reigning preserver” and “the free” have a much less authoritarian tone. At issue here is the Greek *edeixe*, which has the sense of revealing; the question is, who or what is the source of this making manifest? Might it be *Dasein*, or Being, or perhaps the mutual belonging-together of *Dasein* and Being in *polemos*? We shall see that this question of the source—the origin, the ground—will lead us to Heidegger’s discussion of *arkhē* as the *patēr* and the *basileus* of all.

After his translation, Heidegger provides an interpretation of the fragment: “The *polemos* named here is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraclitus thinks of it, struggle first and foremost allows the things that essentially unfold to step apart from each other in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up. In *Aus-einandersetzung*, a world comes to be. [*Auseinandersetzung* does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same.]”<sup>15</sup> Here, Heidegger emphasizes that the fragment is not simply a sociological observation and stresses that *polemos* describes the *ontological manner* in which beings form a world. “World” for Heidegger is not merely the empty space within which objective reality takes up position; the world, rather, is a space within which beings become meaningful for *Dasein* in *Dasein*’s everyday involvements. There is a spatiality to the *Aus-einandersetzung*, the setting out from one another, as Heidegger emphasizes by hyphenating the word. In Chapter Four we shall explore Heidegger’s understanding of the Greek *khaos*, which he interprets as a yawning chasm that swallows up meaning and yet serves as the ground for all *Dasein*’s sense-making practice. The *polemos* permits beings to step forth from

what we might ordinarily call chaos—an undifferentiated jumble in which nothing is distinct and accessible.<sup>16</sup> By letting beings appear, by setting them forth, polemos grants beings the distinctness, the identity and the articulation with one another by which Dasein may then embrace them in the understanding of its world. This making manifest of each being as what it is, as set within definite (if perhaps impermanent) boundaries, is also the function of language, and so Heidegger establishes his own Heraclitean unity of opposites: “Polemos and logos are the same.”

Heidegger continues his exegesis of the fragment: “The struggle meant here is originary struggle, for it allows those who struggle to originate as such in the first place; it is not a mere assault on the present-at-hand. Struggle first projects and develops the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought. This struggle is then sustained by the creators, by the poets, thinkers and statesmen. Against the overwhelming sway, they throw the counterweight of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up. With these works, the reign, *phusis*, first comes to take a stand in what comes to presence. Beings as such now first come into being. This becoming a world is authentic history” (*EM*, 47–48).

This passage gives the first indication that *polemos* (here, still rendered as *Kampf*) has a political import, despite Heidegger’s having denied that the fragment describes ordinary war. Indeed, this is an *ontological* politics. Such an ontological politics does not govern the disposition of factions or classes or property or questions of citizenship or indeed of anything that we would ordinarily think of as political; rather, it governs the origin (*Ursprung*) of how such categories of political interpretation first come to make sense and to have meaning for us in our world. Not only poets and thinkers but also statesmen contribute to the founding and the preservation of this world in *Kampf*. This role of the triad of poets, thinkers, and statesmen in the polemos of Being as ontological politics is a topic we shall return to in Chapter Four. In Chapter Three, we seek to understand how polemos grounds what Heidegger here calls “authentic history.”

Heidegger concludes this interpretation of Fragment 53 with dire predictions: “Struggle as such not only allows for arising and standing forth; it alone also preserves beings in their constancy. Where struggle ceases, beings indeed do not disappear, but world turns away. Beings are no longer asserted [that is, preserved as such]. Beings now become just something one comes across; they are findings. What is completed is no longer that which is pressed into limits [that is, set into its form], but is now merely what is finished and as such is at

the disposal of just anybody, the present-at-hand, within which no world is worlding any more—instead, human beings now steer and hold sway with whatever is at their disposal. Beings become objects, whether for observing (as in a view or picture) or for making, as the fabricated, the objects of calculation. That which originally holds sway, *phusis*, now degenerates into a prototype for reproduction and copying. Nature now becomes a special domain, as distinguished from art and from everything that can be produced and regulated according to a plan” (*EM*, 48).<sup>17</sup>

This passage exemplifies Heidegger’s characterization of nihilism as the reign of sheer will to power, productionist metaphysics, and what he will later call the essence of technology. He speaks of an “oblivion of Being” (*Seinsvergessenheit*) in which Being abandons Dasein and in which Dasein ceases even to take up the question of what it means to be. What is critical to notice here is that this degeneracy sets in when polemos ceases. Nihilism, as the oblivion of Being, comes into its full crisis when Dasein and Being no longer meet in polemos. In an essay after the war, Heidegger states that one of the features of nihilism is precisely to elude such confrontation: “We must not, however, pay too little attention to the discussion of the *essence* of nihilism, if only because it pertains to nihilism to hide its true essence and thus to withdraw from the all-deciding Auseinandersetzung” (*ZS*, 400).

Heidegger’s paradoxical assertion that, in the absence of struggle, “beings indeed do not disappear, but world turns away,” and his strange construction, “no world is worlding any more” (*keine Welt mehr weltet*), must be understood as his way of describing nihilism as an event in the history of Being in the light of which nothing in our everyday experience seems to have changed, but that still constitutes a decisive *ontological* event. Without the meeting of Dasein and Being in polemos, there will indeed still be things; but these will be *mere* things, the material (both natural and human) of the universal calculus of production, planning, and control. For Heidegger, the “world” opens up—the world *worlds*—only if beings remain open to Dasein as questionable, as alive to ongoing interpretation in their Being. We shall pay close attention to the role of *interpretation* as the medium of polemos. Our understanding of Being and our interpretation of beings must be “asserted” (*behauptet*) in polemos if the world is to be safeguarded from degeneration (and, as we shall see in Chapter Four, historical peoples require a similar self-assertion). But what world, and whose world? “When the creators have disappeared from the Volk, when they are barely tolerated as irrelevant curiosities, as ornaments, as eccentrics alien to life, when authentic struggle ceases and shifts into the merely polemical, into the in-

trigues and machinations of human beings within the present-at-hand, then the decline has already begun. For even when an age still makes an effort just to uphold the inherited level and dignity of its *Dasein*, the level already sinks. It can be upheld only insofar as at all times it is creatively transcended" (*EM*, 48). In Chapter Four we shall examine what Heidegger takes to be the ontologically political necessity of this transcendence that the creative ones, the triad of poet, thinker, and statesman, carry through in order to preserve the given world by transgressing its boundaries. For the moment, it suffices to notice that for Heidegger, the proper locus of the world is the Volk—the people, understood as a community bound together by a common tradition (not the people in the sense of the *demos*, the collective inhabitants of a polity and the foundation for a liberal-democratic regime). We shall see that for Heidegger, what most determines a tradition is the *language* that a Volk shares: "In that the linguistic work arises in the saying of the Volk, it does not discuss this struggle but rather transforms the saying of the Volk such that now every essential word leads this struggle forward and puts up for decision what is holy and what is unholy, what is great and what is small, what is valiant and what is cowardly, what is noble and what is petty, what is master and what is servant (cf. Heraclitus, Fragment 53)" (UK, 28–29).

The discussion of Fragment 53 in *Introduction to Metaphysics* constitutes Heidegger's most sustained treatment—at least to which we now have access. Heidegger makes several more brief allusions to Fragment 53 and to polemos in this course.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, throughout the period of our study (that is, approximately, from *Being and Time* (1927) to the end of the Second World War), Heidegger's explicit references to the fragment and to polemos are rare, but they demonstrate the great importance that he attached to both.<sup>19</sup> In Chapter Four, we shall examine Heidegger's 1942–43 lecture course on Parmenides, in which he briefly discusses the polemos fragment and that provides a link between the polemos and an ontological politics.<sup>20</sup> But it is remarkable that in his subsequent lectures of 1943 and 1944 on Heraclitus himself, Heidegger does not once mention the polemos fragment.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, when Heidegger conducts a seminar on Heraclitus in 1966–67 with Eugen Fink, Fragment 53 comes up only once, and then briefly, in the discussion.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to this passing glance in the seminar with Fink, Heidegger brings up the polemos fragment several times after the war. The first of these instances arises in his 1945 essay "The Rectorate of 1933–34: Facts and Thoughts," in which he endeavors to exculpate himself for his involvement with the Nazis as rector of Freiburg University. In the infamous rectoral address of 1933, which

he delivered to the whole university community after assuming his post under the Nazi regime and which we shall analyze in detail in Chapter Four, Heidegger speaks almost rapturously about the role of *Kampf* in the renewal of the university and the German Volk. For example, he announces: “The very questionableness of Being forces the Volk into labor and into struggle [*Kampf*] and forces it into its state [*Staat*] within which the professions belong” (RR, 16). “Both wills [of teachers and students] must place themselves on each side in *struggle*. Every capacity of the will and of thinking, every strength of the heart and every endowment of the body must unfold *through* struggle, increase *in* struggle, and remain preserved *as* struggle” (RR, 18).

After the war, in 1945, Heidegger insists that we must understand *Kampf* in the rectoral address in the sense of *polemos* in Fragment 53, even though he does not even cite the fragment in the 1933 speech. Clearly, he is concerned that he will be judged harshly for employing one of the favorite words of Nazi jargon (witness only the title of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*), and so he writes, “The word *polemos* with which the fragment begins does not mean ‘war’ [*Krieg*], but rather what is meant by the word *eris*, which Heraclitus uses in the same sense. But this means ‘strife’ [*Streit*]—but strife not as quarrel and squabble and mere discord, and most certainly not the violent treatment and repression of the opponent—but rather an *Aus-einander-setzung* of a kind in which the essence of those who step out against each other in con-frontation [*die sich aus-einander-setzen*] exposes itself to the other [*sich aussetzt dem anderen*] and thus shows itself and comes into appearance, that is, in a Greek sense, into what is unconcealed and true. Because struggle is the self-exposure to the essential that reciprocally recognizes itself, therefore, the [rectoral] address, which relates this questioning and reflecting to ‘struggle,’ continually speaks of ‘being exposed’ [*Ausgesetztheit*]” (RR, 28).

This passage confirms the close association of *Kampf*, *Streit*, and *Auseinandersetzung* in Heidegger’s attempt to understand *polemos* in German. It also alerts us to pay close attention to Heidegger’s use of all German words employing the root *setzen*—a word that conveys placement, deployment, exposure, positing, founding, establishing.<sup>23</sup> Heidegger claims this word *Auseinandersetzung* as a special name for describing the ontological nature of truth. Thus in his lecture “On the Essence of Truth,” first delivered in 1930, Heidegger says, “As this letting be [the engagement with the disclosedness of being in *alētheia*] exposes [*setzt . . . aus*] itself to beings as such and transports [*versetzt*] all comportment into the Open. Letting be, that is, freedom, is intrinsically ex-posing [*aus-setzend*], ex-(s)istent. The essence of freedom in regard to the essence of

truth shows itself as the exposure [*Aussetzung*] into the disclosedness of beings” (WW, 186).

In the *Aus-einander-setzung* of truth as polemos, beings are set forth, exposed, in their Being. For Heidegger, this is the key to the ontological understanding of truth: truth grants us that openness to beings, that freedom within which we can make sense of our world and assume our own Being as *Dasein*. Freedom for Heidegger is not the absence of restraint, but rather this exposure to a world of meaning as the *Aus-einander-setzung* of Being. *Dasein* is free because it has its possibilities for Being laid out for it in the polemos, but also because *Dasein* itself can engage in this polemos—indeed, *must* engage, if it is to *be* *Dasein*. This setting forth, this *Aus-setzung* of beings, transpires only if *Dasein* engages in the *Auseinandersetzung* with Being. I shall have much more to say about this essence of truth as *Auseinandersetzung*, as well as about the necessity of *Dasein*’s free engagement with the polemos, in subsequent chapters.

The passage from Heidegger’s 1945 explanation of his rectoral address points to the importance of polemos in Heidegger’s understanding of truth. It indicates Heidegger’s interpretation of the polemos as the originary *agōn* (contest) in which beings present themselves as what they are and in which *Dasein* is free to contend over the preservation of a meaning of beings and the articulation of this meaning—the worlding of the world—the sense of Being itself. Heidegger emphasizes that this contest must proceed in true Olympic form, with respect for the opponent; for without this “self-exposure to the essential that reciprocally recognizes itself,” no being can unfold in its own essential Being.

Indeed, Heidegger adopts this respectful, agonistic tenor as the method of his own interpretation of philosophers’ texts. In his notes for his 1936 lectures on Nietzsche, Heidegger writes, “Only in *Auseinandersetzung* does a creative interpretation arise” (*GA* 43, 275). This agonal *Auseinandersetzung*, therefore, constitutes an aspect of his philosophical method:

Because it is still not understood, it must be said again: *Auseinandersetzung* is not faultfinding or underlining of errors. It is a determination of boundaries—not in order to know things *better* and to show this off!—but rather to grasp the task anew and to know the necessity of boundaries. The boundaries of everything great—the moment of its birth.

No one leaps over his shadow. These boundaries belong to greatness: they are not there to be denied for petty errors; they are truly only the edge—the edge of the Other and of what has been created.

The sharpness of *Auseinandersetzung* is possible here only if drawn from the most intimate relatedness, from the Yes to the essential. In such circumstances, it is not

necessary that a mere proposition be seized upon as “the truth.” . . . Auseinandersetzung does not express itself in “polemic,” but rather in the manner of *interpretive construction*, of the placement of the antagonist in his most potent and most dangerous position. [GA 43, 277, 279]

Heidegger invests genuinely interpretative Auseinandersetzung with the spirit of an honorable duel. Not only does polemos set forth beings into the “boundaries” of their Being so that Dasein can make sense of them, it also governs what looks almost like the beginnings of an ethic for interpreting the thinking of other Dasein. “Respectful recognition is not yet agreement; quite to the contrary, it is the precondition for every Auseinandersetzung” (WHD, 75). But it is even more than this ethic of confrontational respect, because for Heidegger, the thinking of great philosophers stands in the current of the history of Being as an expression of this history. As we shall see in Chapter Three, “interpretive construction” [*auslegender Aufbau*] is predicated on an interpretative *deconstruction* (*Abbau*) of one’s history. In this polemos of con- and destruction, Dasein engages the authentic task of its destiny as a Volk. So an Auseinandersetzung with the work of a great thinker serves as an Auseinandersetzung with the history of Being as a whole. For Heidegger, Nietzsche gathers and completes this history, preparing for a crossing-over to another history, another inception: “If, in the thinking of Nietzsche, the tradition of Western thinking hitherto is gathered and completed in a decisive respect, then the Auseinandersetzung with Nietzsche becomes an Auseinandersetzung with all prior Western thinking” (GA 43, 5). Thus, Heidegger can argue that the scope of the Auseinandersetzung extends beyond beings, to the thinking of Dasein, and finally to the history of Being itself, but that none of this agonal language of polemos serves to glorify actual war or political aggression.

But as an apology for his use of the martial language of the polemos, Heidegger’s 1945 account of the rectorship is a failure. As I argue in Chapter Four, nothing prevents just such a respect for oneself through a respect for the Other from constituting an element of Heidegger’s political ontology of the polemos, or of what he understood to be the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism. Moreover, Karsten Harries rightly points out Heidegger’s after-the-fact disingenuousness, given the audience for the address: “How many of those who then responded to Heidegger’s impassioned use of that word could have been expected to understand ‘battle’ [or ‘struggle’ (*Kampf*)] with Heidegger as meaning first of all the Heraclitean polemos, an Auseinandersetzung . . . or setting apart that lets those who are thus set apart truly come into their own? . . .



If Heidegger's readers failed to grasp what its author considered essential, this was because of the address's ambiguous style, which fused an all-too-familiar National Socialist jargon with the dark, suggestive rhetoric of fundamental thinking."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Heidegger neither scrupled to put his language at the service of the revolution, nor did he bother to spell out for his audiences what he says in 1945, after the catastrophe had run its course: "We must not . . . think of polemos as war and, further, must not deploy the supposedly Heraclitean statement that 'war is the father of all things' to proclaim war and combat as the highest principle of all Being, thus vindicating the warlike philosophically" (*RR*, 21). If Heidegger suspected that the party's predilection for aggressive militarism was out of keeping with the true task of the German national revolution, he did nothing to publicize his view.

So while we may accept that Heidegger interprets the fragment as referring to something quite alien to war in the human sense, we should consider the following passage from his letter of 1955 to Ernst Jünger, one of the latest published references to the polemos fragment: "Nietzsche, in whose light and shadow everyone today thinks and poetizes with a 'for him' or 'against him,' heard a command that demands a preparation of humanity for taking over a mastery of the Earth. He saw and understood the kindling struggle for mastery. . . . This is no war, but rather the polemos that lets gods and human beings, the free and the servants, first appear in their respective essence and that leads forth the *Aus-einander-setzung* of ~~Being~~. Compared with this, world wars remain in the foreground. The more technological their armament becomes, the less they are able to decide" (*ZS*, 418). Though *polemos* is not the same as war, polemos constitutes the guiding ontological phenomenon that grounds such ontic events. Lest this passage cause confusion, we should note that in his letter to Jünger, Heidegger understands this "struggle for mastery" over the whole planet, which Nietzsche foresaw, as the expression of the epoch of complete nihilism, even if this epoch has been given to human history by the "*Aus-einander-setzung* of Being" itself. But now, in 1955, with the catastrophe of the Second World War behind him, along with the failure of his own work to ignite an other inception in history, Heidegger writes "Being" with a cross through it (see *ZS*, 379 and 405). In the era of complete nihilism, confirmed by the disaster of the Second World War, the question of Being has been utterly forgotten (*ZS*, 404–5). Being has been crucified but not yet redeemed. It is forgotten as a question and has withdrawn from *Dasein*. The confrontation with the first inception of Western history and philosophy, in order to forge in Germany another inception for Being through the triad of Hölderlin's poetry, Hei-

degger's own thinking, and the leadership of a statesman who truly transgressed, had ended in utter catastrophe. Germany, the nation that had a calling to renew the question of Being, is sundered and ruled by the two powers, America and Russia, which for Heidegger represent the drive to a knowledge determined by the essence of technology, a knowledge that brooks no concealment, no *lēthē* (*EM*, 28–29). The extirpation of the strife between Earth and World in favor of an Enlightenment that demands absolute insight and universal dominion, both in science and in politics, seems at hand. The time of the demigods is over. “Only a god can save us now.”<sup>25</sup> For the Heidegger who failed in his self-appointed role as vehicle for the revolution of the history of Being, we can only wait and prepare for this arrival—the coming of the gods in salvation or apocalypse.<sup>26</sup>

The instances of Heidegger's treatment of Fragment 53 broadly delineate the course of his path of thinking, from overweening ambition to apocalyptic quietism. Despite the rarity of appearances in his writings of such readings of the fragment, once we have taken into account that when he employs the words *Kampf*, *Streit*, and *Auseinandersetzung* (struggle, strife, and confrontation), his own understanding of the polemos fragment nearly always underlies his use of these words, then we discover that the fragment exercises a far-ranging influence on Heidegger's thinking—for these words and variations on them come up again and again in Heidegger's texts. Even well before his interpretation of Fragment 53, Heidegger occasionally makes use of the word *Auseinandersetzung* to express his sense of the ontological necessity of confrontation. In his “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle” (1922), which then served as a broad statement of his philosophical project, Heidegger writes:

The phenomenological hermeneutic of facticity thus sees itself as called upon to loosen up the handed-down and dominating interpretedness in its hidden motives, unexpressed tendencies, and ways of interpreting, and to push forward by way of a *dismantling return* [*im abbauenden Rückgang*] toward the originary motive sources of explication. . . . *The hermeneutic carries out its task only on the path of destruction.* . . . For philosophical research, the destructive *Auseinandersetzung* with philosophy's history is not merely an annex for the purposes of illustrating how things were earlier; it is not an occasional review of what others “did” earlier; it is not an opportunity for the projection of entertaining world-historical perspectives. The destruction is rather the authentic path upon which the present must encounter itself in its own basic movements; and it must encounter itself in such a way that through this encounter the continual question springs forth from the history for the present: To what extent is the present itself worried about the appropriations of radical possibil-

ities of basic experiences and about their interpretations? . . . Whatever we do not interpret and express primordially is what we do not possess in authentic truthful safekeeping. It is factual life (and that means at the same time the possibility of Existenz which lies in factual life) that is to be brought into a temporalizing truthful safekeeping; thus if such life renounces the primordiality of interpretation, then it also renounces the possibility of receiving its own self in rooted possession; and this means that it renounces its possibility *to be* [*zu sein*]. Thus the critique that simply and already arises from the concrete carrying out of the destruction does not apply to the bare fact *that* we stand within a tradition, but applies rather to the *How*.<sup>27</sup>

This is a difficult passage whose details will become clearer in reference to the discussions that follow. But it is crucial to notice here that as early as 1922, Heidegger already understands human beings as interpretative, or hermeneutic; *to be* means to be called upon to engage in an Auseinandersetzung with their own history. This confrontation must itself be understood as a destructive dismantling, a deconstruction, of the tradition that has been given to us. But Auseinandersetzung is not destructive in the sense of willful violence; instead, this confrontation with history must serve to appropriate the past for the sake of the questions generated by what is at stake in the present and future. We engage in the Auseinandersetzung as authentically *interpretative* human beings who do not simply accept the tradition uncritically but who respond to it in a confrontation that may open up new possibilities for understanding hidden within that tradition. Our task in the subsequent chapters will be to trace the role of Auseinandersetzung and polemos in the major themes of Heidegger's thinking and so to understand how that role illuminates Heidegger's conception of an ontological politics.

## Chapter 2 Polemos as Da-Sein

Heidegger begins his introduction to *Being and Time* with a call to arms for “a battle of the giants concerning Being” (a citation from Plato’s *Sophist*, 245e6–246e1): “Today the question [of the meaning of Being] has fallen into oblivion, even though our age reckons it as progress to affirm ‘metaphysics’ once again. At the same time, we consider ourselves relieved from the exertions of kindling anew a *gigantomakhia peri tēs ousias*” (SZ, 2).

### BATTLE OF THE GIANTS

For the question of the meaning of Being to be retrieved from oblivion, “our age” must rekindle a polemos concerning Being. The giants and the gods must fight. In the early years of his career, Heidegger had engaged in his own confrontations: with the phenomenology of his mentor, Husserl, with Catholicism, the faith of his fathers, and with Aristotle’s thought. Heidegger opens *Being and Time* with a polemos, and in presenting his ontology, he will implicitly portray himself as confronting not only the giants of his age, but also the philosophical

gods of the whole Western tradition. But for Heidegger, the very act of reawakening this battle of the giants concerning Being will demand not only the exertions of thinking but the struggle of politics as well.

Both in order to gain some purchase on his very idiosyncratic terminology and to begin to relate these basic concepts of his thinking to the theme of polemos as a key to both his thinking and his politics, in this chapter we explore the manner in which Heidegger comes to grips with the question of Being. A more directed discussion of the politics must wait. The inspiration that Heidegger drew from his *Auseinandersetzung* with Husserl's notion of categorial intuition was the idea that the Being that carries us with it, unexamined, in all our daily activities and concerns might nevertheless be open to explicit analysis through the phenomenological method, because, after all, this Being is somehow ours already. Our pretheoretical "intuition" of the sense of Being is what enables our interaction with the world, our Being-in-the-world. (Here "sense of Being" translates *Sinn des Seins*; that is, "sense" in the sense of an encompassing orientation to meaning, without which both specific things and specific activities would lose their meaning [*Bedeutung*].) Linked with this clue that our everyday activity could provide insight into the Being that permeates it, Heidegger's conception of the givenness of understanding leads him to argue in *Being and Time* that we always already have an understanding of Being in which we are immersed through Being-in-the-world and that grants us access to beings in a cosmos of meanings and activities. We have reached a fitting point to explicate more fully some of Heidegger's most fundamental concepts in terms of his understanding—itself a *polemology*—of phenomenology. While we cannot pursue an account of the full historical development of these ideas here, we can show how the polemos informs the core of Heidegger's thinking.

## PHENOMENOLOGY AND EXISTENCE AS POLEMOS

Before we begin with the elucidation of the vocabulary of Heidegger's ontological analytic of *Dasein*, we must tend more explicitly to a theme that governs the whole project of *Being and Time* and the methodology of Heidegger's thinking: phenomenology. For Heidegger, phenomenology is, in part, a name of the method demanded by philosophy as a rigorous discipline (*SZ*, 34–35). Phenomenology's task is to exhibit for us something that ordinarily lies hidden from the understanding: "Phenomenology means *apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the way that it shows

itself. This is the formal sense of the research that gives itself the name of phenomenology. But nothing other is expressed by this than the maxim formulated above: "To the things themselves!" (SZ, 34). But for Heidegger, the "thing" that phenomenology must allow to reveal itself is not a thing in the sense of a being or an entity: "that which in an exceptional sense remains *concealed* or which falls back again into being *covered up* or which shows itself only 'in disguise' is not this or that being, but rather, as the previous considerations have shown, the *Being* of beings. It can be so thoroughly covered up that it becomes forgotten and the questions about Being and the sense of Being are lacking. Thus phenomenology has taken in its 'grasp' as its object that which in a distinctive sense demands, on the basis of its ownmost content, to become a phenomenon" (SZ, 35). This, of course, is Heidegger's well-known radical departure in *Being and Time*: that the "object" of phenomenology is indeed no object, no-thing, but rather Being; the manner, or the way, that a thing *is*, and, in particular, how we (the being whom Heidegger calls Dasein) *are*.

But if things and human beings are (to use Heidegger's term of art) *always already* in some sense going about the business of "being," why must Being be uncovered by the work of phenomenology? Is not our Being simply self-evident (SZ, 4)? Indeed, this fact that we *can* and simply *do* go about our daily existence shows that we as Dasein already have an understanding of Being (SZ, 12). But for Heidegger, precisely this everyday Being that is our own—this everydayness that seems to make Being so entirely obvious—actually obscures what is questionable about this Being. "That we do already live in an understanding of Being but that the meaning of Being is at the same time veiled in darkness shows the fundamental necessity of retrieving [*wiederholen*] the question of the meaning of Being" (SZ, 4).

Heidegger's phenomenology seeks to coax Being out of its concealment. Such phenomenology demands a constant readiness for questioning, lest Being slip back into oblivion. "The way in which Being and the structures of Being are encountered in the mode of phenomenon must first of all be *won* from the objects of phenomenology" (SZ, 36). The language of the polemos is nearly invisible in *Being and Time*, but as we shall see, Heidegger understands truth precisely as the un-concealment of Being. Heidegger calls the work of wresting Being from this concealment *Auseinandersetzung* (GA 29/30, 43; SZ, 222), which we now recognize as one of his words for polemos. In *Being and Time*, phenomenology, as the method of wresting Being from concealment, is simply another, earlier name for what we shall grasp as the polemos between Dasein and Being.

Heidegger's famous endeavor in *Being and Time* to gain purchase for prying

open the structures of the phenomenon of Being is a move to interrogate the one being for which Being is already at issue: the being that *we* are, which Heidegger designates by the name *Dasein*. Because our own Being necessarily involves a relation to Being as such, Being is already somehow *implicitly* in question in *Dasein* (SZ, 12); we are always already engaged in a polemos with Being. What remains is for phenomenology to make explicit the structures of the Being of *Dasein*. “The methodological sense of phenomenological description is *interpretation*. The logos of the phenomenology of *Dasein* has the character of a *hermeneuein*, through which the authentic sense of Being and the basic structures of its own Being are *made known* to *Dasein*’s own understanding of Being. The phenomenology of *Dasein* is a *hermeneutic* in the originary meaning of the word, which indicates the business of interpretation” (SZ, 37–38). In tracing the structures of *Dasein*’s Being, phenomenology becomes *hermeneutics*. But phenomenology as hermeneutics is not simply a method of interpreting theoretically; interpretation is fundamental to *Dasein*’s Being, to the way that it makes sense of an intelligible world. Hermeneutics, that is, *Dasein*’s *Being* hermeneutic, is thus the bridge between phenomenology as merely the method of a discipline in philosophical research and the method, or manner, of *Dasein*’s own existence. This Being as interpreting we ourselves will interpret in what follows as still another aspect of the polemos.

Furthermore, the analytic of *Dasein* will interpret *Dasein*’s Being in the “existentiality” of its existence. By “existence,” Heidegger does not mean the extantness, the presence-at-hand, or the objective reality of *Dasein*. Existence, rather, is the manner of *Dasein*’s Being. Heidegger focuses on the etymological roots of this word as a *standing out*.<sup>1</sup> Existence describes *Dasein*’s ec-static character: in its Being, *Dasein* always already stands out into its world, as well as into its past and into its future, and thereby understands its own Being and the Being of beings with which it involves itself. This understanding of its Being in existence is not a static possession for *Dasein*; it is at issue in the polemos of interpretation:

The human being is that being which understands Being and which, on the ground of this understanding of Being, *exists*, which is to say, among other things, that it comports itself toward beings as what is unconcealed. “To exist” and even “*Dasein*” [in ordinary German, “existence”] are not simply used here in an arbitrary and outmoded sense, in the sense of appearing and Being-present-at-hand, but rather in a completely specific and adequately grounded sense: *ex-sistere*, *ex-sistens*—placing oneself out into the unconcealment of beings, *set out* [*ausgesetzt*] against beings as a whole and thereby set into [*eingesetzt*] the *Auseinandersetzung* with beings and also

with itself—not confined within itself like plants, not benumbed in itself like animals in their surroundings, not merely present like a stone (*GA* 34, 77).

Dasein's existence is itself an Auseinandersetzung. Da-sein *is* a polemos. The way in which we *are*, the manner of our Being, involves having been set out and into a world of meaning that already makes some kind of preliminary sense to us but that we must also confront in ongoing interpretation. As ex-(s)isting, as standing forth in a world of meaning, we *are* hermeneutic; our Being as Dasein sets us forth into polemical interpretation. For Heidegger, what distinguishes the ex-(s)isting of human beings as Dasein from the extantness of plants, animals, or stones is that Dasein can enter into the polemos with beings and with its own Being; for us, "*polemos* and *logos* are the same" (*EM*, 47): that Dasein has language, that it can engage in the poetics of interpreting its world, forms the basis of our hermeneutically polemical existence. Phenomenology, as the endeavor to wrest Being from its concealment, fulfills this fundamental impetus of Dasein's polemically ecstatic Being.

## TRUTH

Heidegger's conception of truth defies ready, commonsense understanding. By clarifying Heidegger's understanding of ontological truth, our examination of Heidegger's basic vocabulary will bear fruit as we discern the role polemos plays in truth understood as *alētheia*. This truth as *unconcealment*, Heidegger will argue, takes precedence over truth as a subject's representation of an object or truth as the function of propositional statements. Our clue here must be that Heidegger himself connects truth with his notions of sense and understanding and that he wants to think about truth in a particular way in order to avoid certain persistent misunderstandings about how meaning and action are possible. Let us consider first the use of spatial imagery with truth. Heidegger certainly does not mean that truth has something to do with placement by coordinates of Cartesian space. Instead, truth has to do with the Being-in of Dasein, its Being-*in-the-world*. Again, this Being-in has nothing to do with location on a map. The spatial language, rather, refers to Dasein's orientation within the compass of possibilities that defines Dasein's Being-in-the-world.

Heidegger speaks of Being-in-the-world as "originary transcendence": "This primal transcendence makes possible every intentional relation to beings. But this relation happens in such a manner that beings are in the 'there' of Da-sein in and for Dasein's comportment with beings. It is grounded in a preliminary



understanding of the Being of beings. This understanding of beings, however, first secures the possibility that beings announce themselves as beings. It carries forward the light in whose brightness beings can show themselves" (*GA* 26, 170). The *Da* of Dasein itself intimates a kind of situatedness; our Being is localized amid projections toward possibilities. Rather than location in three-dimensional space, this is a situatedness amid possibilities for action and amid the beings that "announce themselves" within the circumspective system of assignment and reference that understanding deploys as it seizes upon a possibility. The whole problem of transcendence, in fact, is framed in spatial terms: How does cognition transcend its immanence and get out to the things we apprehend? But for Heidegger, Dasein meets up with beings "out there" because Dasein precisely already *is* "there" and *in* a "there." Therefore, truth can be understood as this realm, given by Being-in-the-world and the sense of Being, in whose "light" and "brightness" both beings and possibilities for Being become available to Dasein. The truth of Being is what makes beings accessible, what discloses them to us *as* ready to hand (and also present at hand) in the Being of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. In projecting the hanging of a picture on the wall, the hammer is disclosed to me in Being as a hammer in Being-ready-to-hand for hammering. The cosmos of sense within whose space Dasein finds an orientation to activity and to beings is opened up as the truth of Being. What interests Heidegger in the problem of truth is neither how to corroborate the features of a representation with the characteristics of a being nor how to formulate correct propositions, but rather how beings become manifest to us in the first place, before we can even raise questions of representation and true or false statement (*SZ*, §44b). This is why he says, "the meeting of subject and object (and vice versa) is possible only in an Open that is in itself already coming to be essentially" (*GA* 49, 56). Heidegger addresses the appearing of beings to Dasein as a fundamental phenomenon of truth. Being-in-the-world and the sense of Being help explain Heidegger's ontological interpretation of truth: truth has to do with how beings unveil their meaning to Dasein in the Being of Dasein's everyday activity and so take their place within the encompassing background of the sense of Being.

In addition, Heidegger's understanding of ontological truth possesses two aspects between which it is important to differentiate: discovering and disclosing. In a 1927 lecture course, Heidegger writes, "We distinguish not only terminologically but also on substantive grounds between the *discoveredness* [*Entdecktheit*] of a being and the *disclosedness* [*Erschlossenheit*] of its Being. A being can be discovered, whether by way of perception or by some other mode of ac-

cess, only if the Being of the being is already disclosed: if I understand it. Only then can I ask whether it really is or not, and in some manner or other set about establishing the reality of the being" (*GA* 24, 102). A being is discovered *as* such and such a being (say, *as* a hammer) only because the *Being* of this being is *disclosed* to Dasein: that is, Dasein's understanding of the sense of Being first makes possible, first discloses, a possibility for Being in which a particular being can be discovered. Crucial to this distinction is that the beings that are unveiled, "dis-covered," to Dasein do not manifest themselves as merely present-at-hand things. Discovery here does not mean simply coming across something, whether haphazardly or as the result of a search, but rather existentially understanding something as the being it is in reference to one's activities. Ontologically, the Being of a hammer is disclosed to me only if, in my understanding of Being, the significance of the hammer *as* hammer makes sense to me in the practice of hammering. This ontological disclosure of the hammer comes before correct representations of it or statements about it, and this is why truth as unconcealment precedes truth as representation. The physical thing is only a collection of atoms in a particular arrangement; its being a *hammer* depends on a particular disclosure in the truth of Being and in Dasein's understanding of Being. Truth does not simply illuminate beings as objects lying about, available for our use or examination; rather, the discoveredness of beings goes hand in hand with the disclosure of the Being in which Dasein has its Being-in-the-world.

Truth has to do with the Being within which beings make sense to Dasein *as* the beings that they are interpreted to be. Truth is transcendental in that, as disclosedness and discoveredness, it makes beings accessible to Dasein in the open space of its Being-in-the-world. Truth is an existentiale. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes, "Being-true (truth) means Being-uncovering" (*SZ*, 219). A few paragraphs later, he writes, "Being-true as Being-discovering is a mode of Dasein's Being" (*SZ*, 220). "Being-uncovering" (*entdeckend-sein*) sounds awkward in English, but it serves to describe how Dasein exists: as Being-in-the-world, Dasein uncovers the meaning of beings as given through its engaged activities and possibilities for Being. "Discovering is a mode of Being of Being-in-the-world" (*SZ*, 220).

We have noted that Heidegger draws on the Greek word *alētheia* to explain what he means by truth, and, so far, we have passed this over without much comment. Sometimes, Heidegger hyphenates this word, *a-lētheia*, to emphasize its roots: the alpha privative, denoting a negation, followed by *lēthē*, which means forgetting, and which is also the name of the river of oblivion in the un-

derworld from which the newly dead spirits drink to forget their lives. Hence Heidegger's translation of *alētheia* as *Unverborgenheit*: unconcealment. Heidegger's interpretation of the etymology of this word is controversial,<sup>2</sup> but for our purposes, this debate is irrelevant. What concerns us is the meaning of the interpretation that Heidegger gives to *alētheia* as unconcealment, whatever the proper philological status of the word may be. Heidegger often employs "unconcealment" as a synonym for the discoveredness of beings, but he also uses it in a wider sense as a name for the full phenomenon of truth, which includes the deeper ontological notion of the Being-discovering of Dasein and the disclosure of the Being of beings.

If we think of this unconcealment as the bringing of something out into the open, then we may come to grips with Heidegger's language of space and illumination in respect to truth, for as we have seen, he speaks of truth as the Open (*das Offene*), openness (*die Offenheit*), the clearing or the lit realm (*die Lichtung*). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger connects these themes of spatiality and illumination: "The optically figurative talk of the *lumen naturale* in human beings means nothing other than the existential-ontological structure of this being, that it *is* in such a manner as to be its There. To say it is 'illuminated' [*erleuchtet*] means: illumined [*gelichtet*] to itself *as* Being-in-the-world, not through another being, but in such a manner that it *is* the clearing [*Lichtung*]. Only for a being thus illumined existentially does the present-at-hand become accessible in the light, or concealed in the dark. Dasein brings its There along with it. Lacking its There, Dasein not only factually is not, but simply is not the being of this nature. *Dasein is its disclosedness*" (SZ, 133). The Being-uncovering of truth opens Dasein up to and illumines the horizon of projection and possibility within which Dasein can exist in its meaningful activities. The spatial language conveys the sense of the range of possibilities within which Dasein has its Being-in-the-world; the language of illumination conveys the orientation and articulation with which Dasein apprehends beings and its own existence within the dispensation of the sense of Being.

The clearing and opening convey an ongoing *happening* in which Dasein is free for its possibilities. The German word *Erschlossenheit*, which is translated by "disclosedness," also implies a sense of freedom as a release of a thing for its possibilities: its Being has been unlocked and opened up so that the being in its Being is accessible to Dasein, as the hammer is for hammering. Heidegger sometimes speaks of truth as the "free realm" (*das Freie*). But in speaking of freedom, Heidegger insists on distancing himself from a subjectivistic account of the free will, a will that might be conceived of as the source of the world and

meaning: “Human beings have not created this clearing . . . this free realm, nor is it the human being. It is by contrast that which is allotted to human beings, since it addresses itself to them; it is what has been historically consigned to them” (VS, 124–25). Truth possesses Dasein; the openness to a horizon of possibilities in Being-in-the-world is given to Dasein. Dasein neither creates nor possesses truth.

Heidegger’s understanding of truth is still more complicated than this. We have made some sense of what Heidegger means by truth as *alētheia*, as unconcealment, that is, as the dual unveiling of discoveredness and disclosedness that makes beings accessible. But in the period after *Being and Time* and on through his late work, Heidegger also speaks of the *truth* of Being as somehow a replacement for the notion of the *sense* of Being in *Being and Time*. Additionally, he uses expressions such as the “essence” (or, as I render it,<sup>3</sup> to avoid the “essentialist” implication of a static substance, the “essential unfolding”) of truth (the *Wesen*, or *Wesung*, *der Wahrheit*). So far, we have spoken of truth as that which reveals the Being of beings. Now we need an understanding of how truth pertains to Being itself, apart from the discoveredness of particular beings. But how can this make sense if Heidegger insists that “Being is always the Being of a being” (SZ, 9), that Being cannot be volatilized as some free-floating principle? The answer lies in recognizing the interpretative cast that truth takes for Heidegger: “the truth of Being,” like “the sense of Being” before it, is a term through which he attempts to describe the horizon of meaning in view of which Dasein orients itself ontologically and interprets each being *as* such and such a being.

### THE HERMENEUTICS OF TRUTH

We are now ready to discuss a central feature of Heidegger’s conception of truth, one that will allow us to gain deeper insight into the role that polemos plays in Being. This feature is the hermeneutic, or interpretative, nature of truth in Heidegger’s thought. The complexities of Heidegger’s hermeneutic method have inspired much discussion.<sup>4</sup> As early as a 1919 lecture course Heidegger introduces the language of his hermeneutic approach: “The empowering living through of life experience [*Erleben des Erlebens*] that carries itself along with it, is the *hermeneutic intuition*, which understands . . .” (GA 56/57, 117). What Heidegger here calls “hermeneutic intuition,” a phrase still indebted to the Husserlian vocabulary of sensory and categorial intuition, has already been linked to the understanding, which first erects the whole within

which formal concepts can arise. Even for the early Heidegger, to be situated in Being involves an interpretative understanding of the sense of the whole within which one is immersed.

In this section, we cannot trace the historical development of Heidegger's hermeneutics. We must restrict ourselves to an analysis of what this hermeneutics has to do with truth and polemos. In the previous section we saw that truth governs both how beings present themselves to Dasein and how Dasein understands its own involvement with these beings in Being-in-the-world. In presenting themselves, in their presencing, beings announce themselves *as* the beings that they are. This announcing *as* provides the basis for Heidegger's hermeneutic analysis. Dasein does not simply engage in polemos as something external to itself. Dasein *is* polemos because Dasein's existence is hermeneutic, and all interpretation is polemical.

The *locus classicus* for Heidegger's hermeneutics is section 32 of *Being and Time*. As we have seen, Dasein's Being-there in truth concerns its existence within an open realm wherein Dasein first encounters beings and understands its own possibilities for Being. Now Heidegger explicates interpretation as an aspect of this understanding as it goes about making sense of its Being-in-the-world: "In interpretation, understanding does not become something different but rather becomes itself. Interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise through the former. Interpretation is not the acquisition of information about what has been understood, but rather the working out of possibilities projected in the understanding" (SZ, 148). In emphasizing that interpretation *fulfills* understanding, Heidegger counters the ordinary notion that we must first interpret something before gaining an understanding of it. Interpretation is also not the ascertaining of particular details, the "acquisition of information," about some more generally understood matter. Rather, interpretation describes how the understanding works out existentially the possibilities for Being that Dasein has projected in its practical activities.

The explicitness of this interpretation of something *as* something has nothing to do with a self-consciously theoretical exposition of the thing as an object; interpretation has to do with how beings are explicitly identified and appropriated in an immediate involvement in Dasein's activities. It turns out that what is most important in the interpretation of something as something is the "*as*" itself. It simply is never the case that Dasein first encounters a raw, objective thing and then dutifully attaches an interpretation to it "*as*" something. "Interpretation does not, as it were, cast a 'meaning' over the naked present-at-hand

and does not stick a value upon it, but rather, in encountering something within the world as such, in each case it already has an involvement, disclosed in the understanding of the world, an involvement that gets laid out through interpretation" (SZ, 150).

Let us take an example of what Heidegger might mean by the primacy of the "as." A tree limb lies on the forest floor. It is a thing of definite form and matter, composed of wood. To the scientific eye, the tree limb may be understood as decomposing organic material, or, more abstractly, as a particular configuration of chemical compounds and processes. The physicist may go even further, regarding it as collection of atomic and subatomic particles, arranged in a particular order and tending toward certain patterns of reorganization. Working at such a level of abstraction (or perhaps specificity!), the scientist may claim that the tree limb "really is" such and such an organic arrangement of atoms in such and such a chemical state—and "nothing more" than this.

Heidegger's analysis of interpretation does not imply that such scientific assertions are false, but rather that the assertion as such (in Aristotle's sense of assertion as the locus of truth, in *De interpretatione*, chapter 4) takes the tree limb as a present-at-hand object, yanked out of its involvements within the world. As a being accessible to us as ready to hand, this configuration of atoms is one we might come across *as* an obstacle on a forest path or *as* a campfire or *as* a tent pole, or *as* a walking stick, or perhaps even *as* a weapon. We might even use the limb *as* an improvised hammer to pound a tent peg. In fact, even when, at the beginning of this example, we named this being as a tree limb, that naming, too, involved interpreting the limb *as* something. It does not first "really" exist as a tree limb, only later to be used as kindling, as a walking stick, as a hammer, or as a club—or even as a sample for scientific or philosophical analysis: there is no naked, present-at-hand thing which is what something truly is and which can then acquire various meanings, depending on the circumstances. We take the being *as* the being that it is within the ambit of its involvements in a particular mode of our Being-in-the-world. Even for the scientific investigator, the thing gets interpreted within the projected tasks of research; it is interpreted *as* an appropriate subject for the analyses of biology, chemistry, and so on. So, even the present-at-hand gets interpreted as something ready to hand for the activity of the scientist.

To assert reductively that the object we take as a tree limb (or tent pole, or club) "really is just" such and such a chemical composition of atoms is unreflectively to rely on a certain interpretation of Being, one in which it is held that ultimate substance, understood in terms of mathematical particle physics, can

make a claim to reality that clubs, tent poles, and walking sticks never can. Heidegger's notion of interpretation represents a rejection not of the accuracy of scientific research, but only of the finality or definitiveness of the scientific interpretation of Being. What a being *is* revolves around what it is interpreted *as*; "*the 'as' and Being have a common root*" (*GA* 29/30, 491). In our example, the being in question announces itself to us as a tree limb, as firewood, as a weapon, as a tool, or as a chemical compound only because interpretation assigns it a place within a task that understanding has projected, and this projection occurs on the horizon of possibly meaningful involvements given by the sense of Being. For Heidegger, recognizing this "common root" does not mean sliding into subjectivism, because the context for interpretation is not something we create: the sense of Being within which Dasein's understanding grasps its world is given historically; no one can create *ex nihilo*, by a sheer act of will, the limits within which interpretation operates.

Heidegger provides a specific term for how a being gets interpreted as something within a context of a network of involvements: the "as-structure." The word "structure" implies that any possibility for Being itself implies the construction of all the involvements encompassed by that project: hanging a picture involves a certain being in a structure of activities such that this being is interpreted *as* a hammer. The Being of beings, therefore, is worked out in the as-structure. In the as-structure of interpretation, a being reveals itself as what it is. This is crucial for addressing the question of Being: for beings, *what it means to be* involves Being-interpreted-as, and for Dasein, what it means to be involves the activity of *interpreting*. We *are* as interpretative; as Dasein, we are the being that interprets.

In a passage in section 32 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains how interpretation reaches out ahead to structure our everyday understanding: "The ready to hand is always already understood out of the whole of involvements. This whole does not need to be grasped explicitly through a thematic interpretation. Even if this whole has thoroughly been gone through in such an interpretation, it recedes into an understanding that has not been lifted from its context. And precisely in this mode it is the essential foundation for everyday, circumspective interpretation" (*SZ*, 150). When Heidegger speaks of "a thematic interpretation" here, he means one that deliberately and for its own reflection lays out the whole structure of meaning and involvements. But interpretation need not be thematic and explicit in order to operate within this whole. In fact, our everyday Being makes it impossible to hold this interpreta-

tion constantly out in front of our involvements, as if we were never to lift our eyes from a map by which we were seeking to orient ourselves.

We are always already oriented by interpretation, whether or not this interpretation is made explicit. Heidegger explains this “always already” of interpretation’s as-structure in terms of a corresponding “fore-structure” by which the understanding determines in advance how any interpretation will proceed (SZ, 150–51). In any interpretative venture, such as the explication of a text, there can be no ultimate “appeal to what ‘stands there’” (SZ, 150). Interpreting, like understanding, is an *existentiale*: it constitutes an essential mode of Dasein’s Being. For something to make sense, it must already have been presented to us as *in some sense* intelligible by the fore-structure of understanding (SZ, 151). If we did not bring our presuppositions to the thing to be interpreted, it could not even appear to us as something that might “make” sense. “Sense is an *existentiale* of Dasein, not a property that is attached to beings, that lies ‘behind’ them or floats off somewhere as an ‘in-between realm’” (SZ, 151). Dasein *is* this making sense through the as-structure given to us by interpretation and within the fore-structure given by understanding.

With this reading in place, we are on the verge of making some concrete sense of the role of the polemos in Heidegger’s ontology. For the next question to ask is, how does the particular as-structure, within which Dasein at any one time exists, come to be? A partial answer is that a particular projection of an activity gathers and necessitates a corresponding as-structure (for example, hanging a picture projects interpreting a tool *as* a hammer, and so forth). But this does not address how it is that understanding hits upon one projection of possibility for Being rather than another. We might say that the sense of Being dictates the horizon of possible sense in consideration of which Dasein’s understanding finds its room for play (*Spiel-Raum*), but again, the sense of Being provides a *horizon*, not a tunnel that leads inexorably to one possible activity.

#### TRUTH AS THE POLEMOS OF EARTH AND WORLD

With this review of Heidegger’s ontology in hand, we are now prepared to integrate the influence of Heidegger’s reading of Heraclitus’ polemos fragment into his understanding of ontological truth. An important question left unresolved is, where do the fore- and as-structures of interpretation come from if they are not to be grounded in an objective reality? The answer cannot be that



the human being itself is the source of these sense-making structures, for that would reduce Dasein to the kind of solipsistic, self-creating subject that is utterly alien to Heidegger's project of understanding Dasein as Being-in-the-world. But, on the other hand, to make Being the unique source of sense within which Dasein has its orientation would also reduce Dasein to a completely passive entity for which Being would no longer be at issue as a question. In a conversation late in life with Richard Wisser, Heidegger said, "For the question of Being and the development of this question needs, as a prior condition, an interpretation of *Dasein*, i.e., a definition of the essence of man. And the fundamental idea of my thinking is exactly that Being, relative to the manifestation of Being, *needs* man and, conversely, man is only man insofar as he stands within the manifestation of Being. Thus, the question as to what extent I am concerned only with Being, and have forgotten man, ought to be settled. One cannot pose a question about Being without posing a question about the essence of man."<sup>5</sup> Without this belonging-together of Being and Dasein in the making of the structures of sense, human beings would be indistinguishable from animals. But this belonging-together is not a static relationship. As we will see, sense *happens*, the fore- and the as-structures articulate themselves, because the polemos takes place *between* Dasein and Being. Truth requires both Being and Dasein to meet in Auseinandersetzung.

We shall now explore the meaning of Heidegger's concepts, "Earth" and "World," and the "strife" between them. Since these obscure notions are particularly liable to misunderstanding, it is worth stepping back for a moment to take stock of where we stand. According to Heidegger, as interpretative beings, we always first find ourselves immersed in a world that makes a kind of provisional sense. We might say that this sense of the world is given to us by a tradition, a history that we as individuals never chose. Shortly, we will see that the word that Heidegger adopts (beginning in the mid-1930s) for this historical givenness of meaning is "Earth": we are rooted in the meaning that our inescapable past, both as individuals and as members of a historical community, thrusts upon us. Only because we share in this meaningful givenness does what Heidegger calls "World" make sense. But this World makes sense only *provisionally*; the past that impinges on us forces us into interpretative confrontations we never expected, and the future that we project also confronts our world with new avenues of meaning. Our very Being as human beings rests on a strife between a meaningful world as it has been given and the simultaneous dissolution and reconstitution of meaning by a historicity from which we can never extricate ourselves. For Heidegger, the greatness of a particular work of

art is to make manifest temporally this polemos of meaning at work, the simultaneous rootedness and uprootedness of our interpretative existence.

In a lecture course of 1929–30, Heidegger speaks of the stone as “worldless” (*weltlos*) and the animal as “world-poor” (*weltarm*). Inanimate objects such as rocks and sticks can have no world at all, for beings in their Being are simply never present to them. With animals, the matter is more complicated, for clearly in some sense they apprehend other beings and exist “in” the world with them. Heidegger takes the example of a lizard that seeks out a hot stone in the sun upon which to warm itself. Like the human being, the lizard does not encounter the objects of its world as simply present-at-hand things; it navigates through its environment in a manner quite similar to our own—in this case, searching out a place to warm itself. But Heidegger asks, “Is the sun *as* sun accessible to [the lizard]? Is the ledge experienced *as* ledge” (*GA* 29/30, 291)? This is not a question of whether the lizard shares the same vocabulary as we humans; rather, it is a question of the “as” itself. Can the “as” of a being, interpreted *as* what it is, ever come into question for the animal, as it may for Dasein? Take Heidegger’s example of a lizard sunning on a ledge: “What we come across here as cliff face and sun are, for the lizard, simply lizard-things. If we say that the lizard lies on the ledge, then we must cross out the word ‘ledge’ in order to indicate that that upon which it lies is indeed *somehow* given to the lizard, and yet is not known *as* ledge. This crossing out indicates not only that the ledge is taken as something other but also that it is not accessible *as a being*” (*GA* 29/30, 291–92).<sup>6</sup>

For Dasein, unlike animals, beings are at issue *as* what they are. Their as-structure is open to us, which is to say that we are free to *re-interpret* the meaning of beings. For the animal, the meaning of beings and the sense of Being that articulates this meaning cannot come into question. Dasein *has* a world in that Dasein can, does, and even must put that world into question. This *putting* into question initiates the *Setzen* of Dasein’s Aus-einander-setzung with Being. Dasein must wrest truth from Being in this struggle. In other words: the world as a cosmos of meaning takes shape only in our interpretative confrontation with our own Being, and so with Being as a whole. Dasein and Being belong together because to *be* as a human being means to engage in the polemos of interpretation. To the extent that Heidegger holds that polemos and logos are the same, his insight is indebted to Aristotle’s view that human beings are the *zōon logon echōn*: in having *language*, we are, as Dasein, free to engage in a polemos with the meaning of the world as it has been given.

We recall that for Heidegger, truth is neither the correctness of our represen-

tations of the objective realities of the “world,” nor the truth of the propositional statement; truth is the way in which the world becomes accessible to us. But this very openness demands the struggle of polemos. Truth as un-concealment has its necessary moment of Auseinandersetzung: “In the truth, beings are torn from concealment. Truth is understood by the Greeks as a robbery [*Raub*], a deprivation that must be torn from concealment in an Auseinandersetzung in which phusis precisely strives to conceal itself. Truth is the innermost Auseinandersetzung of the essence of the human with beings as a whole” (*GA 29/30*, 43–44). One could hardly ask for a more explicit and emphatic statement from Heidegger on the centrality of polemos (here, as Auseinandersetzung) for his understanding of truth and for the place that human beings, as Dasein, hold in this event of the truth. A few sentences later, he writes: “Truth is rooted in the fate of human Dasein” (*GA 29/30*, 44). Heidegger says of *a-lētheia* that “This ancient word for truth is precisely because of its ‘negativity’ a primordial word” (*GA 29/30*, 45).

Beings must be torn from concealment; truth is a robbery. Such language does not mean that beings, as objectively real, present-at-hand entities, somehow lie hidden from our view and that our task as human beings is to uncover the “truth” by forcibly exposing the reality of these beings through the methodologies of our sciences. This would constitute a model for the notion of truth deployed by the Enlightenment that Heidegger rejects. Instead of conceiving of this concealment as a curtain of ignorance interposed between human knowledge and objective reality, Heidegger understands it ontologically. Truth is an event, or perhaps more pointedly, an *eventuating*, an ontological happening. In this happening, beings first become intelligible to Dasein. The confirmation of “reality” is a derivative of this originary unconcealment of meaning.

So then why un-concealment, why the emphasis on *a-lētheia*? *Lēthē* means hiddenness and forgetting. For Heidegger, the sense that grants intelligibility to Dasein’s Being and that makes beings accessible to Dasein in their meaning is something that itself constantly tends to recede into oblivion. Sense does not simply lie before Dasein as a present-at-hand realm of intelligibility that a free-floating Dasein then decides to enter. If sense *happens*, then so too, we may say, does *non-sense* happen. Structures of intelligibility decompose, and Dasein can find itself at a loss. Moreover, in the passage cited above, Heidegger says, “Truth is understood by the Greeks as a robbery, a deprivation that must be torn from concealment in an Auseinandersetzung in which phusis precisely strives to conceal itself” (compare *SZ*, 222). Heidegger understands phusis (nature) in the sense of Heraclitus’ Fragment 123: “phusis kruptesthai philei.”<sup>7</sup> Not only does

sense constantly threaten to deteriorate, but Heidegger thinks that an ontological condition of non-sense precedes sense. In both cases—in the wresting of truth and the establishing (*Setzung*) of sense out of non-sense, and in the preservation (*Bewahrung*) of sense—Dasein must engage in the polemos, the Auseinandersetzung, with Being. Paradoxically, the negative moment of a-lêtheia as a kind of polemos is precisely what establishes and preserves the cosmos of meaning within which our lives can make sense.

The negativity in this moment in the making sense of Being is that Dasein must engage in a polemos with sense as it is given. Dasein must confront both how its own Being gets interpreted in Being-in-the-world and how beings themselves are interpreted in the unconcealment of this world. If human beings do not rise to the challenge of this struggle, then, “world turns away” (*EM*, 48). Certainly, the human species does not cease to exist, nor do things, but human beings may cease to be a locus of Dasein. They become rational animals<sup>8</sup> for which the only struggle is an ontic rather than an ontological one: a struggle to “make sense” of nature as a whole, to reduce beings to data within such a nature, and to wield the maximum of power over both nature and beings. World “turns away” because world *as cosmos* is present—the world worlds—only for a being that *is* Dasein, whose existing is defined by the polemos of interpretation with Being. We cease to be Dasein when we give up the ontological polemos—and clearly Heidegger sees this catastrophe looming, especially in his writing on technology after the war.

We still have not addressed adequately the question of where sense comes from, of whether Dasein or Being is the source of truth and making sense. So far, we have seen that Being and Dasein belong together in the polemos of the unconcealing of truth that opens up the world as the realm of sense. In a late seminar, in 1969, Heidegger looked back on *Being and Time* and his treatment of the question of Being through his examination of the sense of Being: “‘Sense’ is understood by way of ‘projection’ [*Entwurf*], which in turn is clarified through ‘understanding.’ The inadequacy of this approach to the question lies in its making it too easy to understand the ‘projection’ as a human accomplishment; correspondingly, the projection can be taken only as a structure of subjectivity—as Sartre does, in that he bases himself on Descartes (in whom alêtheia as alêtheia does not come forward)” (*VS*, 73). Heidegger goes on to explain that to avoid this misunderstanding, he exchanged the question of the “sense of Being” for that of the “truth of Being,” but because this truth might be misunderstood as the correctness of representation, he turned finally to address the question of the “topology of Being.” It is important to realize that by “projec-

tion” Heidegger does not mean a project, a plan or an intention that Dasein carries out. Projection as *Entwurf* is related to what Heidegger calls the thrownness, *Geworfenheit*, of Dasein’s Being (SZ, §31). As thrown, Dasein always already finds itself in a Being-in-the-world that gives Dasein its possibilities for Being. Dasein does not choose its world or the sense of Being within which it has its understanding of Being and its provisional interpretation of beings. Dasein, moreover, carries through the trajectory of this thrownness in projecting: Dasein projects itself into the futural possibilities of Being that issue from this trajectory of its past. For example, if I wish to play some music, this very possibility is given to me by a past in which compositions, audiences, and performance all have a very specific historical meaning that projects into my understanding of what it will mean to play, and the trajectory of this meaningful history will be carried through by me, whether authentically or inauthentically, in how I enter into my future possibilities for Being as a musician.

Heidegger worries that the terminology in *Being and Time* might mislead readers to think that Dasein itself holds sway over this projecting. By the time of his 1935 lecture “On the Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger, largely under the influence of his interpretation of Hölderlin, had landed on a new vocabulary to discuss the happening of the sense of Being that he hopes will avoid the taint of subjectivism. Now he speaks of the strife (*Streit*) of “Earth and World”: “Truth comes to presence only as the strife between clearing and concealing in the opposition of World and Earth” (UK, 49). As I have suggested, Heidegger’s language in this essay is quite obscure, but it helps to understand that he seeks, in employing the word “Earth,” to avoid the subjective implications of the “thrownness” and “projecting” of Dasein’s fore- and as-structures.<sup>9</sup> “World” conveys much the same meaning as it already does as the horizon of intelligibility within whose circle beings and activities make sense, but in this context, we will capitalize both words to indicate their special status in conjunction. Heidegger’s foray into what he calls poetizing thinking (*dichtendes Denken*) can present considerable difficulties for interpretation, especially when he uses language that makes it appear as if Earth and World were mysterious, semidivine powers or even conscious agents like Dasein itself. But we need to bear in mind that Earth and World are themselves neither things or powers subsisting apart from Dasein nor Dasein, but rather that they serve as a vocabulary for thinking about how structures of sense and meaning happen temporally *for* Dasein and *through* Dasein.

Heidegger insists that World, as the realm of intelligibility and opening up,

is in conflict (*Streit*) with the Earth as that which conceals. In departing from the language of *Being and Time*, he is also attempting to explore how the structures of intelligibility, as the realm of truth as openness that he delineated, can emerge, flourish, and decay in the course of time. Heidegger elaborates on the conflictual essence of truth in the essay on the work of art: “Truth is un-truth inasmuch as there belongs to it the region of the provenance of the not-yet-disclosed, of the un-disclosed, in the sense of the concealing. In un-concealment as truth there occurs the other ‘un-’ of a double restraint. Truth occurs as such in the standing-against-one-another of clearing and double concealing” (UK, 47). The “double concealing” and the “double restraint” of the “un-” of unconcealment is the way in which the sense of Being, as the source of the givenness of Dasein’s understanding of Being, both holds back possibilities from Dasein’s understanding and works to erode the understanding that Dasein already does possess. As historical Dasein, the truth of our World is never simply transparent; moreover, the meaning it does hold is constantly at issue, so long as Dasein exists interpretatively. “Truth is the primal strife in which the Open is always in some manner fought out [*erstritten*], into which everything steps forth and from which everything holds itself back as that which shows itself and withdraws as a being. . . . Insofar as openness occupies [*besetzt*] the Open, it holds this open and apart. *Setzen* [setting and founding] and *Besetzen* [occupying and possessing] are in general here thought in the Greek sense of *thesis*, which means a placing out into the unconcealed” (UK, 47). Heidegger’s reference here to the Greek *thesis* as *Setzen* is not a casual gloss but denotes the Aus-einander-setzung of Being in polemos. In strife, a world is founded—posited—within which Dasein finds the openness of its Being-in-the-world and within which beings become intelligible by stepping forth into the clarity of what they are. We are familiar with this as the worlding of the world.

But now Heidegger wants to emphasize the conflictual essence of the truth, the polemical clearing of this World, by opposing it to what he here calls Earth. The Earth designates the givenness of the sense of Being, the thrownness of possibilities, that can never be fully laid bare because this givenness of sense always already informs the fore-structure of Dasein’s understanding of Being. So long as Dasein remains Dasein, Earth cannot be laid bare, because it is what both grants and upends Dasein’s historical understanding; even the interpretative methodologies of the sciences are given by the Earth. “The Earth thus causes every probing into it to shatter against it. It causes every merely calculating obtrusiveness to collapse in ruin. This ruin may present the appearance of

mastery and of progress in the shape of the technological-scientific objectification of nature, but this mastery remains an impotence of willing. The Earth appears as openly cleared only where it is protected and preserved as the essentially undisclosable that withdraws back from any disclosure, that is, that constantly holds itself closed" (UK, 32). The Earth is the *lēthē* of *a-lētheia*. But this then means that World is the *a*-privative of *a-lētheia*, the "un-" of the unconcealment of truth. Earth and World belong together in the polemos of *alētheia*. The openness of Dasein's intelligible world is always grounded in an Earth that itself cannot be grounded intelligibly, because this very giving is itself the ground for intelligibility.

Furthermore, this dispensation of sense is historical, belonging to the destiny of a particular people: "The World is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions of the destiny of a historical Volk. The Earth is the spontaneous coming forth of the constantly self-closing and thereby of the sheltering and concealing. World and Earth are essentially different from one another and yet never separated. The World grounds itself upon the Earth, and Earth surges up through World" (UK, 34). The last sentence is crucial: the World is not static; the Earth quakes, rising up and calling the foundations and structures of meaning into question. If givenness were unequivocal, history would halt, and questioning as a polemos over meaning would make no sense. Truth pertains to a people's historical destiny, which is always *at issue*. Already in a 1931–32 lecture course, Heidegger said: "Unconcealment does not subsist off somewhere in itself or even as some property of things. Being happens as history of human beings, as the history of a Volk. We name this happening of the unconcealment of beings unconcealedness. Unconcealing is in itself an *Auseinandersetzung* with and a struggle against concealing. Concealedness is always and necessarily there with the happening of unconcealment; it makes itself unavoidably significant in unconcealment and helps unconcealment first to become itself" (*GA* 34, 145).

We shall have much more to say about history, destiny, and Volk in Chapter Four, and in a moment we shall explore this necessary negative moment in the happening of truth. But here we see that when Heidegger speaks of the futural intelligibility of the World that "grounds itself upon the Earth" in strife, he also means that Dasein's historicity as a Volk works itself out through this *Auseinandersetzung* of the truth as a historical happening; Dasein's Being-futural, its Being its own possibilities for Being, is grounded in a past that is given to Dasein in a manner that Dasein cannot refuse. As Earth, the sense of Being that

is given to Dasein can be neither chosen nor entirely explained, but it does found the meaningful World within which Dasein orients its everyday Being, as well as its fate and its destiny.

The Earth is in a certain sense a Nothing, what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls the null ground (*der nichtige Grund*) of Dasein's Being. "As being, Dasein is thrown; it had been brought into its There, but not of its own accord" (SZ, 284). The There, the *Da*, is what Heidegger now in "The Origin of the Work of Art" calls World. Dasein *is* its own thrown ground; it *is* the possibilities that have been given to it by its past. But this givenness of having been thrown into its past is something that Dasein cannot master. "[Dasein] is never existent *before* its ground, but rather always only *from this ground* and *as it*. Being a ground indicates, therefore, *never* being in power over one's own Being from the ground up. This *not* belongs to the existential sense of thrownness. Being a ground *is* itself a nullity of itself" (SZ, 284). This nullity is not some pre-existing condition of Dasein's not "being around" in the universe. Dasein's nullity does not reside in the "fact" that, as an extant thing, Dasein does not precede its own existence. Rather, the nullity indicates Dasein's essential powerlessness in the face of its own thrownness and its own facticity. We are born into a particular time and place, and we can do nothing about those givens or the fact that a certain structure of intelligibility to the world has always already been given to us. Dasein must always appropriate a Being that is passed down to it by a historically located world. The nullity of this ground of Dasein's thrown Being means that there are always possibilities for Being that Dasein has not been, is not, and cannot be (SZ, 285). The null ground of Dasein's Being means that the sense of Being (through which Dasein has its understanding of Being and its interpretation of the meaning of beings) has always already closed off possibilities of Being as well as possible interpretations of beings. Moreover, this nullity means that the very sense of Being within which Dasein does have its ground is constantly threatening negation, because the projecting of thrownness may always close off a certain unconcealment of Being and the corresponding disclosure of beings. This is the source of the double nothingness of the Earth: as the ground and foundation of Dasein's World, it is closed to any ultimate mastery of the sense of its whence or its whither. But as authentic, Dasein must always enter into the polemos to wrest away and appropriate as its own the possibilities given to it historically. While the Earth can never be mastered or made fully intelligible, Dasein must nevertheless engage it in polemos to engender a world and a future. Such an engagement involves the constant possibility, if not ne-



cessity, of tragedy and disaster, because in confronting the given world, we can never master it and thereby control its meaning.

When Heidegger says that “Earth surges up through World” he indicates that the trajectory of the projecting of the thrown sense of Being does not lie dormant as the merely ontic foundation for our present world of sense and understanding. The Earth both *preserves* World by granting it its originary intelligibility, and at the same time *challenges*, indeed, *threatens* the World by irrupting into the very structures of sense and meaning that it, as Earth, has grounded, thus forcing Dasein into a confrontation over the interpretation of this World for the sake of essential decisions about its future. This upsurge of Earth into the World occurs because the World can never exhaust the possible configurations of sense and meaning; Dasein resides within its bounds, but these horizons can—and indeed must—shift, buckle, and shatter, because Dasein does not own and direct history. Furthermore, in its authentic activity, in its work, Dasein provokes this strife. “Insofar as work sets up a World and sets forth the Earth, it is an instigation of this strife. But this does not happen so that work may at the same time quell and smooth over the strife in an insipid agreement” (UK, 35). Art and action, as a polemos, are a necessity. So while the horizon of intelligibility is grounded, it is not static; it is subject to seismic disruptions. The belonging-together of Earth and World is a dynamic *energeia*, a Being-at-work. In its essential and decisive work, Dasein must seek, not to compromise this strife, but rather to engender and preserve it. “But the relation between World and Earth by no means languishes in the empty unity of opponents unconcerned to stand up against each other. In its repose upon the Earth, the World strives to surmount this Earth. As the self-opening, it tolerates nothing closed off. But the Earth, as what shelters and conceals, tends always to draw the World into itself and to hold it there” (UK, 34).

World demands intelligibility; Earth is loath to grant it. This is the source of the *strife* between World and Earth; their relation of belonging-together is not simple complementarity, a difference that resolves itself in mutual repose. Despite the language that seems to make Earth and World independent, intentional entities or powers, let us recall that they describe the dynamics of Dasein’s own sense-making and meaning-ascribing existence. “World” names Dasein’s constant striving to forge possibilities for its future out of the tradition, the sense of Being, which has been given to it as its “Earth.” But this very Earth, as the thrown projection of the trajectory of a sense of Being that Dasein did not initiate and that it can never master, always tends to arrogate the intelligibility of Dasein’s world to itself, closing off Dasein’s understanding of the

movement of its own historicizing destiny, and supplying such unquestioning Dasein with its possibilities for Being. When World threatens to eclipse the Earth completely, then Dasein slips into the hubris of the pretension to a total illumination of Being and the lure of a mastery over nature. If Earth engulfed World totally, then Dasein would cease to be authentically historical, remaining the passive prisoner of its own having-been and of the world given to it. In either case, Dasein itself would cease to be; although human beings as a species would remain, World would turn away and Earth would fold up, infertile. The poles of our eclipse as Dasein are, on the one hand, the nihilistic will to power in the total exposure and mastery of “nature” and, on the other, a benumbed, animalistic capitulation to the “conservatism” of what has been.

Thus, for both World and Earth to *be*, they must meet in strife:

The opposition of World and Earth is a strife. But we certainly would all too easily falsify the essence of strife if we were to confuse it with discord and quarreling and thus understand it merely as disorder and ruination. In essential strife, by contrast, the conflicting parties raise each other up into the self-assertion of their essence. The self-assertion of essence, however, is never the rigid insistence on an accidental state, but rather a surrender of oneself to the concealed originariness of the provenance of one's own Being. In strife, each carries the other out beyond itself. The strife becomes ever more conflictual and more authentically what it is. The more the strife overdoes itself in and of itself, the more intractably the parties in strife release themselves to the inwardness of simple belonging to each other. The Earth cannot do without the openness of the World if it is to appear itself as Earth in the liberated upsurge of its self-closing. The World, in turn, cannot drift away from the Earth if it is to ground itself on what is decisive as the reigning breadth and path of all essential destiny. [UK, 34–35]

Later, we shall discuss the political implications of this theme of self-assertion through strife: that an authentic Volk must assert itself and its “destiny” through a polemos with its own history and through an Auseinandersetzung with the destinies of other peoples or else lapse into the “insipid agreement” of a sociality that is dead to its historical tasks. In this passage, what we should notice is that this self-assertion—here, of Earth and World themselves—demands a separation, an Aus-einander-setzung, that gives each party an essential belonging to the other in strife.

Earth and World belong together in strife. The deployment of the sense of Being in the fore- and as-structures of Dasein's interpretative understanding takes place *through* and *as* this strife between the Earth as the null ground of thrownness and World as the openness of intelligibility. Neither Earth nor

World appears as what it is without the conflictual opposition of the other (a very Heraclitean echo). Moreover, this strife does not occur in some transcendent metaphysical realm beyond Dasein. Dasein itself serves as the locus and bearer of this strife, for Dasein is that being for whom Being is at issue; Dasein is the “passageway” for the work of Being (UK, 25). Dasein’s Being-at-issue in its Being means that it must challenge the self-concealing of its own historicity in order to maintain its own authentic intelligibility in its Being-in-the-world. Our Being is at issue in the present as we project our possibilities for Being into the future—possibilities that have carried us forward from the past. To have a genuinely constructive approach to the future, we must engage in a deconstructive confrontation with the past; otherwise, the past carries us forward passively in the momentum of its givens.

The belonging-together of Earth and World is a way of expressing what Heidegger calls the hermeneutic circle or the circle of understanding.<sup>10</sup> The circle comes up as a problem as follows: How are we to interpret anything, if we acknowledge that any understanding we employ to guide the interpretation is itself something that remains uninterpreted? The project of interpretation seems to be circular. But this circularity is precisely the conflictual belonging-together of Earth and World. In World, we have a structure of intelligibility that allows us to understand beings and Being; in Earth, we are thrown into that projection of possibilities that grounds this intelligibility. “To deny the circle, to wish to make a secret of it or to overcome it, means in the end to reinforce this misapprehension [that is, to fail to see that Dasein’s understanding is basically circular in the constitution of Dasein’s Being as care]. The endeavor must rather aim to leap into this ‘circle’ originally and entirely in order to secure the full view of the circularity of the Being of Dasein . . .” (SZ, 315). The way to “leap” into this circle is for Dasein to engage in the polemos with Being. Furthermore, the circularity of the polemos between Dasein and Being will bear on our understanding of Dasein’s historicity, of the revolution of history in the Auseinandersetzung of the first and the other inception, and so, finally, of the meaning of the polemos for the political destiny of a Volk.

## THE KEHRE

In Heidegger’s own account of his thinking’s development, and in the copious secondary literature, the “turn” or “reversal” in Heidegger’s thought—the Kehre—receives considerable attention. The meaning of this Kehre has special bearing on our understanding of Heidegger’s politics. One aspect of the tradi-

tional apology for Heidegger has been that before the turn—despite the path-breaking work of *Being and Time*—his thinking remained mired in metaphysics to the extent that he could be seduced by the subjectivistic, metaphysical project of National Socialism.<sup>11</sup> I will reject as simplistic and misleading the “official story” of the role of the Kehre.<sup>12</sup> But as this story goes, after his “reversal,” Heidegger turns away from any such subjectivistic arrogance and turns toward “release” (*Gelassenheit*), a kind of pious openness that waits upon Being, rather than on human beings (whether in the form of great statesmen, great poets, great philosophers, or great peoples), for a new dispensation of history and a deliverance (*Rettung*) from nihilism.

The theme of the Kehre in Heidegger’s work is very complicated, and we cannot do it full justice here.<sup>13</sup> Tom Rockmore, for example, identifies at least nine ways in which Heidegger makes use of the notion of a turn.<sup>14</sup> But we shall address only the following senses: A) the turn as a putative break or about-face in Heidegger’s personal intellectual biography; B) the turn as a reversal in the project published as *Being and Time* from a phrasing of the topic as “Being and Time” to that of “Time and Being”; C) the turn as a reorientation in his treatment of the question of Being away from the scientificity of fundamental ontology; D) the turn as what Heidegger will characterize as a return of the truth of Being from its oblivion; E) The turn as a relation between Dasein and Being in the polemos, something Heidegger will describe as the “turning.” The last two items, it is worth emphasizing, do not pertain to Heidegger’s own philosophical development but rather to the happening of Being itself—or so I shall argue through a discussion of the relevant texts.

Heidegger’s first published discussion of a Kehre (though by no means his first treatment of it in his lectures or writings<sup>15</sup>) comes in his 1946 letter to Jean Beaufret, known and later published as “Letter on Humanism” (1947). The myth that the turn constitutes a radical break in his development begins largely with the reception of this letter (particularly in France).<sup>16</sup> On this reading, Heidegger’s own thought through the period of *Being and Time* was still wedded to modern metaphysics, inasmuch as the attempt to illuminate Being on the basis of an analysis of Dasein retains the prejudices of subjectivism. The very fact that Heidegger chose to side with National Socialism is interpreted as part of this failure to divorce his thinking from the valorization of the subject, for this political adventure implies the metaphysical view that the human subject is the master or even the source of reality, and so by its will may overcome and dominate the forces of its own history.<sup>17</sup> “Letter on Humanism” lends credence to this reading through its critique of humanism, understood as such an

anthropocentric metaphysics, as a fateful and defining feature of Western thought.

But even in “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger makes it clear that the turn does not imply a wholesale rejection of the project announced in *Being and Time*. He is at pains to explain that *Being and Time* constitutes an attempt to find a language other than that of the metaphysical subject:

If one understands that which in *Being and Time* is called “projection” as a representational positing, then one takes this as an achievement of subjectivity and does not think it in the only manner that the “understanding of Being” in the context of the “existential analytic” of “Being-in-the-world” can be thought—namely as the ecstatic relation to the clearing of Being. The adequate execution and fulfillment of this other thinking that leaves behind subjectivity is certainly made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time*, the third division of the first part, “Time and Being,” was held back (see *Being and Time*, p. 39). Here the whole turns itself around. The division in question was held back because thinking failed in the adequate expression of this turning and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. [Wg, 325]

This passage ambiguously suggests two ways of understanding the Kehre. The first reading is that the Kehre is consistent with Heidegger’s earlier thought. Heidegger directly states that the turn has to do with a shift in emphasis from “Being and Time” (the title of the manuscript that was published in 1927) to “Time and Being” (the title of the unpublished third division of the first part of the treatise). This is the Kehre B referred to earlier. Moreover, Heidegger insists that “this turn [from “Being and Time” to “Time and Being”] is not a transformation of the standpoint of Being and Time” (Wg, 325), a standpoint that confronts what he calls the “oblivion of Being.” In his 1962 letter to William Richardson, Heidegger still finds it necessary to repeat this reminder that the Kehre does not negate his earlier thought: “The formulation of the question in Being and Time is by no means relinquished in [the turning]” (VR, xix). And yet, somehow, “thinking failed” in his first published effort to express properly this shift in the ontological problematic within this one treatise: it had mistakenly made too much use of the “language of metaphysics” to address the question of Being.

This failure of thinking, as Heidegger puts it, bears on the second possible reading of the passage just quoted, one that tends to imply a more serious rejection of the approach of *Being and Time* (that is, Kehre A). Dasein is chosen as the focus of analysis in the first part of *Being and Time* in order to resolve an immediate obstacle to the question: If Being is not a being, how can it be ex-

amined and thought about? Given that in the tradition of Western philosophy, inquiry typically addresses beings in their beingness, and not Being itself, how can we think simply about Being? The answer in *Being and Time*, of course, is that the analysis of Dasein allows us to question a being in such a way that we may gain an understanding of Being itself. Dasein is the *hermēneus* in a literal sense: it acts as a messenger and interpreter, allowing us to move from ontic to ontological inquiry.

But it is precisely the method of beginning with this ontic fundament in Dasein that comes into question in the so-called turn in Heidegger's path of thinking (Kehre A). In 1962, Heidegger delivered a lecture by the same name as the unpublished third division of part one of *Being and Time*: "Time and Being." At the beginning of this talk, he says, "It is worth saying something about the attempt to think Being without regard to a grounding of Being on beings. The attempt to think Being without beings becomes necessary because otherwise, as it seems to me, there is no longer any possibility of bringing properly into view the Being of what *is* today, around the Earth's globe, let alone then to determine satisfactorily the relation of human beings to that which has hitherto been called Being" (*SD*, 2). The turn, or reversal, from "Being and Time" to "Time and Being" (Kehre B) demands eschewing the ontic fundament of fundamental ontology (Kehre C). Even so, the attempt to understand "Time and Being" still redounds on human beings, and indeed upon "what *is* today, around the Earth's globe" (which involves, among other things, the universalizing reign of technology). The ontological is not simply divorced from the ontic in this reversal in thought. But now Heidegger attempts to do that which he failed to express in language before: to think Being—indeed, to think time *and* Being—directly and without the hermeneutic mediation of Dasein. "Every thing has its time. Being, however, is not a thing, is not in time. At the same time, Being remains determined as presencing, as presence, through time, through what is temporal" (*SD*, 3). Heidegger wants to think about the "and" of "Time and Being," about how Being and time are linked (*SD*, 4), yet without calling on the concept of Dasein, a being, in the attempt to do so. He does this by observing that neither time nor Being "is"; rather, "es gibt" time and Being. "Explicitly to think Being itself demands disregarding Being insofar as Being, as in all metaphysics, is grounded and interpreted out of beings and as the ground for beings. To think Being explicitly, this demands relinquishing Being as the ground for beings in favor of the concealed giving at play in unconcealment, that is, the 'It gives' [*Es gibt*]" (*SD*, 5–6).

Heidegger capitalizes the "It" because "we are seeking to bring the It and its

giving into view" (*SD*, 5). The conventional translation of *es gibt* into English is "there is." But to use this phrase (as in "there is Being") to translate *Es gibt* here would defeat Heidegger's purpose, for he explicitly argues that one cannot properly say that Being "is"—or that there "is" time. He wishes to reflect upon the givenness of time and Being, the belonging of time and Being together in this givenness, and, further, what grants this giving of time and Being together.

In seeking the "It" that "gives" both time and Being, Heidegger searches for the nonmetaphysical language that failed him in *Being and Time*. The word that Heidegger finds to explain this *It* itself that grants the givenness of time and Being also partakes in this novel language: "In the sending of the destiny of Being, in the reaching out of time, there shows itself a dedication [*Zueignen*], a conveying over [*Übereignen*], namely of Being as presence and time as the region of the open, into their own [*Eigenes*]. What determines both time and Being in their own, that is, in their belonging-together, we shall call *das Ereignis*" (*SD*, 20). Once again, Heidegger's vocabulary presents difficulties. *Das Ereignis* is perhaps best translated here as "the appropriating event." In conventional German, *Ereignis* means an event, incident, or happening, sometimes with the overtone that this event institutes something decisive. Heidegger hears an etymological echo, on the basis of *eigen*, with other German words that denote ownership or belonging. What he wishes to counter here, with the *It* that gives, is any sense that a subject is responsible for the givenness of Being and time, that these are somehow the product of the human subject's projections, presentations, or representations (see *SD*, 17), whether as Platonic ideas or Husserlian meaning-intentions. The appropriating event that gives time and Being together is what makes Being appropriate to its time, what makes a time its own in the historical destiny of Being, and what opens up a world in which beings belong appropriately in the truth of Being and come to presence for Dasein. None of this can be the product or an act of the will of a metaphysical subject; the appropriating event grants Dasein the world and the time of its Being-there.

But if the turn has to do with this attempt to express the reversal of "Being and Time" to "Time and Being," in which language is hard put to speak about how time and Being belong together in their givenness, and if after the turn Heidegger rejects all emphasis on the human subject or the ego as an impediment to understanding the appropriating event, then how do we reconcile the two possible interpretations of the passage from "Letter on Humanism" cited earlier? On the one hand, we have a renunciation of *Being and Time*, because the analytic of Dasein in fundamental ontology cannot escape the language of

metaphysics and the subject in order to speak directly of time and Being themselves; fundamental ontology fails as propaedeutic to speaking of Being qua Being. On the other hand, we have Heidegger's repeated warnings not to understand the turn as a wholesale rejection of the project of *Being and Time*. Indeed, what Heidegger comes to call the turn was a projected feature of the work of *Being and Time*, originally planned (but never published) as division 3 of part I, the section on "Time and Being" (see *SZ*, 39). Moreover, Heidegger never simply jettisons the language of *Being and Time*. Dasein remains explicitly of interest to him even through his latest period (see, for example, *VS*, 117).

In his letter to Richardson, Heidegger cautions that although his first *published* discussion of the Kehre comes in 1947, "thinking through such a decisive matter requires many years to come into the clear" (*VR*, xviii). The language of the Kehre and Ereignis features prominently in Heidegger's 1936–38 opus *Contributions to Philosophy*. Indeed, to the extent that Heidegger himself sees *Being and Time*, the *gigantomakhia peri tēs ousias*, as simply *one* way of rekindling the question of Being (*SZ*, 437), he already leaves open the possibility that his approach might change. In the early 1930s he began to turn to the pre-Socratics and to the poetry of Hölderlin in his search for the language that had failed him.

It is during this period, in the early to mid-1930s, that Heidegger first examined the polemos in his lectures, notably in a comparison of Heraclitus and Hölderlin and the kinship of their thought (*GA* 39, 123–29). He did so in the context of searching for a language in which the German people might find its proper Being and confront its historical tasks.<sup>18</sup> This search involves a confrontation between what he calls the first inception of thinking with the Greeks and the other inception, in which thinking tries to rescue Being from its oblivion. As a result of his search for a new language after *Being and Time*—beginning with his readings of Hölderlin, reaching a crescendo with the *Contributions to Philosophy*, and continuing after the war—Heidegger evolved the idiom that most readers new to his work find so utterly idiosyncratic, if not simply obscurantist. But Heidegger does not give up on the project of *Being and Time*, which involved nothing less than the rekindling of the question of Being, or the wresting of this question from its oblivion. The turn, as both a reversal and a reorientation, reflects a core struggle within Heidegger's own polemos—the polemos to bring the question of Being into language, and as such, into language that retains the question as a question, and as a question about Being, rather than about an ontic intermediary (that is, Dasein) to Being.

We have seen several ways of understanding the turn. One is as a very specific "reversal" in the ontological problematic, from "Being and Time" to



“Time and Being” (Kehre B). The failure adequately to express the meaning of this reversal in the language of fundamental ontology leads to another sense of the turn: an evolutionary and significant reorientation in the path of addressing the question of Being, away from the model of scientific phenomenology and the existential analysis of Dasein, toward the evocative power of language through the exploration of pre-Socratic Greek philosophy and German poetry in the attempt to speak directly of Being itself (Kehre C). Very crudely, one sense of the turn as we have discussed it so far involves a moment in ontology itself; the other involves Heidegger’s own intellectual biography (collapsing Kehre B into Kehre A).

But these interrelated readings of the turn, encouraged by Heidegger’s own retroactive appraisals of his development, as well as those of commentators, obscure yet other readings. We need to address another important dimension of the turn, one that departs from Heidegger’s intellectual biography to his understanding of Being itself: the turn as a *return* of the truth of Being from its oblivion (Kehre D).<sup>19</sup> The most dramatic exposition of this sense of the turn can be found in Heidegger’s lectures on technology delivered in Bremen (and later developed in the form of the well-known essay of 1953), “Question Concerning Technology”—in particular, in the one titled simply, “Die Kehre.” In this 1949 lecture, Heidegger speaks of “danger” (*die Gefahr*), in the sense not of some specific threat, but rather of the danger inherent to Being itself: that it might remain concealed in its oblivion and that nihilism might achieve complete dominion. At issue here is Heidegger’s famous notion that “the essence of technology is nothing technological” (VA, 39); the danger posed by technology is nothing *immediately* like pollution or nuclear or biological war, but rather the mode of Being announced by technology: a will to master the world in terms of a standing supply of energy-stuff (what Heidegger calls *Bestand*, standing reserve). In this essence of technology, the oblivion of Being comes to completion. Still, Heidegger holds out the hope that in the very deployment of the essence of technology, we may apprehend Being itself at work, for even technology and nihilism are “sent” by the history of Being. The greatest danger thus hides and holds within itself the possibility of a salvation (*Rettung*)—*if* Dasein can stand up to its task of understanding this sending of the epoch of technology as something given by what Heidegger calls the truth of Being. “In the danger there reigns this as yet unthought turning-back-to-itself [*Sich-kehren*]. Thus the possibility of a turn conceals itself in the essence [*Wesen*] of the danger, a turn in which the forgottenness of the

essence of Being [*Sein*] turns itself about in such a way that with the turn, the truth of the essence of Being [*Seyn*] expressly turns in and takes up residence [*einkehrt*] among beings” (GA 79, 71).

In passages such as this, we must understand essence (*Wesen*) as an essential unfolding, a way of Being, not an ideal What that ontically defines a being. Jean Grondin has called attention to the recognition that this sense of the Kehre as a return of the truth of Being has been at work in Heidegger’s thought since at least the period of his *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38).<sup>20</sup> But what does this obscure thought mean? We shall examine more closely, in the section that follows, the distinction that Heidegger draws between the sense of Being [*Sein*] and the truth of Being [*Seyn*]. But preliminarily: this turn as the return of Being from its oblivion entails grasping the Ereignis, the sheer giving of a dispensation of Being within which a particular understanding of the world can operate, and he employs the archaic spelling *Seyn* to distinguish this *truth* of Being from the *Sein* investigated in *Being and Time*, the *sense* of Being. Heidegger sees *Seyn* as more primordial than *Sein*, because the former determines the givenness of any particular articulation of the sense of Being that Dasein grasps in its historically located understanding of Being; the truth of Being (*Seyn*) first grants the parameters of Dasein’s Being-in-the-World. This giving, this opening up of a historical world, is what Heidegger calls the truth of Being in its a-lētheia. Salvation from nihilism will come in the greatest danger if Dasein can see beings, not merely as a standing reserve at the disposal of the will to power, but as opened up and made intelligible by the giving of Being in this truth. As Dasein takes cognizance of this a-lētheia, this Ereignis of the truth of Being, Being will return from its oblivion and turn in to and take up residence with beings. The world in its worlding will be restored.

This brings us to the final, neglected sense of the Kehre as the reciprocity of Being and Dasein (Kehre E), overlooked in part because the evidence for it comes from lectures of the 1930s and 1940s published only relatively recently. Being is not the property, function, representation, or projection of a subject. Nevertheless, Being needs the human being—not as a subject over against which Being stands as just another, if perhaps higher, object—but as Being’s There, the place of its disclosure, its Da-sein. Heidegger calls this emplacement of Dasein in Being the site (*Stätte*). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes: “The human is urged into such Being-here, thrown into the urgency of such Being, because the overwhelming as such, in order to appear in its sway, *requires* the site of openness for itself” (*EM*, 124). And later: “The human

essence is to be grasped and grounded, according to the concealed directive of the inception, as *the site* that Being necessitates for its opening up" (*EM*, 154).

In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger advances a rather apocalyptic vision of the relation of human Dasein to Being, especially if we understand "apocalypse" in the sense of its Greek roots, as an unveiling, a revelation. Being confronts Dasein as an overwhelming sway; it has the character of having always already been given: Dasein did not create this Being into which it is thrown and that rules over Dasein, bestowing upon Dasein its world. For its part, in confronting the overwhelming power of Being, human Dasein instantiates the site of Being-in-the-world, opening up the truth of Being. But Dasein pays a price for its sacrifice and challenge to Being: "Dasein is the constant necessity of defeat and of the renewed resurgence of the act of violence against Being, such that the almighty reign of Being violates Dasein (in the literal sense), makes Dasein into the site of its appearing, envelops and pervades Dasein in its sway, and thereby holds it within Being" (*EM*, 136). This violently sacrificial, almost pagan, interdependent relationship of Dasein and Being is further characterized by Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art": "Precisely in great art, and here only great art is at issue, the artist remains something unimportant against the work, almost like a passageway that annihilates itself in creation for the coming forth of the work" (*UK*, 25). In characterizing Dasein and artistic creativity in this way, Heidegger attacks what he deems one of the most pernicious consequences of subjectivism: the notion that the subject is ultimately the source of meaning and hence the creator of the world and, so, the master of Being.

The givenness of Being shatters this hubris; Being is the overwhelming power because Dasein is always already thrown into an understanding of Being that Dasein did not itself produce and that it must confront and interpret. But at the same time, Being needs Dasein, which dares to confront it, in order to appear in its truth. In the polemos to overturn the old and to institute a new dispensation for the history of a people, the truly creative must serve as a sacrifice (*GA* 39, 137). The violence that the creators experience derives from their confronting Being and thereby allowing themselves to become the site where the truth of Being unfolds. We have seen that in "The Origin of the Work of Art" Heidegger depicts this as a strife between Earth and World. In a single dense passage from *Contributions to Philosophy*, these themes are united:

At times, those who ground the abyss [*jene Gründer des Abgrundes*] must be immolated in the fire of what is brought to endure as truth, in order that Da-sein may be-

come possible for human beings and constancy in the midst of beings be saved, so that beings themselves undergo a restoration in the Open of the strife between Earth and World.

Accordingly, beings are pushed into their *constancy* through the *downfall* [*Untergang*] of those who ground the truth of Being [*Wahrheit des Seyns*]. Being [*Seyn*] itself demands this. It needs those who founder [*die Untergehenden*], and it has, where a being appears, already *eventuated* [*er-eignet*] and allotted to itself those who founder. This is the essential unfolding of Being [*Seyn*] itself; we call it the *appropriating event* [*Ereignis*]. Immeasurable is the wealth of Being's relation to the Da-sein that is appropriated to it in the turning [*des kehrgen Bezugs des Seyns zu dem ihm ereigneten Da-sein*]; incalculable is the fullness of the eventuating of this appropriation. [*BP*, 7]

In *Contributions to Philosophy* Heidegger has clearly launched himself into an uninhibited exploration of language in order to fulfill the sense of the turning we discussed above: an attempt to think about Being without the distortions of metaphysics and subjectivism. Such experimentation with language makes passages such as the one just quoted exceedingly difficult to translate. But for our purposes now, we may discern something of the further meaning of the turn as a *turning* (Kehre E).

The first thing to notice about the turning here is that it operates as a reciprocal relationship between Being and Dasein: "Immeasurable is the wealth of the relation to the Da-sein that is appropriated to it in the turning." We have noticed that already in 1935, Heidegger speaks of a mutual need between Being and Dasein. Now this need is expressed in terms of the Kehre. The turning is a dynamic event that takes place in a back-and-forth *between* Being and Dasein. This reverberation is connected with the strife of Earth and World: Being grants Dasein a world of meaning, but for this world *to world*, to maintain its meaning as historical, Dasein must interpretatively confront this givenness, thereby constantly both endangering and reconstituting its home in Being. The return of Being from its oblivion (Kehre D), its recovery as the truth of Being, takes place through this turning between Being and Dasein; the salvation of Being is not somehow free-floating and independent of Dasein.

The *Contributions to Philosophy* were written secretly between 1936 and 1938, a time of great disappointment, even despair, for Heidegger. He had resigned from his post as rector of the University of Freiburg, having seen his ambition of becoming the philosophical lightning rod for the National Socialist revolution thwarted by the jealousies of hack party ideologues such as Alfred Rosenberg and Ernst Kriek. The *Contributions* may be read as Heidegger's last at-

tempt to rescue the revolution, at least as a matter for thinking. A major theme in the book is a turn from the first inception of Western thought and history toward what Heidegger calls the other inception of that history: “The entirely Other of the other inception over against the first can be elucidated through a saying that seemingly only plays with an *overturning* [*Umkehrung*—also “inversion”], whereas in truth everything changes” (*BP*, 229). Heidegger takes this *Umkehrung*, this overturning, very seriously. In a lecture course delivered in 1937–38, the period of the *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger writes: “The overthrow of the customary, revolution, is the true channel to inception” (*GA* 45, 40–41).<sup>21</sup>

I shall have much more to say about what Heidegger means by this other inception of history in Chapters Three and Four, but here we should notice that the turning and revolution are linked, in the sense of this movement of overturning and return—a return that fundamentally alters what it comes back to while also preserving it as historically unfolding. Heidegger does not consider that *Contributions* itself *is* the revolution. To make this assumption would be to fall again into the trap of hubristic subjectivism, which holds that human beings possess the key to Being and can make use of this key simply by applying their theoretical representations to reality. In the opening preface to *Contributions*, Heidegger scornfully insists that the “contributions” (*Beiträge*) here have nothing to do with “‘scientific’ ‘contributions’ to the ‘progress’ of philosophy” (*BP*, 3). They are not contributions in the sense of an addition to the ever-expanding store of scientifically acquired information at the disposition of the will to power. Rather, they are contributions toward an “attempt” (*Versuch*) (*BP*, 3) to initiate an appropriate questioning: “The ‘Contributions’ question along an avenue [*Bahn*], an avenue that is first paved [*gebahnt*] through the *crossing over* [*Übergang*] to the other inception, into which occidental thinking is now entering” (*BP*, 4).

So while the work does not itself constitute the revolution, Heidegger frequently speaks of a “preparation” (*Vorbereitung*). By characterizing his project as an attempt, a pathway to a crossing over, Heidegger seeks to avoid the subjectivism that holds that human thought, will, and agency can dominate Being; thinking now is an openness rather than a control, a preparation that awaits a happening alien to its own machinations, a happening would be that given to thinking and to Dasein. Hence, the subtitle of *Contributions to Philosophy* is *Vom Ereignis* (Of the appropriating event). *Contributions* endeavors to prepare for an Ereignis, an event that appropriates Dasein in a revolutionary inception through an overturning of Dasein’s Being. “Thus, although they already and

only speak of the essence of Being, that is, of the ‘Eventuation’ [*Er-eignis*], the ‘Contributions’ are not yet able to enjoin the free jointure of the truth of Being out of itself” (*BP*, 4). With words such as “jointure” (*Fuge*) and “enjoin” (*fügen*), Heidegger attempts to evoke the sense of how an interwoven cosmos of sense and meaning is articulated in the worlding of the world; the Ereignis, as the manifestation of the truth of Being, is what engenders the whole of such an articulation, the horizon of intelligibility within whose bounds Being makes sense and beings have meaning. Philosophy can (only) prepare for such an eventuating rectification of the world.

This broader perspective on what Heidegger hoped for at that time from philosophy aids in understanding how the turning between Being and Dasein occurs. The revolution in Being happens only if this turning is honored:

It must be emphasized again and again: the question of truth posed here is not just a matter of an alteration of the hitherto prevailing concept of truth, not an enlargement of the ordinary representation; it is a matter of a *transformation of human Being* itself. This transformation is not required by new psychological or biological insights—the human being here is not the object of some anthropology—the human being stands here in question in the deepest and widest perspective, the truly grounding perspective. The human being in its relation to Being, that is, in the turning [*Kehre*]: Being [*Seyn*] and its truth in relation to the human being. The determination of the essence of truth goes together with the necessary transformation of the human being. Both are the same. This transformation means the deranging [*Ver-rückung*] of human Being out of its previous standing-place—or rather its lack of a standing-place—into the ground of its essence, *to become the ground and preserver of the truth of Being* [*Seyn*], to *be* the There as the ground needed by the essence of Being [*Seyn*] itself. [*GA* 45, 214]

The turning happens between Dasein and Being. In the turning of the polemos with Being, in the strife of Earth and World in which the structures of intelligibility are deranged and rearranged in their jointure, Dasein stands as the founder and the guardian of the event of the truth of Being. The polemical turning is authentically *revolutionary*, and not merely reactively conservative or irresponsibly anarchic, only if the past, as the given source of meaning, is genuinely confronted as a source for a future that interpretatively preserves that past, as historically unfolding, by transforming it. Heidegger’s politics of Being derives from his understanding that this grounding and preserving of the truth of Being in the polemos of the turning demands a thoroughgoing transformation in human Being itself. In this revolution of the turning, Dasein does not seek some final mastery over Being as something to be utterly illumined and

laid bare as present-at-hand; rather, Dasein must serve as the site for the history of *Ereignung*, the polemically transpiring eventuation of the truth of Being. Da-sein is polemos, but polemos is also Da-sein in the belonging-together of Being and Dasein in the Kehre.

I have argued that to think of the turn as merely a transitional moment in Heidegger's own intellectual biography is misleading at best and obfuscating at worst. The "turn" is thereby treated as a sort of second sailing in Heidegger's work. As such, the idea is easily used as a crutch in the apologia for Heidegger's political episode: before the turn, so the story goes, his thinking was still ensnared in lingering subjectivism and metaphysics. Otherwise, Heidegger would never have treated the German Volk as a bearer of Dasein, or Dasein itself as the fulcrum for remaking the world and saving us from nihilism. But this official story simply banalizes the meaning of the Kehre as a biographical fact about Heidegger's intellectual development.

To understand the turning as a moment in Heidegger's thought itself is to come closer to the truth. There is indeed a turn from "Being and Time" to "Time and Being," but the reversal by no means implies a wholesale rejection of Heidegger's earlier work. Furthermore, the deepest meaning of the turning does not bear on *Heidegger's* thought per se, but rather on *thinking* itself. Heidegger himself recommends "Letter on Humanism," with its talk of the Kehre, as "a possible impetus to an Auseinandersetzung with the matter for thinking" (*ID*, 70). Dasein's most proper Being is thinking as a confrontational interpretation of the cosmos of meaning that has been given to it by the truth of Being. But this truth of Being itself is made manifest only by Dasein's confrontation with it, hence the belonging-together of Da-sein and *Sein* in the turning (see *ID*, 19–20). The turning describes the engagement of Dasein and Being, the movement between Being and Dasein in the polemos as world opens itself up to Dasein and Dasein confronts its world in interpretation. It is a *turning* because in confronting the world of meaning, Dasein is always doubling back on its own Being, re-turning to its Being as a past, present, and future to be broken open in its otherwise inauthentically accepted givenness. The turning describes Dasein's temporality as a polemical temporality, a confrontationally interpretative Being. (I shall examine this temporality in detail in the chapters to follow.) Being itself re-turns to itself as Da-sein, for only in Dasein's polemos with the world opened up in the truth of Being does Being have its There, its site of manifestation. But this re-turn is never simply repetition, for mere mimicry avoids genuine polemos, becoming effete nostalgia or banal conservatism.

The Kehre names the role that Dasein must measure itself against, the call-

ing to which it must respond, in order for Being (*Seyn*) to fulfill itself as this simultaneous bestowal and withdrawal of truth in the polemical eventuating of history. Only then can Dasein wrest Being back from its oblivion: when Dasein engages Being in the turning of the polemos. This polemos is never merely a conflict between persons or peoples, although it may be manifested as such, but is rather a confrontation between Being and Dasein through which both are instantiated in the unconcealment of truth. The content of this turning confrontation of Dasein and Being will become clearer in Chapter Three, whose subject is the confrontation between the first and the other inception of history. The turning between Being and Dasein serves as the impetus to the epochal turn within history itself, a turn toward an other inception that returns to the first one and renews it by transforming it.

#### THE TRUTH OF BEING: BESTOWAL AND WITHDRAWAL OF THE SENSE OF BEING

In the passage just analyzed, as in the passage cited above from the period of the *Contributions to Philosophy*, as well as in the 1949 Bremen lectures, Heidegger uses the spelling *Seyn* rather than *Sein*. As we have briefly noted, *Seyn* is an old-fashioned form that he adopts after his reading of Hölderlin. With this word, Heidegger attempts to convey a certain understanding of Being distinct but not divorced from his earlier conception. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger frames his undertaking as an attempt to address the question of the sense of Being. Metaphysicians had interpreted the Being of beings, but always by forgetting the difference between Being and beings, by treating the question of Being as the search for some kind of absolute ground for beings. The search to understand Being qua Being is lost in oblivion. Heidegger further recognizes that we encounter Being only as the Being of beings, but he does not want to lose Being to beings, to reduce Being to a property of beings or to the totality and reality of beings. When Heidegger inquires into the sense of Being, this “sense” reveals itself as the manner in which Being unveils beings to Dasein through time and Dasein’s own temporality. Truth is not the correctness of the subject’s cognition of a being, but rather the very disclosure of beings by Being to Dasein. Quite the opposite of a property of beings, Being gives beings to Dasein in truth. Only thanks to this bestowal of Being-in-the-world can the problem of the correctness of our relation to objects or the truth of our statements even come into question. Because of the centrality of truth as unconcealment to the question of Being, Heidegger reformulates the problematic: from the “sense of



Being” in *Being and Time* to the “truth of Being” in the period beginning around 1930 and finally to the “topology of Being” in the late period (VS, 72–73).

But already in the 1930 lecture “On the Essence of Truth” Heidegger begins to discuss Being not merely as that which grants unconcealment in truth but also as that which at the same time withdraws and bestows “errancy” (*Irre*) (WW, 193ff.). This errancy is not a matter of mistakes in the judgment of facts, but rather a movement as essential to Being’s unfolding as unconcealment. Heidegger’s earlier attempt to address Being tends to obscure something crucial: that Being not only bestows but also withdraws sense and meaning. It withdraws its sense, its truth, and so—and this amounts to the same thing—it withdraws itself. Being sinks into oblivion behind beings and the world as these are disclosed. In his 1937–38 lecture course, Heidegger writes, “Beings *are*, but the Being of beings and the truth of Being [*Seyn*] and therewith the Being [*Seyn*] of truth is *denied* to beings. Beings *are*, and yet they remain abandoned by Being [*Seyn*] and left to themselves, such as to be merely the object of machination” (GA 45, 185). Truth’s Being and Being’s truth both unveil *and* conceal in the action, the work, of the appropriating event. This is because Ereignis instantiates a *particular*, historically unfolding field of sense and meaning, thereby closing off other possibilities. Being grants this field of meaning, but its very granting by Being withdraws as the field is established, and Dasein easily fixes on the domination of beings in their historically revealed form without confronting the historicity of the revelation itself.

When Heidegger speaks in the 1930s of Being as *Seyn*, he seeks to articulate this fugitive sense of withdrawal as well as presencing. Heidegger’s distinction between *Seyn* and *Sein*, or the truth of Being and the sense of Being, is potentially confusing, but it is critically important (especially in considering some of the ontologically relativistic postmodernist readings of Heidegger). To risk some oversimplification, *Seyn* describes the truth of Being as a-lêtheia, the manifestation, not of beings, but rather of the very cosmos of sense within which a particular world of beings can have their meaning and within which Dasein’s Being can make sense. *Sein*, as Heidegger investigates it in *Being and Time*, is *for the most part* Being as the sense of Being, the Being that Dasein understands in its everyday activities and interpretative involvement. As such, the *sense* of Being (*Sein*), that is, the orientation of Dasein’s existential understanding, always finds its home *within* the truth of Being (*Seyn*), that is, the historical revelation of a particular sense of Being. The truth of Being happens

(*geschieht*) and establishes an epoch (*sich ereignet*) as the sense of Being within which a world has its meaning.

For Heidegger, the truth of Being (*Seyn*) as a-lētheia withdraws while it reveals, in two ways. First, any truth of Being, as the opening up of a given historical world of sense (of Being) and meaning (of beings) always covers over other possible revelations as such. Second, Dasein, for the most part, does not *think* Being either in the sheer *givenness* of it in its historical epochs (an established sense of Being) or in the historical *giving* of these very epochs as such (the a-lētheia of the truth of Being). The world makes provisional sense to Dasein, and that is usually enough. If the world at times does not “make sense,” Dasein seeks out this sense in some account of beings, not Being. Because beings, not Being, are what ordinarily fascinate us, Dasein is plunged into an oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*).<sup>22</sup> In this oblivion of Being, the subjectivistic dominion over beings becomes our only goal. For Heidegger, this is the onset of nihilism, of which the domination of technology is only an epiphenomenon.

But this oblivion of Being is not merely ours, not simply a matter of our forgetfulness; to assume so would again be to fall prey to subjectivism, as if remembering Being were just the matter of the human will that constitutes reality as it sees fit. The ambiguity of the “of,” the subjective and objective genitive, is at work in the oblivion *of* Being. The oblivion belongs to Being itself, too. Hence Heidegger also speaks of a *Seinsverlassenheit*, an abandonment of beings by Being.<sup>23</sup> When it withdraws, Being leaves beings to themselves. But how can this make any sense in Heidegger’s thinking, if Being is not a free-floating highest principle, but the Being of beings? In *Seinsverlassenheit*, beings do not cease to exist, but human beings may cease to be Dasein; if they give up the confrontation with Being as the ongoing interpretation of beings, the “world turns away.” In *Contributions*, Heidegger writes of “unbeings” (*das Unseiende*). He does not mean beings that have ceased to exist, but rather beings as they exist in the oblivion of Being: deprived of a world that worlds in the polemos of the truth of Being and made the objects of machination.<sup>24</sup> Beings no longer present an avenue for Dasein into a polemos with the fore- and as-structures of the sense of Being; they are as indifferent in their meaning as the rock upon which a lizard suns itself. In nihilism, Dasein gives over its poetry; for being able to engage in the metaphors of language constitutes the polemos of Dasein’s interpretative confrontation with meaning.

But deliverance from this nihilism will not come through quietism—a re-

jection of all activity as a manifestation of subjectivism and the will to power—that simply waits for Being to “do something.” The later Heidegger’s emphasis on “release” or “letting be” (*Gelassenheit*) may give this impression, but it is a false one. In “The Question Concerning Technology” (1953), Heidegger writes: “Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, the essential meditation on technology, and the decisive Auseinandersetzung with technology must happen in a realm that is on the one hand bound up with the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally distinct from this” (VA, 39). Dasein’s Auseinandersetzung with Being remains necessary: “For questioning is the piety of thinking” (VA, 40). Questioning is the piety of thinking to the extent that questioning engages in polemos. Only polemos as Auseinandersetzung allows Being to return from its oblivion. But how so?

In another 1949 lecture “Die Gefahr” (The danger), Heidegger coins a term to describe the manner in which Being discloses beings to Dasein in the age of technology and full-blown nihilism: the *Ge-Stell*, usually translated by something such as “enframing.”<sup>25</sup> The *Ge-Stell* describes a mode of Being in which all beings are set (*gestellt*) in a universal frame of reference, accessible and serviceable for the applications of power and dominion. Nothing escapes the *Ge-Stell*; this is precisely its nihilism. In the *Ge-Stell*, the world becomes rigid; even if there remain scientific truths or sources of energy or deposits of raw materials yet to be discovered, all beings are in principle subjected to the will to power of the commanding subject, who installs each new piece of information into the frame that has already been “set,” *gestellt*, over all beings.

This *Ge-Stell* constitutes a counterpart to the Greek understanding of nature as *phusis*. For Heidegger, *phusis* is also a manner of *Stellen*, of setting forth. Being as *phusis* lets beings appear as what they are in Dasein’s Being-in-the-world; it produces (*her-stellt*) beings in the sense of a setting forth that transpires of its own, without human agency. Human beings cannot pretend to master this nature as producing, the self-revealing manifestation of beings in a meaningful world; *phusis* is, as it were, always already there before us, granting us access to beings in their presencing. The counterpart to *phusis*, according to Heidegger, is *thesis*—that which sets forth, or posits, through human convention and production in the usual sense. But there may still be an *appropriate* relation of *phusis* and *thesis*: “Pro-duction, in the sense of *phusis* as thought by the Greeks, means: to bring hither, from out of concealedness, out into unconcealment. The bringing means: to let something arrive and come to presence from within itself. Only if *phusis* holds sway is *thesis* possible and needful. For if something that has been brought forward by pro-ducting is present, then on

and from such a present being (for example, rock), through a human positing, thesis, another present being (a stone stairway and its steps) can be produced and set forth beneath what is already present (the protruding cliff and the ground). This present being (the stone stairs) comes to presence in such a manner that what is produced by human positing (*thesis*), becomes enduring" (*GA* 79, 64).

In making use of beings, such as rock, set forth by phusis, human thesis establishes beings of its own production. In both cases, there is a setting forth, a *Stellen*; a positing of, say, a human artifact such as a stone stairway, on the basis of the naturally occurring "deposit" of rock. Both phusis and thesis as *Stellen* produce, set forth, and make beings manifest in their presence. *Stellen* itself is closely related to *Setzen* and the *Auseinandersetzung*. In one of his translations of Heraclitus' Fragment 53, as we have seen, Heidegger has polemos as *Auseinandersetzung* setting forth and producing beings (*her(aus)stellen*, his rendering here of *epoiēse*) (*EM*, 47). The *Aus-einander-setzung* of Being is the making intelligible of a world in the setting forth of beings into the distinctness of their respective meanings. In the *Kehre* as turning, *Dasein* engages Being in this continuous strife over the interpretation of its Being-in-the-world.

In the *Ge-Stell*, the *Stellen*, the positing of the *Setzen*, is still there, but has been collected (*Ge-*) and rendered immobile in a framework, whereas the production of phusis holds sway and encompasses us in a manner beyond our mastery. *Setzen* has rigidified as *Satzung*: setting forth and positing become fixed law (*Ge-setz*) and positivism. "The term *Ge-Stell*, as spoken to technology and heard in a thoughtful manner from technology, says that its essence determines an epoch of Being [*Seyn*], because its essence, setting forth (*das Stellen*), rests in the inceptive destiny of Being [*Seyn*] (*Phusis-Thesis*)" (*GA* 79, 66). Once again, the nihilism of the essence of technology is not something utterly alien to Being; it has its roots in the historical destiny of the truth of Being. It is a distortion of the proper relationship of Being to *Dasein* and of phusis to thesis. Human production as a craft that respects natural production is replaced by a fabrication of beings that treats nature as a warehouse of raw materials. Stone is no longer quarried to build an edifice that will be appropriate to its setting, whose artistry will illuminate the setting forth and the production of nature as phusis upon which it rests. Instead, strip-mining plays a role in constructions that impose upon and seek to dominate nature as a realm of resources and a grid for the deployment of power. But to break out from the framework of the *Ge-Stell* demands that *Dasein* recover its belonging to Being in the *Kehre*. This is why Heidegger calls for the "decisive *Auseinandersetzung*" with the essence

of technology at the close of “The Question Concerning Technology.” By engaging in the polemos with Being, by opening up to the truth of Being as such, Dasein may engender the *Aus-einander-setzung* that breaks the reign of *Satzung* and frees up the *Ge-Stell* as *Stellen*, the belonging together of “natural” and human production in *phusis-thesis*. Far from being a repudiation of polemos, “after” the turn Heidegger’s writings on the essence of technology demonstrate his continuing understanding that Dasein’s most proper “activity” takes place in *Auseinandersetzung*, not in expectant passivity in the face of the catastrophes of the history of Being.

#### ON HEIDEGGER’S *GELASSENHEIT* AND “NIETZSCHEANISM”

Several related objections to the interpretation advanced here could be raised at this point. The first is that while this discussion of the polemos might apply to Heidegger’s “middle period,” it does not address his manifest textual “turn” to *Gelassenheit* after the war. Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit* (letting be or releasedness) seems a definitive rejection of the metaphysical subject as the source of a *will* that molds the world to its re-presentations, and as such, a rejection of anything like the polemos of a Dasein aggressively confronting the world. *Gelassenheit*, by contrast, endeavors simply to let beings be, to release them (and Dasein) from the metaphysical obsessions with power and dominion. Dasein’s proper response to existence in *Gelassenheit* must now be as the gentle “shepherd of Being” (BH, 328, 338), not its antagonistic master.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Heidegger’s emphasis on will and the confrontational polemos with Being in the writings of the mid-1930s smacks of a Nietzscheanism that he seems to renounce, both in his lectures on Nietzsche and, even more decisively, after the war. Moreover, if the meaning of the polemos is that *to be is to interpret*, how does this differ from Nietzsche’s perspectivism as the struggle of the will to power to impose meaning on the world, and does not Heidegger dispense with all of this subjectivism through *Gelassenheit*?<sup>27</sup> Finally, Heidegger explicitly equates such subjectivism with nationalism in “Letter on Humanism” (1946): “Every nationalism is metaphysically an anthropologism, and as such, subjectivism” (BH, 338). Does this not show that he has repudiated the Volk mythology of the 1930s?

As a matter of simple textual history, as I have shown, Heidegger neither explicitly abandons nor implicitly rejects the idea of polemos and *Auseinandersetzung*. This is most clear in the 1953 letter to Jünger and his essay on technol-

ogy.<sup>28</sup> With respect to the notion of *Gelassenheit*, it is worth pointing out that the theme appears in an embryonic form at least as early as his 1929–30 lecture course (*GA* 29/30, 137) or the 1936 *Kunstwerk* essay (UK, 16).<sup>29</sup> In “On the Essence of Truth” (1930), he writes, “To let be is to let oneself engage with beings” (WW, 185). I have argued that the “turn” constitutes no decisive break in Heidegger’s thought. In his 1956 addendum to “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger says that his notion of a “letting happen” (*Lassen*) is “not passivity, but the highest doing . . . in the sense of thesis, a ‘working’ and a ‘willing’” (UK, 69). My argument about the *Kehre* is that it is precisely in the turning of the polemos between Dasein and Being that the world is both established *and* confronted: thesis is the *Setzung* of the *Aus-einander-setzung* of Dasein and Being. For Being to emerge into unconcealment, and for Dasein to let beings be, Dasein cannot remain passive; it must confront the given interpretation of the world. This confrontation is not a willing in the sense of a Nietzschean imposition of the subject’s will to power on a formless chaos, but rather the resolutely active, reinterpretative encounter of Dasein with the world as it has been given by a history that Dasein can never leap out of and control.

As one of the speakers in a 1944–45 dialogue collected in *Gelassenheit* itself says: “You speak continually of a letting be [*Lassen*], which gives the impression that this means some kind of passivity. Nevertheless, I believe it has nothing to do with ineffectually letting things slide and bustle along” (*G*, 33). Even in view of Heidegger’s own personal retreat into political quietism after the war, there is nothing incompatible between *Gelassenheit* and polemos; in fact, for Dasein to let Being eventuate and to let beings be, Dasein must engage in the activity of the polemos. Being *needs* this engendering activity of Dasein to manifest itself. Ever since “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger had argued that *ontologically*, freedom transcends both activity and passivity; freedom is the openness of Dasein and Being to each other in the worlding of the world, and my contention has been that this openness, this worlding, is forged in the turning of the polemos between Dasein and Being. If we understand that in the interpretative “work” of the polemos, Dasein does not *subjectively impose* its interpretation in the manner of the will to power, but rather that Dasein’s “activity” (*energeia*, *Ins-Werk-Setzen*) in the polemical turning with Being is both an opening up *of* and an opening up *to* the dispensation of Being, then there is nothing necessarily Nietzschean about it. Last of all, one cannot explain away Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism as the function of a lapse into Nietzschean voluntarism, that is, an aggressive imposition of the will upon Being

and history, because even in the 1930s, the idea of polemos includes the moment that Heidegger later calls *Gelassenheit*. Certainly, it is true that Heidegger rejected as metaphysical the nationalism that *actual* National Socialism championed and that after the war he believed Germany's *Augenblick* to save the West had passed, leaving the world a wasteland to be dominated by America and Russia. But Heidegger never repudiated what I shall analyze in Chapter Four as his *ontological* understanding of the Volk as historically at issue in the authentic polemos with both other peoples and its own destiny as something *at work* (*en-ergeia*), and therefore not a willful, subjectivistic *essence*.

## Chapter 3 Polemos and the Revolution of History

Dasein is polemos and polemos is Dasein. Our discussion of Heidegger's analysis of Dasein, of truth as *a-lētheia*, and of the *Kehre* as a turning between Dasein and Being in the polemos has brought us this far. But now I need to make good on the claim that because polemos is *Da-sein*, and Dasein *is* time, then polemos itself is the meaning of Dasein's temporality, that polemos is time. To accomplish this, I shall lay out Heidegger's interpretation of time in his early period. Phenomenology must show how Being unfolds, as Heidegger says, on the horizon of time. The sense of Being is not only an orientation in a cosmos of sense-making practices but also an orientation in time, which brings these practices to bear on Dasein. There are two aspects of Dasein's orientation in time. For the individual Dasein, projections of its possibilities for Being are accomplished within the bounds of a horizon of past-present-future that encloses that Dasein. For individual Dasein as a member of a historical people, the horizon of its possibilities is defined by a history of communal practices.



## FROM THE POLEMOS OF MEANING TO THE POLEMOS OF TIME

Dasein “makes” sense, and sense has a hold on Dasein, because Being-in-the-world both reveals beings to Dasein and discloses modes of Being for Dasein’s involvement with these beings. But, crucially for this project, I have shown that this nexus of involvement and understanding is not a static entity, a “reality” to which Dasein may or may not correctly adapt itself. In the strife of Earth and World, sense (*Sinn*) and the dissolution of sense (*Unsinn*) are in constant struggle, because non-sense for Heidegger is not mere gibberish, but the existential possibility that Dasein’s referential web of orientation toward beings and practices in Being-in-the-world may shift, change, or even unravel completely. The locus of this struggle between sense and non-sense is Dasein’s polemos with Being in the turning between Dasein and Being. In this strife, the fore-structure and the as-structure of how beings get interpreted are fought out: in World, a horizon of possibilities for Being meaningfully opens up a region of beings for Dasein’s involvement; in Earth, that horizon is constantly put into question in its grounding, and sense and meaning become ever and again a matter of contention. Earth, to use Heidegger’s language, juts into the World and both supports *and* disturbs the horizon of meaning. The very dissolution that Earth may bring to the World works as an aspect of a historical happening, a historicizing, that grounds and renews the horizon of Dasein’s existence. This will lead to a discussion of the positive role that negativity, as this dissolution, plays—as what Heidegger calls *Abbau* and *Destruktion*, dismantling and destruction—in the working of polemos.

The notion that the horizon of sense that delimits Dasein’s Being-in-the-world can and does change brings us to the central issues of this chapter: time and history. The world within which Dasein finds itself is not static; indeed, Dasein is ec-static in a web of significance that has movement and a trajectory. But while this movement in the referential structure of the world is not random for Heidegger, nor is it to be characterized by a definite teleology, along the lines of a Hegelian dialectic. The movement of history, as the fate of individual Dasein and the destiny of communities, is always polemically at issue for Dasein in authenticity.

In his treatment of Dasein’s Being as historical, Heidegger distinguishes between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. *Historie* is the detached enterprise of regarding moments and periods in time as unitary occurrences, discrete points on the

time line that need to be put into some explainable order. *Historie* treats time (or “times”) as something present-at-hand. Even when we reflect on our past as a unified, continuous flow, we are still engaged in *Historie* if, as *Dasein*, we treat this history as something external to our own Being. I shall translate *Historie* with “historiology,” or variants of it. Despite the academic flavor of the word in English, the historiological relation to time is a decisive existential possibility for all *Dasein*. Heidegger argues that just as the capacity to reflect on beings as present-at-hand things rests on a prior readiness-to-hand of beings in *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world, so, too, does the experience of time in historiology depend on a more primordial mode of our own Being that he calls *Geschichte* and that I shall translate as “history.” Time and history are not simply *things* that we experience as external to our Being. We *are historical* in Heidegger’s sense in that our *Dasein* understands its possibilities for Being by projecting that Being out into its future in terms of an interpretation given by its past. *Dasein*, as a being whose Being is temporal, “historicizes” by making both past and future decisively *present* rather than now-points “back there” or “up ahead” on the time line. *Dasein exists* historically.

We have already had some indications of the importance of time in our previous discussions. But we have yet to make explicit the importance of time for what we have come to call the polemos of Being, and so this chapter will begin with a discussion of time in Heidegger’s work. It is well known that in *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts to explicate the sense of Being. Because the sense of Being is not a static essence but rather is itself the horizon within whose compass all meaning and sense are at issue for *Dasein*, we may say in anticipation that time *is* the deployment of a horizon of sense in the disclosure to *Dasein* of the truth of Being. If, as Heidegger describes it, the sense of Being occurs temporally as the unconcealment of truth in Being-in-the-world and if, as we have previously shown, truth as *a-lêtheia* involves a polemos of sense and meaning in the strife of Earth and World—and so of presence and absence, of sense and non-sense, of Being and Nothing—then we must say that time itself is polemical, that time constitutes the horizon for the *Auseinandersetzung* of the sense of Being.

Following this understanding of time as itself polemical, we recall the insight won at the end of the previous chapter, that the turning, the *Kehre*, does not merely describe a shift or reversal in Heidegger’s thought but indicates an essential and dynamic belonging-together of *Dasein* and Being in polemos. In the belonging-together of *Dasein* and Being as polemical antagonists in the

turning, the *sense* of the Being of Dasein's practices in Being-in-the-world, and the *meaning* of the beings disclosed in those practices, is fought out in an ongoing interpretation. In this chapter, we shall see that the working out of the turning between Being and Dasein in polemos constitutes both the temporal horizon of Being and the temporality of Dasein. Moreover, the movement of the turning corresponds to a circularity in Dasein's interpretative appropriation of its history.

This chapter will demonstrate that the way in which Being is polemical in time is through the setting-itself-to-work (*das Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen*) of sense and meaning, through the Aus-einander-setzung of Dasein's authentic encounter with its own ontological inception. After an overview of the place of time in Heidegger's thinking, we shall see here that the turning between Dasein and Being proves crucial to a discussion of how human beings, as Dasein, are involved in the temporality of Being's originary strife. This involvement of Dasein's temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) in the Temporality (*Temporalität*) of Being must be explicated as the ground for Heidegger's understanding of history and Dasein's historicity. It will be crucial to this discussion to show that, while Heidegger resists the label of historicist, he thinks that the sense of Being within which Dasein finds its Being-in-the-world is itself historical, and that the historicity of this Being is at issue for Dasein as a historical community. The central thesis of this chapter is that the way in which such history is at issue for Dasein is that Dasein as polemos comes into confrontation with Being as time, as the temporal horizon of understanding.

We shall explicate two formulations of Heidegger's attempt to address this confrontation with time and history. One consists in what Heidegger calls, starting in the mid-1920s, his own project for the destruction of the history of ontology. By the mid-1930s, Heidegger speaks instead of the confrontation between the first and the other inception of the history of Being (*die Auseinandersetzung des ersten und des anderen Anfangs der Geschichte des Seins*). In this second formulation, we shall be particularly interested in Heidegger's understanding of inception as *Anfang* and *arkhē*, and in how Dasein, in its polemos with Being, works as the locus through which this inception takes hold. We shall interpret the confrontation of the first and the other inception as a *revolution* in history in which past and future are originally turned and returned to the present. This taking hold of an inception of history in the Auseinandersetzung can best be understood as what Heidegger calls the Ereignis, the event of appropriation in which Dasein and Being are allotted to each other in a historical Being-in-the-world that defines an epoch.

### TIME IN BEING AND TIME

In a 1924 lecture, “The Concept of Time,” Heidegger said, “In anticipating, Dasein *is* its future, indeed, in such a manner that in this Being-futural it comes back into its past and present. Dasein, grasped in its uttermost possibility of Being, *is time itself*, not *in* time” (BZ, 19). Our task here is to understand how, just as Dasein *is* time, and Dasein *is* polemos, time itself is involved in the polemos of Dasein’s sense-making practices—that is, how time is polemos and polemos time. We must determine how a temporal confrontation penetrates Dasein’s existential structure.

Dasein’s temporality fills out the sense of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Temporality is what will ultimately explain the How of this Being-in-the-world, but not in terms of a time that can be measured on a clock or a historical time line. In *Being and Time*, what Heidegger calls care (*Sorge*) is the fulcrum between temporality and Dasein’s existence. As an ontological-existential determination, care describes Dasein’s everyday Being as always already out ahead of itself in its possibilities for Being, amid its involvements with the beings that it encounters in its activities in the world (SZ, 192). Having a horizon of possibilities given to it circumscribes Dasein’s existence, and this Being-ahead-of-itself in its possibilities involves Dasein’s projecting itself temporally.

Dasein is a being for whom, in its Being, this Being itself is at issue. This “is at issue” has been elucidated in the state of Being of understanding as the self-projecting Being toward its ownmost Being-able-to-be. This Being-able-to-be is that for the sake of which any Dasein is how it is. In each case, Dasein has already compared itself in its Being with a possibility for itself. Being free *for* one’s ownmost Being-able-to-be, and thereby for the possibility of authenticity and inauthenticity, shows itself with an originary, elemental concreteness in anxiety. Ontologically, Being toward one’s ownmost Being-able-to-be [that is, authenticity] means that Dasein is in each case already *ahead* of itself in its Being. Dasein is always already “beyond itself,” not as a comportment toward other beings that it is *not*, but rather as Being toward the Being-able-to-be that it itself is. [SZ, 191–92]

Dasein, in its Being, *is* its possibilities, its Being-able-to-be, and as such, Dasein is always out ahead of itself in these possibilities. Dasein “is at issue” for itself in this Being because this Being-able-to-be is always in question in relation to a horizon of possibilities for Dasein as mine, for my own “I am.” Care, as an existiale, most broadly describes the meaning of Dasein’s existential structure in Dasein’s own Being-at-issue for itself. Anxiety singles out each Dasein in its own Being-at-issue, such that, in its possibilities, Dasein is free either to seize

these as its own authentically, or to allow them to be chosen inauthentically for its Self by the They-Self. For reasons we have discussed in earlier chapters, this Self, the “Who” of Dasein’s existence, is not a free-floating subject that must make its way into the world; the Self is constituted by how Dasein does or does not appropriate the factual Being-in-the-world granted to it and that it essentially *is*. But as the Dasein analysis of *Being and Time*’s division 1 has shown, even if Dasein takes up this Being-at-issue-for-itself as its own in authentic Being-one’s-Self (*das eigentliche Selbstsein*), this is still only a *modification* of the Being handed over to Dasein by the involvements and possibilities handed down to it by the average everydayness of the tradition and the Being of the They-Self (see SZ, 130, 179, 268, 299, 371). A pianist preparing to perform a Mozart piano concerto, for example, can allow herself to be guided by how “they” have played this piece before, by what “they” in the audience expect to hear, by what the “they” of her parents, friends, and mentors hope for from her—and her performance will be inauthentic, even if technically dazzling. But even an authentic performance can come about only as a modification of the tradition of playing, performing, reciting, and so on, that she will somehow appropriate in her own way; authenticity cannot arise *ex nihilo*. Dasein’s entire Being is like this: it must forge its authenticity *within* and *as* its historically given Being.

The locus for temporality in Dasein’s everyday Being, which has been passed over though implicitly assumed in the analysis performed in division 1 of *Being and Time* (see SZ, 332), lies in Dasein’s having possibilities, in this Being-ahead-of-itself, whether as given by the They-Self and taken up blindly in inauthenticity, or as appropriated by Dasein’s own Self in authenticity. The central passage for this in *Being and Time* is section 65: “Temporality as the Ontological Sense of Care.” In its Being-in-the-world, whose sense has been revealed as care, Dasein understands possibilities onto which it projects its Being. Dasein projects its Being onto possibilities for involvements with beings. Dasein’s understanding projects an upon-which of interpretation onto an equipmental totality of beings that is revealed by the involvement with this projected Being. If I take up the possibility of hanging a painting, then beings (wall, nails, hammer) are revealed in their fore- and as-structure, and modes of Being (hammering, hanging, adjusting) are disclosed for my understanding, which projects ways of acting with this equipment.

Only in what Heidegger calls anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*) does Dasein take up its finite possibilities as authentically its own. Death confronts Dasein as the utter foreclosure of possibility. In confronting death authentically, Dasein understands that it must make possibilities for Be-

ing as its own; ignoring mortality gives rise to the existential illusion that the horizon of possibilities is infinite, never requiring a decision at the moment. In not fleeing death, Dasein can authentically bear that Being-able-to-be that is finitely its own. Precisely this anticipatory Being of resoluteness underlies Dasein's primordial temporality, *as* anticipating, as a mode of *projecting*, of *Being-toward*. "[Anticipatory resoluteness] is possible only in that Dasein *can*, at *all*, come toward itself in its ownmost possibility and endure this possibility as possibility in this letting-itself-come-toward-itself; that is to say, it exists. This letting-*come-toward*, which comes toward itself in enduring that distinctive possibility, is the originary phenomenon of the *future as coming-toward* [Zu-kunft]" (SZ, 325).

All temporality is grounded in Dasein's having possibilities, and this basis lends the future a certain priority: "*The primary phenomenon of originary and authentic time is the future*" (SZ, 329). Heidegger distinguishes this conception of the future from that of a continuous series of now-points: "'Futural' here does not mean a Now that, *not yet* having become 'real,' sometime first *will be*, but rather the coming [Kunft, playing on Zu-kunft—"future," literally, "coming toward"] in which Dasein comes toward [zukommt] itself in its ownmost Being-able-to-be" (SZ, 325). The primacy of the future means that Being-able-to-be opens up the full dimensions of Dasein's temporality. Thus, in respect to the past, "having-been [Gewesenheit] arises in a certain manner from the future" (SZ, 326). Only because Dasein is such a being whose own Being is at issue does its own having-been also become an issue as the ground for the future: our horizon of possibilities extends the trajectory of the past. Moreover: "Only insofar as Dasein *is* at all as I-*am*-having-been can it come toward itself futurally such that it comes *back*. Authentically futural, Dasein *is* authentically *having-been*" (SZ, 326). The having-been of Dasein allows the future as coming toward (as Zu-kunft) to come "back" from its futural projection. To take our example of the pianist again, if she struggles to prepare a performance authentically, her Being projects itself into this future recital, but this future also comes back to her in the present of her preparing, and, most important, it draws forth the pianist's having-been, for to be authentic, she must confront the history of interpretations of this piece, her own training, her previous experiences as a performer, and so on.

Dasein's Being-futural also constitutes Dasein's Being-present. Dasein's making present (*Gegenwärtigen*) takes place in a context where beings become accessible to it through the projection of Dasein's own active and absorbed involvement with them. Hence: "existence, in acting, concerns itself circumspec-

tively with the factually and environmentally ready to hand” (SZ, 326). Dasein’s Being-present allows it to encounter ready-to-hand beings disclosed by its futural projecting. “The resolute Being-amongst the ready to hand of the Situation—that is to say, an acting that allows for the encountering of what *comes to presence* environmentally [*das handelnde Begegnenlassen des umweltlich Anwesenden*—is possible only in a *making-present* of these beings” (SZ, 326). The present is not a naked now-point moving from past now-points to future ones, but rather the nexus of Dasein’s having-been and its coming-toward-itself in the understanding of its own Being-able-to-be.

Past, present, and future are existential components of Dasein’s Being as having-been, making present, and coming toward. Heidegger has explained care as Dasein’s “ahead-of-itself-already-Being-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (beings encountered within the world)” (SZ, 192). Now Heidegger reinterprets this structure of care temporally: “The ahead-of-itself is grounded in the future. The already-Being-in announces in itself the having-been. The Being-amongst is made possible in the making present” (SZ, 327). The unity of these temporal dimensions of Dasein makes its existential Being possible. Indeed, Heidegger defines temporality in a passage in which he insists on this unity: “Having-been arises from the future, and in such a manner that the future that has been [*gewesene*] (or better, that *is* as having been [*besser gewesende*]) releases the present from itself. This unitary phenomenon portrayed as the future that as Being-past makes present [*gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*] we designate *temporality*” (SZ, 326). As this unitary phenomenon, Dasein’s temporality cannot be conceived of as a thing that a historian must overcome to “get at” the past, or a time traveler to “get to” the future. “Temporality ‘is’ not a being at all” (SZ, 328). Rather, temporality describes *how* Dasein exists in the world.

Heidegger now calls each of these temporal dimensions (past, present, future) in this one phenomenon an *ecstasis*. “Future, having-been, and present [*Gegenwart*] display the phenomenal character of the ‘toward-itself,’ the ‘back-to’ and the ‘allowing-to-be-encountered-by.’ The phenomena of the toward-, the to-, and the amongst- reveal temporality as the *ekstatikon* pure and simple. *Temporality is the originary ‘outside-of-itself’ in and for itself.* Thus we call the phenomena so characterized as future, having-been, and present the *ecstases* of temporality” (SZ, 328–29). In its ecstatic temporality, Dasein stands out (in the sense of the Greek roots of *ek-stasis*) from itself. Ecstatic temporality fills out the sense of Dasein’s transcendence, characterized in division 1 as ex-(s)istence, also a standing-out-of-itself. Dasein’s ecstatic temporality explains something about what it means to be, something that the ontologically naïve interpreta-

tion of Being understands as simple extantness: How is it that a thing, a being, can be present, “exist”? The naïve understanding asserts that real beings can be discovered and come into our presence simply because they exist independently in a real realm that we, in time, can explore; the past, present, and future are time points at which beings are extant when the “now” encounters them as “present.” Ecstatic temporality, however, means that for something to be meaningful to us, it must come to presence in the temporal projection of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world.

Anticipatory resoluteness provides the key to the futural meaning of Dasein’s authentic Being-toward-death, and in anticipatory resoluteness, we also have a key to the polemical meaning of temporality. Just now, we stated that temporality explains the How of both Dasein’s existence and beings’ coming to presence for Dasein. The accessibility, the openness, of beings to Dasein’s understanding, we have discussed as the *altheia* of truth. We have also seen that this unconcealment of the truth is not a static revelation of an objective reality; rather, Dasein’s polemos with Being in the Kehre kindles an ongoing strife of meaning. Dasein is that being whose Being is at issue for itself in that the meaning of beings, the as-structure—and indeed the entirety of the sense of Being-in-the-world—is interpretatively at issue for Dasein as the *Da* for Being in the turning. As we have interpreted Dasein’s existential understanding as polemical, so we can now show that Dasein’s authentic temporality is polemical as well.

The classic passage on Dasein’s anticipatory resoluteness lies in section 62 of *Being and Time*. We have already briefly discussed Being-toward-death as the existential ground for anticipatory resoluteness: in Division Two of *Being and Time*, Heidegger seeks the Being-a-whole of Dasein’s existential structure. In section 62, he writes: “The nullity that reigns through Dasein’s Being unveils itself to Dasein itself in authentic Being-toward-death. Anticipation reveals Being-guilty only on the ground of the *whole* Being of Dasein. Care contains death and guilt equiprimordially in itself. Being-able-to-be-guilty is understood *authentically and wholly*, which is to say *originarily*, only in anticipatory resoluteness” (SZ, 306). Guilt and death here are not things or ontic states (as is religious, psychological, or legal guilt, or physical death), but rather ontological aspects of Dasein’s existentiality as care. Being-able-to-be-guilty and Being-toward-death define the boundaries of Dasein’s finitude. If we understand these boundaries as a horizon of possibility within which Dasein has its Being-in-the-world, then Being-guilty describes the facticity into which Dasein always already finds itself thrown. Dasein always already finds itself with a Being-in-



the-world and horizon of possibility assigned to it. Guilt defines the finitude and the inescapable givenness (the “nullity,” as Heidegger calls it) of Dasein’s past. Death, by contrast, confronts Dasein as that possibility which cannot be outstripped and which ends all possibility. Death defines Dasein’s futural finitude. Yet guilt also applies to the future, for Dasein’s authentic existence in choosing to own its given past is bound up with taking responsibility for choosing one possibility for the future over others, thereby confronting the limitation imposed on the future by mortality. Together, guilt and death make up Dasein’s finite, existential Being-a-whole: “Resoluteness first understands the ‘can’ of Being-able-to-be-guilty only when it ‘qualifies’ itself as Being-toward-death” (SZ, 306).

Heidegger recognizes an authentic Being-guilty. He calls it wanting-to-have-a-conscience (*Gewissen-haben-wollen*); the call of conscience draws Dasein out of the They-Self into the possibilities for Being that it can make its own (SZ, 272). Authentically guilty Dasein takes up as its own the world as it is given, but without simply surrendering to average everydayness. Authentic Being-guilty thus pertains to Dasein’s having-been, but as we have seen, the future has priority in ecstatic temporality. Dasein’s Being-futural governs its Being-past: “[The call of conscience] is a calling-forth (and ‘-forward’) of Dasein, as a summons to its ownmost Being-able-to-be-its-Self, to its ownmost possibilities” (SZ, 273).

The “forward” of the call of conscience and the “toward” of Being-toward-death point to the futural Being of *anticipatory* resoluteness. Anticipation does not refer to some psychological state of anxious expectation. In German, *Vorlaufen*, what we render here as “anticipation,” means literally “running forward.”<sup>1</sup> Heidegger uses *Vorlaufen* to designate Dasein’s authentic Being-futural: “This indicates that Dasein, authentically existing, lets itself come toward itself as its ownmost Being-able-to-be, that the future must first win itself, not from its present, but rather from the inauthentic future” (SZ, 336–37). Anticipation is opposed to the awaiting (*Gewärten*) of inauthentic Being-futural that merely allows possibilities to flow over Dasein in the temporal current of average everydayness. In anticipation, Dasein “wins” its possibilities as its own; it does this in resoluteness. Precisely in this winning-its-Self resides the polemos of Dasein’s temporality. But the winning is never over; it is always at issue in Dasein’s strife with Being.

Once again: “resoluteness” does not mean an unflinching attitude or disposition of character. English translation is particularly difficult here. *Entschlossenheit* does indeed mean resoluteness and decisiveness in ordinary Ger-

man, but in the context of *Being and Time*, we should be alive to the distinct echo of this term with *Erschlossenheit*, the dis-closedness whereby beings are first given to Dasein in the projection of the involvements of its Being-able-to-be. Disclosedness brings Dasein into the truth of its understanding Being-in-the-world. The echo suggests that resoluteness is anything but a closing off of Dasein's possibilities. "With the phenomenon of resoluteness we are led before the originary *truth* of existence. Dasein is unveiled to itself as resolved in its temporally particular factual Being-able-to-be, such that it itself *is* this unveiling and Being-unveiled" (SZ, 307). Resoluteness demands an ongoing openness to winning as one's own the possibilities given by the past and projected into the future. Heidegger argues that this appropriation requires a Being-certain (*Gewißsein*) as to "what resoluteness discloses [*was Entschlossenheit erschließt*]." But that the Being-certain of anticipatory resoluteness wins its own future most emphatically does not mean that it seizes on one existentiell possibility and remains stubbornly "certain" of it, come what may: "The Situation does not allow itself to be reckoned up and given over in advance like something present-at-hand that expects some survey. It is disclosed only in a free, beforehand undetermined self-resolving that is open to determination. *What then does the certainty that belongs to this resoluteness mean?* It must hold itself in what has been disclosed in the resolve. But this means that this certainty precisely cannot *rigidify* itself in respect to the Situation; rather, it must understand that the resolve, according to its own sense of disclosure, must be *held open* and free for temporally particular, factual possibility. The certainty of resolve means *holding-itself-free* for its possible and indeed factically necessary *taking back*" (SZ, 307–8).

By "Situation" here, Heidegger means the whole horizon of factual involvements for Dasein's Being-able-to-be that is disclosed by Dasein's Being-resolved (SZ, 299–300). Because the horizon of the Situation is never at Dasein's disposal but rather is given over to Dasein by Being, Dasein's Being-certain means its remaining open to the temporal disposition of this Situation. Such a certainty, as a way of Being, does not mean that Dasein falls into irresoluteness as a kind of weakness of the will, unable to cleave to its decisions. Resoluteness as *not being rigid* means that Dasein holds itself open to the polemos of Being with the context, both ontic and ontological (the There), of Dasein's Situation. What anticipatory resoluteness is certain of is its own openness to an ongoing winning of, and so an ongoing strife over, the sense of its own future.

So, in the Being-certain of anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein does not seize upon one single existentiell possibility as irrevocable. To do so, to ignore that

Being holds sway over the Situation by arrogating this power to Dasein, might be characterized as ontological hubris. Dasein's winning its own future emphatically does not mean the imposition of the will by a subject striving to mold an external and alien reality by seizing control of the historical horizons of its own Being; such transcendent mastery lies beyond Dasein's finite power—if not beyond its overweening ambition. But opposition to the notion that anticipatory resoluteness is weak or vacillating, Heidegger writes: “On the contrary: this holding-for-true as resolved holding-itself-free for taking back is the *authentic resoluteness to the repetitive retrieval of itself*” (SZ, 308). In anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein faces its own finitude, as Being-guilty and especially as Being-toward-death, and resolves to a continuous strife to wrest its own meaning and possibilities from Being. Indeed, being resigned to one's own finitude, accepting one's mortality as Being-toward-death, demands ongoing polemos precisely because the horizons of meaning can never be fully exposed and illuminated. Absent such total enlightenment guaranteeing a certain control over objective nature (if only as a projected ideal), Dasein must always struggle with the given world to make sense of its own existence; loosely speaking, to forget our finitude is to forget our humanity—as both our most profound disability and our most essential calling. This means, rather than seizing upon one path into the future on the basis of a final decision about the meaning of one's past, constantly holding open the meaning of the future and its possibilities on the basis of an ongoing interpretative reflection on what has been given by the past. In contrast to mere rigid decision, this resolve to be open to one's own possibilities for Being need not lapse into hubris, because what Dasein appropriates from average everydayness as authentically its own is a Self whose contours are still granted by Being, not erected subjectively. Facing finitude in authentic Being-toward-death supposedly both negates any arrogant tendency of Dasein to presume itself the source of its existential possibilities and opens Dasein up to a grateful appropriation of the horizon of Being given to it.

Anticipatory resoluteness constitutes Dasein's authentic futural temporality. Having-been and the present also have their authentic temporality. In the case of the present, Heidegger calls this the *moment of vision*: “To the anticipation of resoluteness there belongs a present, in measure with which a resolve discloses the Situation. In resoluteness, the present is not only brought back out of the distracted dispersal amid what is most nearly of concern but, rather, is also held in the future and past. The present that is held in authentic temporality and consequently is *authentic* we call the *moment of vision*. This term must be un-

derstood in the active sense as an ecstasis. It means the resolved rapture [*Entrückung*] of Dasein that carries Dasein off to that which is encountered in the Situation in possibilities and circumstances presented to Dasein's concern, but a rapture that is *held* in resoluteness" (SZ, 338). The moment of vision (*Augenblick*), as authentic present, cannot be understood in terms of a "now" in which beings array themselves about us as present and extant; on the contrary, it pulls Dasein out of its fascinated everyday concern with what is closest to us. In the Augenblick, literally a "blink of the eye," Dasein understands and gathers in, "sees," the There of its Situation in such a manner that its own possibilities for Being, as given by its Being-guilty and Being-toward-death, illumine what is present for it as both ready to hand and present-at-hand in its everyday involvements and possibilities. The moment of vision en-visions a present in which, not beings themselves, but rather the *way* in which beings come-to-presence as meaningful for Dasein can be appropriated authentically. Our pianist, playing the concerto she has prepared so carefully, exists in the present as the moment of vision if, in her playing, she interprets the music in such a way that it remains Mozart and yet also becomes her own; as a series of notes, the music is the same; only her Being is authentically transformed.

Just as the authentic present turns on the authentic appropriation of one of the temporal ecstases, so, too, is repetitive retrieval an authentic appropriation of Dasein's having-been: "The authentic coming-toward-itself of anticipatory resoluteness is at the same time a coming back to one's ownmost Self, thrown into its individuation. This ecstasis makes it possible that Dasein, as resolved, can take over the being that it already is. In anticipating, Dasein *retrieves* itself *again forth* into its ownmost Being-able-to-be. We call authentic *Being*-having-been *repetitive retrieval*" (SZ, 339). Again, futural temporality, as the ecstasis of Dasein's Being-able-to-be its possibilities, governs Dasein's authentic past. *Wiederholung* is rendered here as "repetitive retrieval" because neither 'repetition' nor 'retrieval' does full justice to this key term in Heidegger's existential lexicon. As an ontological dimension of Dasein's temporality, *Wiederholung* neither merely duplicates the past in a repetitive reenactment nor hauls some lost treasure out of a forgotten time in a restorative retrieval. As the authentic appropriation of Dasein's own Being-guilty, repetitive retrieval constitutes the authentic temporality of Dasein's having-been. In Being-at-issue for itself in anticipatory resoluteness, Dasein also must "take over" the Being of its own Being-guilty, its having-been-thrown into the possibilities of its Being-in-the-world. What Dasein then retrieves and repeats is not the ontic content of some

bygone era, or even the attitude and sensibility of such an age. Dasein instead retrieves the How of its own having-been, a *way* of confronting the meaning of the past, in the present, for the sake of the future.

Returning to what we have learned in earlier chapters, we recall that in addressing the ontological question of *how* Dasein is, rather than the ontic question of *what* Dasein is, this How is interpreted as Dasein's Being-at-issue-for-itself in its possibilities. This Being-at-issue-for-itself, in turn, gets deployed in Dasein's understanding of its existential Being-in-the-world. This deployment, finally, we have interpreted as polemos, the strife and Auseinandersetzung, between Dasein and Being, both in regard to how the sense of this Being-in-the-world gets understood and how the beings encountered within it get interpreted. The How of Dasein *happens* in the polemical deployment of sense, meaning, and understanding. Dasein's temporality further elucidates the How of this polemical happening. We now have a fuller grasp of how Dasein's having possibilities underlies its temporality—or rather, of how Dasein's temporality is the primordial foundation of any Being-able-to-be. That Dasein *is* its possibilities must now be connected to our understanding that Dasein *is* time and that Dasein *is* polemos. In its temporality, Dasein works out its possibilities in the polemos with Being.

Only in authentic temporality does Dasein confront its possibilities as its own. This suggests that while polemos takes place as the originary mode of Dasein's temporality and Being, it can be passed over in favor of the inauthentic temporality of everydayness that rigidly maintains itself, and that thus, precisely, does not find its own Being at issue. What is at issue then for resolute Dasein are possibilities—questions, as it were, posed to Dasein's Being-futural by the call of conscience—that Dasein must take up again as its own. And while the language of polemos is not evident in the discussion of repetitive retrieval, as it was in the passage on resolve's not rigidifying itself in anticipatory resoluteness, still, for Dasein to hold itself open to its own having-been, it must also engage in a constant confrontation over the meaning of its past. Again, this polemical way of Being-futural-as-having-been does not mean plucking insights from the past for use now; rather, it involves confronting the past as a mode of the authentic present's strife over the sense of its own Being-futural. Otherwise, even given the most scrupulous academic historiography, Dasein will forget the futural task of its having-been and lapse into a mere idolatry of the past that allows one's authentic Self to be inundated by the They-Self. The future is the decisive temporal dimension here: only in confronting the meaning of its own future does Dasein engage in a polemos with its Being as given by

its past. To the extent that Dasein is time, Da-sein is also polemos. But Dasein never confronts its temporality in isolation as an individual.

#### HISTORY IN BEING AND TIME

The notion of repetitive retrieval brings us to the question of history. So far, we have discussed Dasein's temporality as if Dasein were an isolated individual. Each Dasein, immersed in the Being-there of the "I am," exists in such a way that it *is* its possibilities, its Being-able-to-be. To recapitulate: the possibilities that Dasein *is* are given to Dasein by a past and projected into a future, and thus they impinge on the involvements of a present. Heidegger writes: "Dasein does not exist as a sum of momentary realities of experiences that come forward, follow on one another, and disappear" (SZ, 374). This much we might have gathered from the ecstatic nature of temporality. Rather than skipping from present-at-hand now-point to now-point, existential Dasein "stretches itself along" through the projections of its temporal ecstases (SZ, 374). This stretching along (*Erstreckung*) describes how Dasein exists ecstatically in the span in which Dasein resides *between* its Being-thrown into Being-guilty by birth and its Being-futural in Being-toward-death (SZ, 373). "As care, Dasein *is* the 'between'" (SZ, 374). For Heidegger, Dasein's historicity, its Being-historical, is bound up with this spanned stretching along: "The specific movedness of the *stretched-out stretching-itself-along* we call the *historicizing* [*Geschehen*] of Dasein. The question about Dasein's 'context' is the ontological problem of its historicizing. Laying out the *structure of historicizing* and the existential-temporal conditions of its possibility means winning an *ontological* understanding of *historicity* [*Geschichtlichkeit*]" (SZ, 375). When discussing "historicizing" in Heidegger, it is important to keep in mind that this is a *historical happening*. Heidegger draws on the etymological closeness of *Geschehen* ("historical happening"—rendered here as "historicizing") and *Geschichte* (history) for his understanding of the "between" of the stretched spannedness of Dasein's temporality as *Geschichtlichkeit*, a term rendered as 'historicity.'

Dasein's historicity, its stretching-itself-along through the unity of its temporal ecstases out into its possibilities, underpins the constancy of Dasein's Self, what Heidegger identifies here as the problem of the "Who" of Dasein (SZ, 375). Dasein's Self is not an isolated, individual monad that happens to enter into time. "The analysis of the historicity of Dasein attempts to show that this being is not 'temporal' because it 'stands in history' but, on the contrary, that it exists historically and can exist only because it is temporal in the ground of its

Being" (SZ, 376; emphasis removed). Dasein's historicizing grants unity to the spannedness of the ek-stasis of the "I am" into past, present, and future, whether or not this is constituted by the They-Self or through an appropriated modification of the They-Self by the authentic Self. Existentially understood, history is not a neutral field within which events and Dasein may "stand" as present-at-hand beings, arranged across the now-points of the time line. History is possible only for that being, Dasein, for whom its own temporal Being is polemically at issue. Living beings other than Dasein, or natural events, may occur "in time" (SZ, 376–77); we may even develop "natural histories" for them, but the telling or writing of such histories is possible only for the kind of being that has Dasein's historicity.

For our purposes, the critical passages concerning Dasein's historicity are to be found in section 74, "The Basic Constitution of Historicity." It makes some sense, if we take history as it is ordinarily understood, to think that if Dasein *is* its possibilities, then Dasein's history, the past and heritage that have been factually given to it, decisively constitutes the horizon for Dasein's Being. This helps us to get at Heidegger's meaning, but we must bear in mind that *historicity*, which as an ontological determination of Dasein is not the same as history and heritage, does not just include the temporal ecstasis of the past. Historicity is made possible by Dasein's temporality, which is primarily *futural*. Only in the authentic future of Being-toward-death does Dasein then appropriate as its own what is handed down by historical tradition: "Once grasped, the finitude of existence tears [Dasein] back from the endless multiplicity of the most proximate possibilities—of taking comfort, of taking things lightly, of making oneself scarce—which offer themselves, and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate* [*seines Schicksals*]. With this we indicate the originary historicizing of Dasein that lies in authentic resoluteness, and in which Dasein *hands* itself *over* [überliefert] to itself as free for death in an inherited, and yet at the same time chosen, possibility" (SZ, 384). *Überlieferung* means "tradition" in German, but we must hear this word broadly, not just as "inherited customs." Literally a delivering over, a handing down, the *Überlieferung* passes on the existential horizons of Dasein's having-been. In fate, Dasein takes over what has been handed down to it by tradition, but it does so existentially.

In his use of the term "fate," Heidegger does not mean some mystically determined future that "must" befall someone; this would be merely an ontic understanding of the matter. "Fate does not first arise through the collision of circumstances and occurrences. Even someone unresolved will be driven about by

these—and more so than one who has chosen—and yet can ‘have’ no fate” (SZ, 384). Fate is not a determinate ontic role or series of events that have been preordained by chance or divinity for someone, but rather it is an *existentiell* mode of Dasein’s historicity. Heidegger plays on the resonance between *Schicksal* and *Geschichte*. Both imply a sending, a *Schickung*, carried by the momentum of Dasein’s historical happening. In its historicizing, Dasein has been “sent” a horizon of possibilities. In inauthenticity, Dasein retreats into the fascinating nearness of the everydayness given to it, as if the horizon of its possibilities were infinite and not at issue. Only when Dasein faces its mortality in the polemos of authentic temporality can it seize its own Being-able-to-be and “have” a fate as well as a tradition that is its own. Fate, as an allotment, allocates the horizons for Dasein’s Being-able-to-be, not events and circumstances as somehow decided ahead of time. As nothing determinate, fate bears forward the authentic polemos of what is at issue for Dasein’s Being in its own historicity.

Fate then determines how Dasein confronts the individuality of its own historicity. But this misses something of what even the common understanding of history conveys: that for us as historical beings, our individual fates are bound up in the context and momentum of something that is more than just individually our own. Individual fate is embedded in a world of meaning shared with others:

If fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in the Being-with with Others, its historicizing is a historicizing-with [*Mitgeschehen*] and determined as *destiny* [*Geschick*]. With this we indicate the historicizing of a community, of a people [*der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes*]. Destiny does not put itself together out of individual fates, any more so than Being-with-one-another can be conceived of as an occurring together of several subjects. Fates are already guided from the outset in Being-with-one-another in the same world and in the resoluteness for determinate possibilities. In communication and in struggle the power of destiny first becomes free. The fateful destiny of Dasein in and with its “generation” makes up the full, authentic historicizing of Dasein. [SZ, 384–85]

This passage is absolutely pivotal for the interpretation we are advancing concerning Dasein’s polemical temporality and historicity in *Being and Time*, as well as for our further discussions of polemos and politics. In respect to the former, the passage provides one of the few instances in *Being and Time* where Heidegger explicitly discusses the polemical nature of Dasein’s Being and so provides evidence that we have not arbitrarily imposed our interpretation of



the polemos of Dasein's temporality and historicity, largely implicit in *Being and Time*, on Heidegger's thinking.

*Geschick* (destiny) is etymologically very close to *Schicksal* (fate), and so both resonate with the sense of the "sending" (*schicken*) of *Geschichte* (history). The prefix *Ge-* in German usually implies a kind of unity that gathers together various aspects of one phenomenon. To use Joan Stambaugh's example, *Gebirge* means a mountain range as an integrated assembly of various individual mountains, *Berge*.<sup>2</sup> Dasein does not carry out its Being-in-the-world in isolation. The possibilities that each individual Dasein may or may not authentically appropriate in its own fateful historicity are bound up with the possibilities for Being that are given by the particular historical community into which Dasein is thrown by birth or circumstance. Individual Dasein does not first choose to "enter" into a historical community in which these individual fates are then added together to form a communal destiny, as if Dasein were a free-floating subject with its own individual fate conveniently in tow and at its disposal. Rather, because Dasein is always already a Being-with-others in Being-in-the-world, individual "fates are already guided from the outset in Being-with-one-another in the same world" by destiny.

This brings us to the pivotal sentence: "In communication [*Mitteilung*] and in struggle [*Kampf*] the power of destiny first becomes free."<sup>3</sup> Just before this passage, Heidegger writes, "If Dasein, in anticipating, lets death become powerful in itself, it understands itself, free for death, in its own *superior power* of its finite freedom, in order that in this freedom—which only ever 'is' in the having-been-chosen of choice—it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment for itself and become clear-seeing for the accidents of the disclosed Situation" (SZ, 384). Fate, then, will somehow empower the moment of vision such that Dasein can appropriate its present that otherwise seems to oppress it as mere historical accident. Some might read the use of "power" in this passage as an instance of the earlier Heidegger's failure, before the turn, to escape completely from the metaphysics of subjectivity: Dasein is still conceived of in terms of a power it may wield over Being, and so the Heidegger of 1933–34 is seduced into thinking that Dasein might assume power over its political fate as a historical people. But if we think of *Macht* (power) and *mächtig* (powerful) in this passage as noun and adjectival forms of the same root as *mögen* (may) and *Möglichkeit* (possibility), just as in English, the same Indo-European roots underlie the verbal form "may" and the noun "might,"<sup>4</sup> then we can interpret "power" as the enabling, the appropriating as authentic possibility, of Dasein's

own possibilities for Being. Dasein does not assume some hubristic will to power here; it is mortality that becomes powerful *for* Dasein *if* Dasein resolutely faces its Being-toward-death. Death then frees Dasein for its own possibilities and thereby enables (*empowers*) the “finite freedom” of Dasein’s seizing its possibilities for Being authentically. Such a power in finitude is “superior” to Dasein’s abandonment to an inauthentic “powerlessness” in an average everydayness that is merely handed over to Dasein in its possibilities by the They. The becoming “free” of “power of destiny” means that Dasein must enter into a polemos with its own history to open up the enabling power of the possibilities of Being inherent in Dasein’s given tradition. As such, the confrontation with fate as the thrown projection of Dasein’s historical Being need not be the imposition of a subjectivistic will upon history.

But the freeing of the power of fate happens “in communication and struggle.” This suggests that the sending of fate is itself polemical. *Mit-teilung*, communication as sharing-with, compliments the *Mit-einandersein*, the Being-with-one-another, of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. “Communication” here depends on Heidegger’s understanding of language, about which we will have much more to say in relation to polemos in Chapter Four. Heidegger discusses communication in an earlier chapter in division I on assertion and interpretation: “[Communication (*Mitteilung*)] is a letting-someone-see-with [*Mitsehenlassen*] us what has been pointed out in the manner of determining it. The letting-someone-see-with shares with [*teilt mit*] the Other a being pointed out in its determinateness. What is ‘shared’ is the seeing in common that is a *Being toward* what has been pointed out—a Being toward that must be thought of as Being-in-the-world, in *the* world, that is, from out of which what is pointed out gets encountered” (SZ, 155).

Discourse, as an ontological mode of language, is a way that Dasein points out to other Dasein specific beings for its involvement with them in Being-in-the-world. Communication requires that we share a determinate world, and a Being-in-the-world, with other Dasein: “The sharing with one another [*Mit-einander-teilen*] of the same world in this relation of absorption in [our concerned dealings with beings and the world]—first enables *communication* [*Mitteilung*].”<sup>5</sup> Only within this ontological sharing (*mit-teilen*) of a world can we communicate (*mitteilen*) in a manner that makes sense. Communication, as a further mode of discourse, then, is a basic existential mode of our Being-with other Dasein in a shared community and as a historical people. Only because Dasein can share, in communication with other Dasein, the beings that it en-

counters and the Being that is disclosed in the practical involvements of its Being-in-the-world, can anything like a common existence come into and stay in Being—and share a destiny.

But the way we interpret beings and the way beings encounter us is a matter of ongoing polemical strife between Being and Dasein, and so: “In communication *and in struggle* the power of destiny first becomes free.” Neither the fate of individual Dasein nor the destiny of historical peoples encounters Being-in-the-world as a static field of meaning and sense within which it has the “power” and the “freedom” to carve out whatever possibilities it chooses. Authentic Dasein always finds its own Being at issue in the polemical interpretation of its historical existence; inauthentic Dasein finds nothing at issue in its history and so retreats into an ontological comfort—even if, on purely existentiell terms, Dasein is miserable and oppressed.

But this sentence that we have singled out as so pivotal is also frustratingly sparse. What is the significance of the “and” linking communication and struggle, for example? Does it imply that the struggle is an aspect of communication? This might be understood by what we have just said about the polemical disclosure of beings and possibilities for Being that is shared in Being-with other Dasein. And yet, does Dasein “struggle” with other Dasein within its own community to free this communal fate, or must peoples struggle with other peoples, or perhaps with Being itself as the locus of sense, meaning, and possibility? Heidegger leaves us with little to go on in *Being and Time*. Given the tenor of the passage, which discusses fate and Dasein’s Being-with other Dasein in a historical community, it would seem that the most likely interpretation is the following: although a historical people is not identical with the mere sum of its individual members, still the Being-in-the-world that individual Dasein share as a people will not be homogeneous for all members of the community. The people is only the condition for the possibility of the shared communication of meaning, and interpretations must still be worked out and struggled over. This suggests that a people may die ontologically—that is to say, lose its Being-at-issue for itself in a destiny—when the sharing of meaning ceases to be polemical. When a people ceases to confront the meaning of its own history *as a people*, it can no longer support a destiny that is communally at issue. The polemical conversation then lapses either into chaotic babble or into homogeneous conformity and agreement. Authentic confrontation with destiny can no longer even arise. This is the sense in which Heidegger later says, as we have seen, that as *Auseinandersetzung*, “polemos and logos are the same” (*EM*, 47);

to remain vital, the meaning of one's world, and the meaning shared by a historical community, must constantly be exposed in confrontation.

This interpretation of communication and struggle is strengthened by what Heidegger says about historicity and the repetitive retrieval. "The resoluteness that comes back to itself and that hands itself down then becomes the *repetitive retrieval* of a possibility of existence that has come down to us. *Repetitive retrieval is explicit handing down*, and this means the going back into possibilities of Dasein that has-been-there" (SZ, 385). So far, this is entirely in accord with what we have learned about repetitive retrieval in temporality, and it also expands on its import for Dasein's historicity: what is to be repeated in the retrieval is not a past set of circumstances, past occurrences, or even past Dasein, but rather the polemical Being-at-issue of possibilities that *exist* as having-been. What comes next bears directly on repetitive retrieval as polemical: "Authentic repetitive retrieval of a possibility of existence that has been—that Dasein choose its hero—is existentially grounded in anticipatory resoluteness; for in this, first and foremost, the choice is taken that makes one free for the following and loyalty that struggles for what is to be repetitively retrieved" (SZ, 385). The striking interpolation "that Dasein choose its hero" poses difficulties for interpretation, given its sudden irruption in the text with little elaboration. That Heidegger speaks of retrieving a possibility of existence indicates that in having a hero, we do not simply mimic the character or deeds of a historical figure. Instead, we share that Dasein's past existential confrontation with a *Being-at-issue* that remains at issue, and so *present*, for us. But this means that Dasein, to be authentic, cannot learn from its hero what *determinate* existentiell actions to take. Thus, the choice of a hero "makes one free for the following and loyalty that struggles *for what is to be repetitively retrieved*," and not for following a person. In struggling, loyalty to the past does not mean imitating a heroic person or actions: "Rather, the repetitive retrieval *returns a rejoinder* [*erwidert*] to the possibility of the existence that has-been-there" (SZ, 386).

So, despite the importance of the repetitive retrieval of the How of Dasein's past, this retrieval would have no sense apart from serving as a moment in Dasein's confrontation with its own possibilities for Being. Fate then is bound up with Dasein's special orientation to the future: "If fate constitutes the originary historicity of Dasein, then history has its essential weight neither in the past nor in the today and today's 'connection' with the past, but rather in the authentic historicizing of existence, which arises from the *future* of Dasein" (SZ, 386). All authentic polemical confrontation with the past must in some decisive

sense be in the service of Dasein's future as a dimension of time that itself confronts us in the present. "In repetitive retrieval, fateful destiny can be expressly disclosed in respect to its being bound up in a heritage that has come down to us" (SZ, 386). "Fateful destiny" binds together the Being-futural of individual and communal Dasein; the two together struggle for the meaning of the future out of the inheritance of the possibilities handed down by their historical tradition. This implies that Heidegger himself must have understood his own polemos with the meaning of the history of Being to have more than a merely personal, scholarly significance: his individual fate as a thinker must be linked to the destiny of that thinking, because for Heidegger, the thinking of the history of Being *is* the history of the West.

### DESTRUCTION AND POLEMICAL HISTORICITY

The interpretation of Dasein's Being-at-issue-for-itself in its temporality and historicity *as polemical* lends insight into an important concept in Heidegger's methodology: what he calls destruction (*Destruktion*), or sometimes dismantling (*Abbau*). Our analysis here will be crucial for our later treatment of "deconstruction" in postmodernism, especially in Derrida. In a 1969 seminar, Heidegger insists that destruction "must be understood rigorously as *de-struere* [Latin: 'to tear down something built'], as dismantling deconstruction [*Ab-bauen*], and not as a laying to waste" (VS, 75). It would be hard to underestimate the influence of these concepts on a wide spectrum of postmodernist and deconstructive theory in the late twentieth century. But what we want to show next is that these concepts of demolishing and negation constitute a crucial aspect of Heidegger's own *positive polemos* with history—in this case, the history of Being itself. We shall then see that this polemical demolition constitutes Heidegger's attempt at his own repetitive retrieval of an inception for authentic historicizing. In section 6 of the first introduction to *Being and Time*, Heidegger speaks of a destruction of the history of ontology as necessary for freeing up the question of Being. While we cannot pursue the details of this destruction of ontology in terms of the specific account Heidegger gives of the history of Being, we can examine how this destruction, as a dismantling *deconstruction*, constitutes the explicit *method* of Heidegger's phenomenology and, consequently, how the destruction, in that it is polemical, means that "de(con)structive" phenomenology is itself polemos.

One of the most important passages on destruction lies in section 5 of the introduction to his 1927 lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.

Here, Heidegger identifies three aspects of the phenomenological method: reduction, construction, and destruction.<sup>6</sup> Phenomenology is the apprehending of the meaning of Being as a question through the formal exposition of Being in its existential structures. But Being is always the Being of a being. Phenomenological reduction, then, describes the analytic of some being (for example, Dasein) which is then led back, in the Latin sense of the *re-ductio*, to the question of the meaning of Being: “The basic component of the phenomenological method, in the sense of the leading back [*Rückführung*] of the investigative vision from the naïvely grasped being to Being, we designate as *phenomenological reduction*” (*GA* 24, 29). Heidegger notes that the reduction is “not even the central component of the phenomenological method” (*GA* 24, 29). Having been led away *from* beings, we must still be led *to* Being.

This idea brings Heidegger to destruction as the component of the phenomenological method that corresponds to the ecstasis of the past. “The consideration of Being takes beings as its starting point. This start is obviously always determined through the factual experience of beings and the range of possibilities for experience that are appropriate always to a factual Dasein, that is, to the historical context of a philosophical investigation” (*GA* 24, 30). Dasein’s having-been necessarily impinges on how a given hermeneutic Situation gets interpreted. Because of Dasein’s historicity, “already in antiquity, an average conception of Being established itself, a conception that was applied to the interpretation of all beings of the various realms of Being and the modes of Being of these realms, while Being itself could not specifically and expressly be raised and delimited as a problem” (*GA* 24, 30).

In this “average conception of Being,” operative at least since Plato, the ontological difference has been forgotten, and Being has been interpreted as a being. The history of Being then makes it very difficult for Dasein to complete the movement of the reduction to the construction of Being. This hardening of the tradition, in a way that impedes the question of Being, demands that we loosen the tradition up: “The store of basic philosophical concepts out of the philosophical tradition is today still so much in effect, that this effective working out of the tradition can hardly be underestimated. Thus all philosophical discussion, even the most radical and newly inceptive, is pervaded by handed-down concepts, and therefore by handed-down horizons and perspectives that we cannot simply assume to have sprung up originally and genuinely from the region of Being and the constitution of Being that they claim to comprehend. Therefore, there necessarily belongs to the conceptual Interpretation of Being and its structures—that is, to the reductive construction of Being—a *destruc-*

tion—that is, a critical dismantling of concepts in respect to the sources from which they were drawn—concepts that are handed down and that are at first necessarily employed” (*GA* 24, 31). Dasein should not blithely imagine that it can confront and project its future authentically without the concomitant struggle of deconstructing historical concepts that have interpreted Being in advance, thereby precluding a genuine confrontation.

Just as ecstatic temporality has its unity, so too does the phenomenological method: “These three fundamental components of the phenomenological method—reduction, construction, destruction—belong together in their content and must be grounded in their belonging-together. Construction in philosophy is necessarily destruction, that is, a dismantling of what has been handed down, a dismantling that gets carried out in the historical return to the tradition. This is neither a negation of the tradition nor a condemnation of the tradition as a nullity but on the contrary means precisely the positive appropriation of it” (*GA* 24, 31). In appropriation as *An-eignung*, one must hear the echo with the *eigen* of *Eigentlichkeit*: appropriation makes one’s own authentic possibilities accessible through the destructive loosening up of the hardened interpretations of Being handed down by tradition. The meaning granted by tradition cannot simply be annihilated, for Dasein is not a free-floating subject, absolutely at liberty to create ex nihilo the sense of Being and the meaning of beings encountered in our Being-in-the-world. But destruction does permit Dasein to make this tradition, as the having-been of Dasein’s Being-able-to-be, its own, and as such retrievable in repetition.<sup>7</sup>

Less well known than this passage from 1927 are several considerably earlier discussions of destruction that very clearly connect it with the theme of polemos. As early as 1921,<sup>8</sup> in a letter to his student Karl Löwith, Heidegger takes up the language of demolition:

I readily believe that you cannot “theoretically” bring together the How of my philosophizing with an orientation toward anxious concernfulness [*Bekümmierungsrichtung*]. This “together” is no theme for theoretical development. I can in no other way have my “I am” except by simply grasping and being it in such and such a manner.

Even in destruction I do not intend and do not dream about an Objectivity-in-itself [*An-sich-Objektivität*]; it is one’s own facticity that gets “forged,” if you will. It is a matter of whether an all-comprehending, falsely impersonal objectivity accomplishes more than a setting oneself loose on things in which above all one must *oneself be there amongst* things, without which there is no coming to grips with things. A person, then, is Objective as one-sidedly dogmatic, but philosophical as “absolutely” *ob-jectively rigorous*. [DB, 30]

Heidegger distinguishes between an *Objektivität* (rendered with variants of “Objectivity”) and *Gegenständlichkeit* (rendered here, with unavoidable colorlessness, by variants of “objectivity”). The former pretends to a false scientific realism; the latter “stands against” its object in a different manner: “The rigor that is objective touches on no thing [*keine Sache*—but rather on historical facticity” (DB, 30). The object of philosophical rigor is the How of Dasein’s own existing amid historically given possibilities.

What is to be dismantled in the destruction of historical facticity, then? To a certain extent, it is the meaning of this historical facticity itself as given to each temporally particular Dasein. This means something quite specific for Heidegger himself in 1921:

I work concretely and factically out of my “I am”—out of my spiritual and, in general, my factual provenance—milieu—life-context—out of that which is accessible to me from there as the living experience within which I live. This facticity, as existentiell facticity, is no mere “blind existence”; it lies bound up with existence, which means, however, that I live it—the “I must,” about which one does not speak. Existing seethes in this *Being-so/Facticity* [*Sosein-Faktizität*], in the historical; this means, however, that I live the inner commitments of my facticity, and as radically as I understand them. . . . [In facticity] resides the “historically spiritual” historical consciousness—and I am this in the life context of the *university*.” [DB, 29]

The young teacher Heidegger discovers his own historical Being-at-issue in the concrete situatedness (“facticity”) of life in the university. In destruction, it seems from this letter to Löwith, authentic Dasein frees up the historicity of its own facticity such that it can address the meaning of this facticity anew and seize it in its originary possibilities. Heidegger goes on to say how this reflects on himself:

What I want in teaching at the university is for human beings to *have at it*. One cannot overcome the old university by making the “intellectualism” of ossified instructors laughable and by feeling such individuals to be, and by convincing them that they are, the opposite of oneself, who is the richer, livelier, and deeper person, but rather thus: by going back to the origins for the fulfillment of those who survive in today’s facticity and by deciding on one’s own what one can. What will happen—whether in fifty years we will still have universities—who knows—these are not institutions for eternity. But one thing we have at hand: whether to torment ourselves in our moods and brood about possible primeval cultures or to *offer* ourselves *up* and find our way back into existentiell limitation and facticity, rather than involving ourselves in reflections about programs and universal problems. [DB, 31]



For Heidegger, the university provides a locus—his locus—for confronting Dasein’s own factual (that is, historically given) possibilities for Being. Destruction then seems to be a way of making this authentic Being-at-issue accessible, but without spitefully attacking the status of those academics who cannot lead their students, as Heidegger himself aspires to do, to “have at it” in the polemos over the meaning of their own historical situatedness. The importance of the university as a site for the revolutionary coming to grips with one’s own Being remains a theme for Heidegger from the earliest days of his academic career at least through the rectoral address of 1933. Heidegger is already diagnosing a crisis in the university in 1921, but he has nothing but contempt for the current attempts at reform and cultural renewal.<sup>9</sup>

So, quite early in Heidegger’s thinking, there is a sense of destruction as an *ontological* concept, and one that allows Dasein to “have at it” with its own situatedness in factual historicity. As a manner of negating, what destruction destroys is not ontic persons or institutions (although such might follow as a consequence), but rather the hold these have over Dasein as struggling to be authentic. Confirmation for this interpretation can be found in a lecture course of 1921–22, soon after the letter to Löwith:

To what extent and in what manner and whether authentically developing philosophy, in the life context of the university, has to take into consideration other philosophies of other Situation-origins at all; what “taking into consideration” here means; how the sense and proportion of specifically philosophical “polemics” is to be determined at all—to deliberate on all this now would be an inappropriate interlude, since we remain for the most part unclear as to our concrete tasks. It certainly already resides in the formal sense of philosophy, and in our comportment toward it, that philosophy in an eminent and unsuperficial sense is polemical [*polemisch*] (waged in the brightness of the “day”), insofar as the constructive appropriation of the concrete carrying-out of the Situation of philosophizing carries itself out in the manner of a destruction. The becoming-relevant of a Situation is in itself polemical (by which this word is not to be understood as “looking for a fight” in the sense of the standard philosophical and scientific “controversies.” Polemic rather as such through *da-sein*). [GA 6I, 67]

Heidegger explicitly indicates that destruction is a mode of Dasein’s polemically appropriating the There of its Situation through Being-there. “Polemics,” in the conventional sense of the word as a mere contentiousness over theories and programs (such as reform of the university), can be only a derivative mode of Dasein’s confronting its own Being in the givenness of its historical situation. *Mere* polemics, in the ordinary sense of this word, busies itself inau-

thetically in the present-at-hand argument and loses itself in taking sides; genuinely polemical *destruction* frees up argumentation so that Dasein can authentically encounter what is at issue (*die Sache des Denkens*, as Heidegger comes to call it), and so appropriate anew its own possibilities. This does not mean that historical questions and disputes become irrelevant and superficial, but rather that the sense, for example, of the dispute over the meaning of the university can come to *have sense*, and so be engaged in authentically, only for Dasein that is already polemical in its Being. There can be no genuine response to the problem of the purpose of the university, the arrangement of its divisions, the relationship of faculty to students, and so on, if no one, as Dasein factually thrown into a given situation that addresses him as something *at issue*, can even enter into a genuine confrontation over the meaning of education, knowledge, teaching, the university, and so forth.

For Heidegger, however, what is most at issue for Dasein is not its Being in the various existentiell possibilities at issue for individuals, but rather the Being-at-issue of Being itself—that is to say, how Being gets interpreted throughout the history of the West as the overarching ground of all possibility. How historical Dasein has addressed, and has been addressed by, the question of the meaning of Being determines all other aspects of Dasein's facticity, whether Being is interpreted as *idea*, as God, as substance, as the copula, or as the will to power (to name but some of the metaphysical interpretations that Heidegger discusses in his treatments of the tradition). For Heidegger's thinking, then, what he calls the history of Being becomes what above all must come into the polemical destruction. This is necessary partly because the question of Being has been forgotten as a question (*SZ*, 1), but also because the very need for an awakening is grounded in a history that must be dismantled for the sake of the vitality of the question itself.

Readers of Heidegger's work from *Being and Time* onward will be familiar with the notion of destruction as the goal of the unpublished part 2 of *Being and Time*, whose aim would have been the destruction of the history of ontology for the sake of the "loosening up of the hardened tradition" so that the question of Being might be properly reawakened (*SZ*, 22). But such a destruction, for the sake of the question of Being, must be understood in terms of Dasein's polemical historicity. This is nowhere more apparent than in the essay "Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle," written by Heidegger in 1922 as a synopsis of his broad philosophical project.<sup>10</sup>

This essay provides important insight into historicity and destruction. First of all, destruction plays a role in the appropriation of Dasein's authentic exis-

tence: "Existence becomes intelligible in itself only in the undertaking of making facticity questionable in the temporally particular, concrete destruction of facticity in respect to its inclinations for movement, directions, and deliberate availabilities" (PIA, 14). The movement of falling (Verfallen) as thrown into fascination with inauthentic everyday existence characterizes factual Dasein. Appropriation of one's own possibilities for Being requires the "countermovement" of the destruction that draws Dasein out of its falling, into its own authentic existence. So destruction is fundamentally a negation and a counterforce: "The 'counter' [of the countermovement of destruction], as the 'not,' announces therewith an originary achievement that is constitutive of Being. In respect to its constitutive sense, negation has the originary primacy of position" (PIA, 14). This negation is "primary" in that it makes possible, as Dasein's own, Dasein's confrontation with what is at issue in its Being; otherwise, Dasein's absorption into everydayness would never even come into question in the polemos between Dasein and Being. Destruction as negation breaks Dasein's forgetful fall into everydayness. But the countermovement of polemically deconstructive authenticity does not annihilate the factual movement of everyday possibilities; this would be to understand destruction ontically. As we have seen before, authenticity appropriates everyday Being in a modification. "Through the concern over existence, nothing is changed in the factual condition of temporally particular life. What is changed is the How of the movement of life, which as such can never become a matter for general publicity or the 'They'" (PIA, 14).

This account of destruction is not yet broad enough, for it does not address Dasein's historicity. Dasein confronts its historicity authentically "in one's own time and generation" (PIA, 18). But this easily falls prey to the inauthentic everydayness of immediate concerns. A confrontation with Dasein's historicity itself, not just one's own accidental historical location, is necessary: "The phenomenological hermeneutic of facticity thus sees itself as called upon to loosen up handed-down and reigning interpretedness in its hidden motivations, unexpressed tendencies, and ways of interpreting, and to push forward in the *dismantling return* to the originary motive sources of explication. The phenomenological hermeneutic of facticity sees itself called upon in this way, insofar as it wants to help today's Situation toward a radical possibility of appropriation through interpretation—and this in the manner of a making attentive that first provides concrete categories. *The hermeneutic works out its task only on the path of destruction*" (PIA, 20).

In this essay, Heidegger's "hermeneutic of facticity" refers to making philo-

sophically explicit the How of Dasein's interpreting the possibilities for Being of its Being-in-the-world. This is not a matter of academic contemplation, but the ground for the "radical possibility of appropriation" in which Dasein assembles its own authentic Being through a dismantling of its past, which he speaks of here as "the originary motive forces of explication." "Motive" here must be understood not in terms of personal, psychological forces, but rather as the impetus of Dasein's historically given interpretation of its Being-in-the-world. Dasein *tends* to interpret the world unreflectively in a manner handed over by tradition, an impetus whose *inertia* Dasein must interrupt through the destruction in order to take over its own historicity authentically.

Heidegger goes on in the same passage to explain how this destruction connects with Auseinandersetzung in respect to history: "For philosophical research, the destructive Auseinandersetzung with philosophical history is no mere addendum in the service of illustrating how things were earlier, no haphazard review of what others 'did' earlier, no opportunity for the projection of entertaining world-historical perspectives. The destruction is rather the authentic way upon which the present in its own grounding movements must encounter itself, and it must encounter itself in such a manner that the question thereby springs continually forth from history: To what extent is it (the present) itself concerned with the appropriation of radically grounding possibilities of experience and their interpretation?" (PIA, 20–21). Auseinandersetzung, as the setting-out-and-apart-from-one-another of confrontation, aptly describes the dismantling (*abbauend*) character of destruction. Philosophy's confrontation with its own history is not a mere subdiscipline, as is the history of philosophy in an academic department. Heidegger seeks "a radical logic of origins" (PIA, 21). In deconstruction, the philosophical interpretation of Being itself gets loosened up so that it can be authentically renewed as a question. But the destruction does not merely destroy; the dismantling is simultaneously the construction, that is, a unifying gathering, of Dasein's own possibilities for Being in the appropriation of what has been deconstructed. The thinking of Being by historical philosophers is of importance to Heidegger not as a mere record of past theories. Through destructive polemos with the history of philosophy, Heidegger seeks an authentic return to the origins that can renew the urgency of Being as an enduring question.

We cannot examine the details of Heidegger's account of the history of Being here. Heidegger's interpretations form the content of what most readers of Heidegger know of as his destruction of the history of ontology as described in section 6 of the second introduction to *Being and Time* and in section 5 of the

introduction to *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Heidegger's vast body of work on the pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Christian Scholasticism, early modern philosophy, Kant and German idealism, and Nietzsche, to name but some of his partners in confrontation, constitutes the texture of this destruction of the history of Being. As we proceed, we will touch only on strands of this texture to illustrate our points. But very broadly, according to Heidegger, at its inception, the question of Being received direction from the Greeks, a direction that has by now hardened into mere momentum, such that Being no longer confronts Dasein as a question in its possibilities for appropriation.

Our purpose here has been to show how destruction takes part in polemos. But Dasein's own Being-at-issue-for-itself in its Being should not be disconnected from the seemingly more abstract status of the history of Being. Because of its history, Being has fallen into oblivion: Dasein has forgotten Being, and Being has abandoned Dasein. This is the core of Heidegger's diagnosis of modernity's nihilism. Nihilism implies the possibility that Being might lose its There—that Da-sein as the locus of the Kehre, as the site for polemos, might vanish, even if the human, as the rational animal, remains on Earth, just like any other biological creature, but with the special aim of making the conquest of nature its business. This possibility grounds the sense of Heidegger's own polemos: to confront the history of Being and renew the question of Being in what he calls the Auseinandersetzung between the first and the other inception of Being.

#### POLEMICAL INCEPTION AND THE REVOLUTION OF HISTORY

Given the importance of destruction to Heidegger's phenomenology, it is striking that just a few years after the publication of *Being and Time* he ceases to speak of this destruction as a central component of his thinking. This may have something to do with the turning in Heidegger's thinking after 1930. In a retrospective remark during a 1973 seminar, Heidegger explains,

Already in *Being and Time*, there was such a return [to the inception], even if this was still somewhat clumsy. In *Being and Time*, it was undertaken as destruction, that is, as dissolution, as dismantling of that which sends itself forth, since the inception, in the unbroken succession of transformations that represent the history of philosophy.

But *Being and Time* still did not come to a genuine knowledge of the history of Being, and from this arose the clumsiness and, strictly speaking, the naïveté of the

“ontological destruction.” Since then, the unavoidable naïveté of what has not been experienced in knowledge has retreated. [VS, 133]

The failure of *Being and Time* to move beyond the analytic of Dasein led Heidegger to question the phenomenological project of fundamental ontology in its entirety as being itself too subjectivist and naïve, too much a part of the metaphysical tradition. The notion of a destruction carried out by Dasein against its history carries overtones of a subjectivistic imposition on Being that is too clumsy (*ungeschickt*) to respond appropriately to the destiny (*Schicksal*) of Being, which calls for response, not assault.

But this setback does not mean that Heidegger simply gives up on the task of a confrontational return to the origins. Instead, he searches for a way of expressing this confrontation in language that acknowledges the mutual belonging-together of Dasein and Being in the polemos of the turning. By the time of *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger has found his voice: Dasein’s polemical appropriation of its having-been for the sake of its own future is “the confrontation of the first and the other inception” (“die Auseinandersetzung des ersten und des anderen Anfangs”). We leave to others the discussion of the details and the validity of Heidegger’s account of the history of philosophy and of Being; we are concerned here with Heidegger’s interpretation of the overall structure of that history. The structure that interests us now is the confrontation between the first and the other inceptions, a complex concept that we shall tackle by examining the specific words Heidegger employs.

Let us begin with *Anfang*. Here we follow Reiner Schürmann in translating this word as “inception” (HBA, 121–25). *Anfang* has the literal meaning of a seizing upon or grasping toward, a sense that the English “inception” and its Latin forerunner *incipere* echo. Crucial to Heidegger’s understanding of *Anfang* is that this is an ontological, rather than an ontic term: the inception is a mode of Dasein’s Being, the way of its having-been that reaches into the future, and not a determinate ontic occurrence or period on a historiological time line. As early as 1921–22, Heidegger speaks of our need “to hold ourselves in radical understanding at the inception, and remaining with the inception, to grasp and retain it in its How from out of the concrete Situation” (*GA 61*, 170). What is at issue for Dasein in understanding the inception is not a matter of fact about a historically specific, ontic beginning, but rather the ontological task of claiming the past as a having-been that retains meaning as the source for a confrontation with the future as an aspect of the present. “What is inceptive is in-

deed a having-been [*ein Gewesenes*], but not something bygone [*ein Vergangenes*]. The bygone is always a being-that-is-no-longer-present, but the having-been is Being that still comes-to-presence, although Being is what is hidden in its inceptiveness" (*GA 51*, 86). We shall reserve the term "beginning" (sometimes translating Heidegger's use of *Beginn*) for the idea of an ontic commencement in history, in contrast to "inception" as a name for the historicizing of Being itself (see *GA 51*, 108).<sup>11</sup> *Beginn* designates an outset to be located in the vulgar understanding of time as a sequence and series of now-points:

"Beginning"—that is something other than "inception." A new weather condition, for example, begins with a storm, but its inception is the thoroughgoing and complete transformation of the atmospheric conditions. The beginning is that by which something commences, inception that out from which something springs. The [First] World War had its inception centuries ago in the spiritual-political history of the West. The World War began with engagements at the advanced posts. The beginning is left behind right away, it disappears in the onward of the happening. The inception, the origin, by contrast, comes first and foremost to appearance and is fully there at its end. Whoever begins much, often never comes to the inception. Now, we humans, to be sure, can never start with the inception [*mit dem Anfang anfangen*]<sup>12</sup>—only a god can do that—but rather we must begin, that is, take something up that first leads into the origin or indicates it to us. [*GA 39*, 3–4]

It is helpful to consider how *An-fang* accords with *Be-griff*, as "in-ception" with "con-ception," both in the sense of a unifying understanding and as a genesis. In the inception, the way in which Dasein conceives its Being-in-the-world and the beings that it encounters in its Being-there is engendered both as the fate of individual Dasein and as the destiny of the historical peoples bound up in the inception. The inception by which Heidegger's fate as a thinker was set in motion, as well as the destiny of Germany and the West as a whole, for example, lay with the Greeks. In a letter of December 20, 1931, to Elisabeth Blochmann, Heidegger writes, "It becomes ever clearer to me that and how the inception of our Western philosophy must again become present for us so that we once again learn from this exemplar that everything does not have its right and worth in the arbitrary, nor the arbitrary in everything—that a being *is* not if it does not have *its* law, *its* basis, *its* origin and *its* rank. Today's philosophizing becomes ever more questionable for me. It is so far from the simple impetus of the originary philosophizing of the Greeks, who even in such questioning wrested for themselves, through struggle, the essence of human beings, in which the breadth of the world and the depth of existence are one" (*HB*, 46).

The crisis of modernity, no more than the crisis of the university which is

but a symptom of this larger nihilism, cannot be confronted directly in its ontic circumstances without stumbling about in attempts at reform that fail to get at the heart of the matter, which is the fateful destining of the history of Being that determines the ontic crises of our everyday concerns. “Given . . . that the inceptive [*das Anfängliche*] holds sway over and ahead of all its consequences, then the inceptive is nothing that lies behind us, but rather One and the Same—what comes toward us, over and in front of us, in a secretive turning” (*GA* 55, 43). The inception is itself futural in Dasein’s own Being-at-issue. As this authentic future, the inception is not identical with the doctrines of Greek philosophy at the dawn of Western thought. Past and future are “One and the Same” as what Dasein must confront as most intimately at issue in its own Being. The inception *turns* to us not from some bygone past but rather from a future that is polemically, and so productively, in question. As a *turning*, the inception is bound up with polemos between Dasein and Being in the Kehre; the inception defines the historical horizons of this polemical turning.

In Chapter One, in our discussion of Heraclitus’ Fragment 53, we addressed the sense of polemos as pantōn patēr, as father of all. Polemos engenders all beings in that, as the Aus-einander-setzung, it sets all beings out and apart from one another in the distinctness, articulation, and interrelatedness of their meaning. By doing so, polemos sets both beings and Dasein together into the openness of Being-in-the-world. But polemos is also pantōn basileus, the king of all. Just as the inception holds sway back over history from out of the future, as well as from the past, polemos itself “holds sway over and ahead” of all beings, determining them in advance in their Being in the fore- and as-structure of how they are encountered by Dasein. Polemos is the arkhē, both as the generative inception, the patēr, and as the sovereign, the basileus, of what is.

In Greek, *arkhē* may mean origin, cause, first principle, beginning, but also sovereignty and dominion.<sup>12</sup> In his 1939 essay “On the Essence and Concept of *Physis*,” Heidegger writes: “*Arkhe* means especially inception and mastery” (*Wg*, 317). He goes on to argue that “*physis* is *arkhē*,” and that both hold sway over the movement of beings in their Being (*Wg*, 317). In *Contributions to Philosophy*, he writes that the inception is “hidden,” and yet it “safeguards the highest mastery in itself” (*BP*, 57). In a 1941 lecture course, Heidegger connects *arkhē* as mastery with his understanding of ground: “To this [discussion of ground] corresponds the Greek name for that which we ambiguously enough mean by ‘ground’: *arkhē*—that by which something begins inceptively, the *inceptive* and thus eldest, the firstborn. But at the same time, this word means something like “mastery”—that which grasps out over everything and at the



same time holds everything under itself; to each inception in the authentic sense, the character of mastery is proper, and every genuine mastery is inceptive. Both inception and mastery reverberate in unison in the Greek word *arkhē*” (GA 49, 77). The inception masters beings by grounding the Being-in-the-world within which Dasein interprets beings. Polemos, then, as inception, also rules over the movement of the Being of beings as they are polemically interpreted in the historicity of Dasein, and as this *arkhē*, it rules over the sense of the destiny-laden movement of Dasein’s Being-futural.

To understand the inception as the *arkhē* that founds and holds sway over the destiny of the movement of Being as time and the concomitant movement in Dasein’s interpretation of beings, we must explore Heidegger’s ontological understanding of motion in his interpretation of *energeia*. The Greek word for work is *ergon*. As early as 1922, Heidegger translates *energeia* as “at work” (PIA, 33). Later, he specifies that *energeia* means “Being-at-work” (*am-Werk-sein*, GA 33, 167) and that the question of the nature of *energeia* demands that we ask as well about what enables the “movement” of the possible becoming real.<sup>13</sup> Movement understood ontologically has nothing to do with motion as it is studied in the ontic scientific disciplines as change in position on a spatio-temporal grid. In the 1966–67 seminar given on Heraclitus in conjunction with Eugen Fink, Heidegger says, “When he speaks of the father and ruler, Heraclitus, in an almost poetic language, grasps the sense of the *arkhē* of movement: ‘*prōton hōthen he arkhē tēs kinēseōs*’ [the *arkhē* is the first Whence of movement]. The first source and origin [*Ursprung*] of movement [*Bewegung*] is also the first source and origin of ruling and directing” (GA 15, 45).

Polemos as father and ruler serves as the *arkhē* to the movement of Dasein’s history. As father, polemos-*arkhē* gives Dasein the Whence of its thrownness, the sheer givenness of its having-been; as ruler, it gives individual Dasein the Whither of its fate and a people the Whither of a collective destiny. Temporally, as both the Whence and the Whither, polemos-*arkhē* grants a trajectory to Dasein’s history, launching Dasein along the path of the movement of its *Being-underway*, its Being-underway. Ontological movement has to do with the inception as it works itself out in the polemical action of truth as *alētheia* that encompasses both the fate of individual Dasein and the destiny of peoples. Thus, the movement of the *energeia* is also an *entelekheia*, a Being-toward-the-end, but not an end understood as either a directed teleology or an ontic finishing, completion, or demise. Rather, this movement moves toward the end in the sense of the inception that returns to Dasein out of Dasein’s own Being-futural, grounding Dasein in what is most at issue in its Being.<sup>14</sup>

The movement of the generative, productive inception of Being is nowhere more apparent than in “The Origin of the Work of Art.” The strife in Being itself, in the action of *a-lētheia*, is explicitly displayed in the work of art. This movement Heidegger calls the setting-itself-to-work (*das Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen*) of truth as art: “So then the essence of art would be the following: the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings” (UK, 21). Heidegger also understands *energeia* as this setting-itself-to-work. The symmetry between the work of art as the *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen* of truth and truth as the *Aus-einander-Setzung* of Being is striking. The link is the *Setzen*, the establishing and setting into place against each other of bounded beings that do not lapse back into the concealment of formlessness or undifferentiated clutter: “*Setzen* here bespeaks a bringing-to-stand” (UK, 21). The *Aus-einander-setzung* of the truth of Being establishes the open realm within which beings in their truth may stand forth in their distinctness as intelligible and accessible to *Dasein*. In both *Auseinander-setzung* and *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen*, beings come to a stand for *Dasein*’s Being-in-the-world: “The openness of this Open, that is, truth, can be what it is, namely *this* openness, only if it establishes itself, and so long as it establishes itself in its Open. Therefore in this Open there must always be a being in which the openness takes its stand [*Stand*] and its constancy [*Ständigkeit*]. Insofar as openness occupies [*besetzt*] the Open, it holds this open and apart. *Setzen* [setting and founding] and *Besetzen* [occupying and possessing] are in general here thought in the Greek sense of *thesis*, which means a placing out into the unconcealed” (UK, 47).

The *Setzen* as thesis (“setting,” “placing,” “establishing,” even “founding”) carries the sense of the inception’s generative and masterful power of founding a reign of Being in which beings may come into the Open for *Dasein* in its Being-in-the-world (VS, 58ff). The *Setzen* comprises the roles of *polemos* both as *patēr* and as *basileus*. But as this passage suggests, the inceptive reign of the *arkhē* requires that particular being, *Dasein*, for whom this dispensation is always polemically at issue. Thus the *Aus-einander-setzung* as the *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen* of *energeia* will lend further clarity to the meaning of the polemical turning between Being and *Dasein*.

By engaging in *polemos* with Being, *Dasein* enables the work of Being’s making manifest a world in *alētheia*. This en-abling, this *Ver-mögen* or *Ermöglichung*,<sup>15</sup> manifests itself as an *Ermächtigung*, that same empowerment discussed above, whereby beings first become revealed as what they are in the *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen*. For Heidegger, this underlies the meaning of the Idea of the Good in an unusually sympathetic phenomenological interpretation of

Plato from 1931–32: “The highest idea is that which can barely be envisioned, which *simultaneously* enables [mit-ermöglicht] something like Being *and* unconcealment at all, that is, which *empowers* [ermächtigt] Being and unconcealment as such to be what they are. Hence the highest idea is this Empowering, the empowerment for *Being*—that it as such *gives* itself to itself; and in unity with this, the highest idea is the empowerment of *unconcealment*—that it as such *historicizes*. This Empowering is then the prefiguration of *aitia* [fault, ground, cause] (of “power,” of “machination” [*der Macht, Machenschaft*]))” (GA 34, 99).

This passage offers a somewhat more positive interpretation of power than in Heidegger’s later critique of nihilism as expressed by Nietzsche’s will to power. In his interpretation of Nietzsche’s will to power, the subject assumes hubristic dominion over Being, arrogating to itself alone the power of inception. But in empowering as the setting-itself-to-work of inceptive Being in the dispensation of the arkhē, Dasein and Being are appropriated to one another in the turning as polemos. The arkhē as inception encompasses the aitia as cause and enabler. Heidegger equates to *agathon* (the good) and “that which empowers” (*das Ermächtigende*) as “that which makes one thing and another fitting and adapted, as that with which something may begin inceptively; ‘good!’ means: It will be done! It is decided! It has nothing to do with the meaning of *moral* goodness; ethics has ruined the grounding meaning of this word” (GA 33, 106). The power of Being, as what enables the “fit” of Dasein’s involvement in an equipmental totality, rules over Dasein’s Being-able-to-be in Being-in-the-world with the power of inception and command. Because it transcends both the unconcealment of beings and the givenness of Being itself, Heidegger calls this empowering of Being overarching.

We must again recall the etymological closeness of *Macht* and *Möglichkeit*, and then of *Werk*, *wirken*, and *Wirklichkeit* in reading passages such as the one just quoted. Powers and possibilities can appear only when the “Being-at-work” instantiates the motion—the “energy,” the polemos—of the strife between Earth and World. Work then involves a setting in motion of Being-in-the-world, the articulation of an as-structure within which Dasein exists interpretatively. For Heidegger, *dunamis* and *energeia* are connected in such a manner that that which empowers (*dunamis*) remains present as that which is “at work” (*en-ergeia*) in the actual (Wg, 357); in this way, polemos as inceptively generative *patēr* remains at work as the reigning *basileus* in the historical world it conceives. But neither Being nor Dasein alone is this father and king, but rather the two together in the polemos of the *Kehre*.

But while he might consider that philosophy is yet at its height with Plato, who still questions the Being of beings, Heidegger in 1931–32 already believes that the path that this first inception of the thinking of Being takes with Plato will lead to the total arrogation of this enabling power by the human subject in the will to power, as is evident here in his guarded allusion to “power” and “machination” in quotation marks. Later, Heidegger employs the word *Ereignis*, the appropriating event, in an attempt to convey a sense of that which reveals and bestows both the giving of unconcealment of beings and the giving of Being itself and yet that remains something—an event or happening—that humans cannot usurp as their own power. This usurpation by human beings of the inceptive power of Being, as the authority of universal dominion, creation, and command over beings through science and politics, amid the forgetting of Being itself, forms for Heidegger the core of Western nihilism, which reaches its full flower in modernity.

Earlier in the same 1931–32 lecture course on Plato, Heidegger says that the artist is the one who “has the essential glimpse into the possible [*das Mögliche*], who brings the concealed possibilities of beings to work [*Werk*] and thus first gives people sight for the actual beings [*das Wirklich-seiende*] in which they blindly muck about” (*GA* 34, 64). In the strife between Earth and World, the inceptive powers at work in Being interact and come to appearance through the activity of creative human beings. But it would be a fundamental error, tantamount to nihilism for Heidegger, to conceive of the human creator as the owner and originator of these powers that are at work (that is, a creator in the sense of the God of Genesis 1). Quite to the contrary, Heidegger repeatedly describes the creative as the witnesses (*Zeuge*) or the sacrifices (*Opfer*) of Being, through whom Being reveals itself in the artist’s work.<sup>16</sup> Heidegger often refers to a triad of poet, thinker, and statesman as those whose works instantiate this revelation of Being. Their role is neither pleasant nor easy. Let us recall a passage from *Contributions to Philosophy*: “At times those who ground the abyss must be immolated in the fire of what is brought to endure as truth for Da-sein to become possible for human beings and for constancy in the midst of beings to be saved, so that beings themselves undergo a restoration in the Open of the strife between Earth and World” (*BP*, 7).<sup>17</sup>

The creators undertake a tremendous task in their work—work that Heidegger wants to conceive as broadly as possible. In the inceptive *arkhē*, ontic persons are “immolated” and used up in the polemical turning. Heidegger’s vision of the creator is heroic and tragic, perhaps even brutal. “Compared to the work, the artist remains something unimportant, rather like a passage that de-

stroys itself in the creative process for the sake of the emergence of the work” (UK, 25). In such a tragic role, a Hölderlin, a Nietzsche, a van Gogh, perhaps even an Oedipus, meet their fate, but they also carry forward the movement of the destiny of the West. The violence that they experience in their tasks—Heidegger once describes Dasein as being “literally” violated by Being (*EM*, 136)—derives from the creator’s standing in the center of the strife between Earth and World—amid the clash of “essential powers of Being” in their Auseinandersetzung. The creators become the human site, the There, for polemos in the inceptive turning: “Struggle first projects and develops the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought. This struggle is then sustained by the creators, by the poets, thinkers, and statesmen. Against the overwhelming sway, they cast the counterweight of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up” (*EM*, 47–48). The triad of creators ground what Heidegger here calls authentic history. They are “the authentically creative” (*die eigentlich Schaffenden*).<sup>18</sup> But however “creative” they may be, individual human beings cannot be the source of Being and beings. The “overwhelming sway” (*das überwältigende Walten*) is Being itself as the arkhē, the inception that “holds sway” (*waltet*) over the “sway” of history’s momentum.

We have now gone into considerable detail in explicating the sense of inception as arkhē and as the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of Being, but we still have not come to grips with the idea of a confrontation *between* inceptions. For Heidegger, inception is confrontation, and confrontation is inception. The single most important text for understanding this confrontation of inceptions is the *Contributions to Philosophy*. While the scope of that work is too broad to permit anything approaching a detailed interpretation of it here, it may be said that as a whole, the *Contributions* themselves constitute Heidegger’s great (and perhaps overweening) attempt to prepare his own thinking as one of Being’s sacrifices by allowing an inception to take place through him in the thinking of the Auseinandersetzung of the first and the other inception (see *BP*, 114).

The ambitious scope of Heidegger’s project can be discerned in the titles of various divisions of the *Contributions*. In the Preview (1. “Vorblick”), an overview of the whole text, he attempts to grasp the Situation of fully developed nihilism in modernity, as well as the task for thinking in the time of the going over (*Übergang*) to the other inception. The Accord (2. “Der Anklang”) reflects on the echo of the other inception with the first inception that has run its course into nihilism. The Interplay (3. “Das Zuspiel”) evokes a play between the first and the other inception to prepare the way for the Spring (4. “Der

Sprung”), a leap from the first to the other. The Grounding (5. “Die Gründung”) seeks to prepare the ground for this leap so that Dasein can land and stand upon in its futural Being. In the division on the Futural Ones (6. “Die Zu-künftigen”), Heidegger reflects on the Being-futural of those who accomplish this grounding. In the last and most difficult division of the work’s original structure, the Last God (7. “Der Letzte Gott”), Heidegger explores the sense of mortality and divinity in the other inception as the horizon of Dasein’s finitude.

Perhaps the first question to ask is, Why does Heidegger speak of a “first” and an “other” inception—and indeed of *the* first and *the* other? Why not, for example, a first and a second? Nothing we have learned so far about inception has claimed that there have been or should be two such distinctly determinate inceptions to history. Certainly, the first inception is *the* first for Heidegger because it establishes *the* grounding for all Western thinking and history. Also, talk of a “new beginning” in opposition to a tradition would smack entirely too much of the modern idea of progress, as well as of the subjectivist will simply to nullify history and “begin” again ex nihilo. But these observations simply graze the surface of Heidegger’s meaning.

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger seeks to prepare a way for a “crossing-over,” an *Übergang*, a going-over or transition to the other inception (*BP*, 4). At the time of the writing of the *Contributions*, Heidegger also embarks on a series of lecture courses that constitute his enormously influential Auseinandersetzung with Nietzsche (see *NI*, 9–15). In notes to these lectures, Heidegger writes that since Plato, “thinking is ‘meta-physics,’ and Nietzsche’s philosophy is its end and so also the beginning of a crossing over” (*GA* 43, 285–86). Metaphysics, as the atrophy of the power of the first inception, forgets Being by contemplating only beings and the principles that would account for them. It is well known that Heidegger regarded Nietzsche as the last metaphysician who nevertheless points to a bridge beyond nihilism, and yet as someone who himself remains the dangerous culmination and exhaustion of philosophy since the ancients. For Heidegger, Ernst Jünger’s apocalyptic vision of a total mobilization of the will to power in the marriage of human beings to machines who fight as worker-soldiers for dominion over nature and each other expresses the phenomenal fruition of Nietzsche’s thinking, especially as made manifest by the fantastic and monstrous industrial mechanization of combat in the First World War. The confrontation with Nietzsche is meant to expose both the danger and the authentic future of Nietzsche’s thinking at the cusp of inception as both

past and future. “To grasp Nietzsche as the end of Western metaphysics, this is no historiological ascertainment of what lies behind us but is rather the *historical* onset of the future of Western thinking” (*BP* 176).

The first inception with the Greeks establishes what Heidegger in the *Contributions* calls the guiding question (*Leitfrage*) of metaphysics, in contrast with the “grounding question” (*Grundfrage*) of the other inception: “The originary appropriation of the first inception (and that means of its history) means setting foot in the other inception. This carries itself out in the going over from the *leading question* (What are beings? the question about beingness, Being [*Sein*]) to the *grounding question*: What is the truth of Being [*Seyn*]? (Being and Being [*Sein und Seyn*] are the same and yet fundamentally different)” (*BP*, 171). The leading question of the first inception about the ultimate ground of beings has exhausted itself in the crisis of nihilism, in which human beings, in answering this leading question of metaphysics, pretend to dominion over Being. Hence, Heidegger characterizes the crossing over as an overcoming (*Überwindung*) (*BP*, 37, 182), carried out by the grounding question, that attempts to prepare the ground for the leap into the other inception. The grounding question, in asking about the truth of Being (*Seyn*), asks about the historical movement of the open region of a-lêtheia engendered by the polemos between Dasein and Being. To ground this movement for the sake of the other inception through Dasein’s sacrificial response to the grounding question would enable the “overcoming of nihilism” (*BP*, 175). But at the same time, the over-coming must be a going under, a disaster (*Unter-gang*): “Going under, meant in its essential sense, is the going toward the silent preparation of the futural, of the moment of vision of the abodes in which the decision falls over the coming and the absence of the gods. This going under is the first and foremost inception” (*BP*, 397).

The end of the reign of the first inception, as both the negation *and* the appropriative restoration of metaphysics, brings calamity—but not everyone can understand the potentially redemptive meaning of this “going under,” even if it involves ruin and destruction. “The age of the going under can be known only by those who belong to it. All others must fear the going under and therefore deny and renounce it” (*BP*, 397). Those who understand the sacrifice of creation can rejoice in the apocalypse, understood as the unveiling destiny of the confrontation of inceptions. Everyone else sees only catastrophe and destruction in the crossing over as going under.

The talk of disaster and apocalypse recalls what we have indicated before: that Heidegger shifts from speaking of a destruction of the history of philoso-

phy to a confrontation of the first and the other inception. The catastrophic crossing over as a going under suggests that, as with the destruction, the confrontation of inceptions proceeds as a kind of negation. In a section of the *Contributions* that he subtitled “The Negation,” Heidegger writes: “The No is the great leaping *away* [Ab-sprung] in which the *Da* [the *There*] in *Da-sein* is blown open [ersprungen]” (BP, 178). This leap must also affirm—say Yes—to what it leaps toward in the grounding question, but the leap away first undertakes the leap, “and so here the No overtakes the Yes” (BP, 178). In negating the first inception, the other inception first gains the impulse of the movement of its *arkhē*. But as with the destruction, this negation is not an annihilation: “Such negation, to be sure, does not satisfy itself with the leaping away that just leaves things behind it. Rather, the negation unfolds itself, inasmuch as it sets free the first inception and its inceptive history and sets back what has been set free into the possession of the inception, where it, as deposited, still surpasses everything now and in the future that once surrendered itself in its consequences and became an object of historiological calculation. This building up of that which surpasses in the first inception is the sense of the ‘destruction’ in the going over to the other inception” (BP, 179). By placing “destruction” in quotes, Heidegger cites his own thinking of the period of fundamental ontology but shows that he has moved beyond it into the thinking of the polemical inception.<sup>19</sup> The leap away into the other inception builds up and builds upon (*erbaut*) the first inception, even as it dismantles (*abbaut*) it, so that it may find its feet in the grounding of an authentically inceptive future.

The first inception is first in the sense that it initiates the dominion of the leading question of metaphysics as the destiny of the West. Apart from this first inception, there may still be events of authentic inception in the existence of historical *Dasein*. Yet these inceptive events are all still encompassed and determined in their horizontal historicity, in their range of sense and possibility, by the destiny of the event of the first inception that interprets the question of Being as a question about beings. The other inception is not “new” in respect to the “first,” since it builds on and out of it, even as it denies it in negation. Nor does the other inception follow the first as a “second” in the sense of being subsequent along a numerical time line. “The other inception of thinking is so named, not because it is simply formed otherwise than any other philosophy hitherto, but rather because it must be the uniquely other in respect *to* the uniquely one and first inception. Out of this allotment-to-one-another [*Zugewiesenheit . . . zueinander*] of the one and the other inception, the manner



of the thoughtful meditation in the crossing over is also already determined. The thinking of the crossing over provides the grounding projection of the truth of Being [*Seyn*] as *historical* meditation” (*BP*, 5).

The “Zugewiesenheit . . . zueinander” both necessitates and enables the Aus-einander-setzung of the inceptions. The other inception is a repetitive retrieval of the first inception of the history of thinking, and so of the Being of the West—Being here understood as the Seyn of the polemical truth in which beings come to presence for Dasein in the strife of Earth and World, a strife in which Dasein plays its sacrificial role in the turning. As this repetitive retrieval for the sake of Being’s futural projection, the other inception accomplishes a salvation (*Rettung*)<sup>20</sup> of both Dasein and Being from the nihilism overtaking the West: “The Auseinandersetzung is therefore no opposition of opponents, either in the sense of a crude rejection or in the manner of an *Aufhebung* of the one in the other.”<sup>21</sup> The other inception, out of a new originality, helps the first inception to the truth of its history and thereby to its inalienable and ownmost mode of Being other, which becomes fruitful only in the historical conversation of thinkers” (*BP*, 187). In the repetitive retrieval of the first inception, the other inception rekindles authentic *questions* retained in the first inception, but passed over and hidden by its history. The power of such questions, if retrieved, will be to engender again Dasein’s polemos with what is at issue for its historical Being. The grounding question of the other inception awakens questions about the How of Being as does any repetitive retrieval; only the scope of this retrieval is so broad as to encompass the How of the whole of Western history and return to its ontological origins. It is as if the Being of the West as a whole had as its task the challenge of an authentic appropriation of its history and so of its Self. And not just *as if*.

Thus, the questions to be unlocked and rekindled are not simply about the existentiell possibilities of any one factual Dasein and its fate, but rather both about the sense and tenor of the question of Being itself and about the projection of the truth of the history of Being (as Seyn), that is, how Da-sein will exist in the polemical Open of its Being-in-the-world among beings. The other inception puts the destiny of all Western Dasein in question. In speaking of “originality” here, Heidegger does not mean the mere newness of something never seen before, but rather a return to the originary power of the *arkhē* as the source, the *Ur-sprung*, for Dasein’s leap into the crossing over of its history as ongoing polemos.

The empowering, polemical return to the source explains in part what Heidegger means by the Ereignis, the appropriating event, which, according to the

subtitle, *Vom Ereignis*, is the theme of the *Contributions to Philosophy*. The confrontation of inceptions initiates an event that appropriates Being and Dasein to one another in a polemos that saves the history of Being. This event of confrontation demands what Heidegger calls “inceptive thinking” (*das anfängliche Denken*): “Inceptive thinking as Auseinandersetzung between the first inception, which must first be won back, and the other inception, which is to be unfolded, is necessary on these grounds.” (BP, 58). In this inceptive thinking occurs what we recognize as the substance of many of his lecture courses: Heidegger’s confrontations with historical thinkers. Because Heidegger regards thinkers as conduits for Being—bearers, not creators or originators, of thinking—inceptive thinking is the field on which the history of Being fights out its sense and its destiny.

What then is *inception*, that it can become the highest of all beings? It is the essential unfolding of *Being* itself. But *this* inception can be first accomplished only as the *other* in the Auseinandersetzung with the *first*. The inception—conceived inceptively—is Being [*Seyn*] itself. And in measure with Being [*Seyn*], *thinking* is also more originary than re-presenting and judging.

*Inception is Being [Seyn] itself* as appropriating event, the hidden mastery of the origin of the truth of beings as such. And Being [*Seyn*] is the inception as the appropriating event. [BP, 58]

The question of the sense of Being asks about how beings have meaning for Dasein in Dasein’s *Being-in-the-world*; the *sense* of Being discloses to Dasein’s understanding an *orientation* in Being through which beings can be meaningful. But the essential unfolding of Being (*Wesung des Seyns*) pertains to the *How* of Being itself: how an originary event initiates the realm in which what is at issue in the polemos between Being and Dasein unfolds in history and *as* history. The inception *is* both Sein and Seyn together as that which both conceives (the *patēr*) and holds sway (the *basileus*) over the event of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, as well as the authentic historicity of this *Da-sein* in both the fate of individuals and the destiny of peoples.

Heidegger admits that this inceptive thinking appears entirely useless to metaphysical thinking, and rightly so. In the oblivion of Being, human beings, intent on domination over the whole of beings, must deem inceptive thinking quite useless, for by its own admission, such thinking can “start” nothing, since it claims no ontic insight or power. But, Heidegger counters, “what is more useful than the salvation in Being [*die Rettung in das Sein*]?” (BP, 58). In a lecture course delivered in 1937–38, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, Heidegger writes:

“Philosophy is the immediately useless but nevertheless masterful knowing of the essence of things” (*GA* 45, 3, emphasis removed). As inceptive, this originary thinking, as polemos and *arkhē*, holds sway over all beings by establishing the horizons of sense within which we interpret both beings and the scope and meaning of our own activity. Philosophy, as inceptive thinking, does not know the “essence” of beings as an ontic set of properties that gives it power over them. “Knowing” in Heidegger’s sense gives movement (*energeia*), sets to work the confrontation of interpretation within which Being and Dasein meet in the turning and within which the meaning of beings is first established for Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Inceptive thinking does not belong to Dasein as its tool for the conquest of Being conceived as objective Nature. The Ereignis, the appropriating event, grants Dasein a history and establishes Dasein *in* this history. Whenever Dasein authentically confronts the meaning of its own history, then Dasein belongs to inceptive thinking in the history opened up by the confrontation of the appropriating event.

Polemos is Ereignis, and Ereignis is polemos in the Being of the inception that establishes the history in which, and *as* which, Dasein is at issue for itself. In a 1937–38 lecture course, Heidegger showed how the themes of history, historicity, and inception would pass over into the political questions of the remaining chapters of our project:

The *historical* does not mean a mode of making discoveries and gaining information; rather it means *historicizing itself*. The historical in neither what is bygone nor what is present, but rather the *futural*, that which is set to the will, to expecting and to care. . . . *The futural is the origin of history. But the futural is the great inception*, that which—constantly withdrawing itself—most broadly reaches backward and at the same times most broadly reaches forward. The concealed destiny of all inceptions is, however, that they are seemingly forced aside, overtaken, and refuted by that which begins inceptively *through the inceptions* and follows them. The customariness of that which then becomes accustomed becomes master over that which is always uncus-  
tomary in the inception. Thus, in order to save the inception, and with it the future, from time to time a breaking of the mastery of the customary and the all-too-accus-  
tomed is needed. This must be overthrown [*umgewälzt*] so that what is uncus-  
tomary and what reaches forward may break free and come to power. The overthrowing of the customary—revolution—is the genuine relation to inception. The conservative, as a holding on, by contrast, just holds to and fastens hold of that which has begun in consequence of the inception and that which has become of inception. For the in-  
ception, precisely, never lets itself be grasped through mere holding on, because to begin inceptively means to think and to act from out of the futural and the uncus-

tomary, renouncing the crutches and evasions of the customary and the accustomed.  
[GA 45, 40–41]

This passage that speaks of “revolution,” delivered in lectures in 1937–38, well after Heidegger’s resignation from the post of rector of the University of Freiburg in 1934, is contemporary with the writing of the *Contributions to Philosophy* and supports the interpretation of that text as Heidegger’s endeavor to engender and clear a passageway for a revolutionary inception. It provides an encompassing overview of the themes we have been trying to link together in this chapter, from Dasein’s futural historicity to the renewal of history through a confrontation of inceptions.

For Heidegger, *conservatism*, as an attempt to preserve what is and what has been by obstinately holding on to the customary traits of one’s historical community, is simply decadent, a manifestation of what Nietzsche would call *ressentiment* against the passage of time. By contrast, genuine history, and authentic embeddedness in a community, demands a revolutionary confrontation with the future through the *inceptive* trajectory of the community’s history. Inception (*Anfang*) must be distinguished from a mere beginning (*Beginn*) to some historical tradition. The inception *decides* nothing specific; it provides no particular content that ought to be preserved; rather, it founds the parameters for a whole way of interpreting, of questioning, of Being. A people, and a thinking, is revolutionary whenever it, in forging its future, continually confronts the possibilities left open by the inception to its history. Heidegger is “conservative” in this sense: such a revolution does not cast off the past in a self-inventing break with history; though it does not cling to history, genuinely polemical revolution does *preserve* history through a completely radical confrontation with it (hence Heidegger’s translation of *basileus* as *waltender Bewahrer* (EM, 47)). A people, a Volk, remains such, not by unthinkingly preserving particular characteristics and institutions, but rather by engaging in a fundamental struggle against the delimitations of the world established by its tradition. Preserving the tradition remains important, but only if such preservation serves as an *occasion* for the ongoing polemos with history, not as a crutch for clinging to the past out of resentment against time or in evasion of the defining questions of the present. What “conservatism” should conserve, then, is Heidegger’s sense of the Earth as a rootedness in a past and a tradition that, though given, can never be fully opened up and that thus demands constant, ongoing exploration and interpretation.

The Auseinandersetzung of the first and the other inception is a revolution

in the sense that, through this confrontation as re-revolution and *Um-wälzung*, the history of the West revolves and returns in full circle on itself, but not simply to replicate the past.<sup>22</sup> To be more precise, the movement of this revolution is helicoid, not circular, because in recovering the past, it does not simply “come full circle” to where it began but raises the *impetus* of the past up to a new dimension. In the repetitive retrieval of the first inception, the history of metaphysics is revolutionized and recovered in its originary impetus, not indeed as metaphysics, but as the question of Being in which all interpretation of the sense of Being and the meaning of beings returns to Dasein in the fecundity and power of polemos. “And because the originary belongs to the inception, the repetitive shaping of the inception [in Revolution as *Umwälzung*] is never the plagiarizing and knocking off of the earlier, but rather the entirely Other and nevertheless the Same” (*GA* 45, 41). The other inception does not duplicate the questions and metaphysical positions of its origin but rather is the Same as this originary inception in confronting a Being still at issue for the West, even if it gives this questioning a new direction. The revolution turns past nihilism in an overturning of the oblivion of Being. This revolution will be ontically revolutionary as well, for it will break the hold of the merely customary and conservative. But what Dasein has become most accustomed to is not a realm of beings but a mode of interpreting Being as a being, thereby lapsing into nihilism and the oblivion of Being. Moreover, the revolution is not an act accomplished by the will of the human subject or exercised as a dominion over history. The revolution occurs in the appropriating event of the turning between Dasein and Being: “*The other inception* demands the leap into the gaping middle of the turning of the appropriating event, in order to prepare the There in respect to its grounding—knowingly, questioningly, and in the style of preparation” (*BP*, 231). The Ereignis “founds” the belonging-together of Dasein and Being; it “appropriates” them to one another in the Kehre as a polemos that grants both Being and Dasein a meaningful history open to interpretative confrontation.

Finally, the revolution of history in the confrontation of the first and the other inception bears a remarkable resemblance to the hermeneutic circle. In his early maturity as a thinker, Heidegger speaks of the hermeneutic circle as an important problem and theme of phenomenology. To ordinary logical thought, the hermeneutic circle is supposed to represent a paradox, a vicious circle, for all theory of interpretation: if the task of such theory is to understand the How of our interpretative activity, how can we even pretend to gain a first foothold, given that every starting point begins in interpretation (*SZ*, 152)? Heidegger’s answer to this seeming vicious circle is that, if we have not grasped

the sense of Dasein's understanding as Being-in-the-world, then the circularity of Dasein's sense-making will indeed always seem vicious. "Understanding, as the disclosedness of the There, always touches upon the whole of Being-in-the-world. Existence is understood together with this understanding of the world, and *vice versa*. All interpretation, moreover, moves within the fore-structure, which we have already characterized. All interpretation that is to contribute to understanding must already have grasped what is to be interpreted" (SZ, 152).

For Dasein, the hermeneutic circle is not a matter of a merely contemplative "theory" of interpretation, but an aspect of its own existential Being in the interpretative understanding of Being-in-the-world. In our own discussion of Dasein's Being-in-the-world, and the fore- and as-structure within which sense is constituted, we have seen that Dasein is always already thrown into a world within which beings and modes of Being have been interpreted in the everyday involvements that are given to Dasein. This is why Heidegger states that: "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but rather to come into it in the right manner" (SZ, 153). Because Dasein cannot escape the "always already" of interpretation, its task must be able to take this circularity up as its own—but again, to be authentic, such circularity must be helicoid rather than merely replicative.

Entering this circle "in the right manner," or entering it properly, in Heidegger's sense of the appropriate and the appropriating, means Dasein's taking up the having-already-been-interpreted of its authentic past for the sake of the interpretation of its future. This way of entering the hermeneutic circle must itself be characterized by polemos: the "right manner" for entering the hermeneutic circle is through the appropriating event of the polemos of Dasein with Being in the turning. The turning itself also has this character of circularity. Moreover, the Ereignis, the event of appropriation in which Being and Dasein are granted a history together in inception, takes place in the polemos of this revolutionary turning. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger writes, "In the turning the appropriating event has its innermost historicizing and its widest grasping outward. The turning that comes to presence in the appropriating event is the concealed ground of all other subordinate turnings, circles, and cycles, which, dark in their provenance, remain unquestioned and readily take themselves to be the 'ultimate' (compare, for example, the turning in the articulation of the leading question; the circle in understanding)" (BP, 407).

The appropriating event, as polemical turning between Being and Dasein, grounds all other aspects of circularity, including the hermeneutic circle of interpretative understanding and the revolution of history. The turning as this

event governs the hermeneutic circle because it first gives Dasein its Earth and World; the appropriating event grants the *arkhē* from which Dasein's understanding is thrown and within which Dasein's Being-in-the-world becomes intelligible. As we shall see in the next chapter, because the turning, as this event, first grounds Dasein's world and history, the inception of this *arkhē* in the polemos of Dasein and Being demands an extraordinary displacement, a de-range-ment (*Ver-rückung*) of which only the few are capable, for this inceptive grounding demands that they leap onto an ungrounded ground—a *khaos*—and thereby serve as the vehicles for the event. Recall the passage from the *Contributions*: “Those who ground the abyss must be immolated in the fire of what is brought to endure as truth” (*BP* 7). Only in this apocalyptic, originary turning of an ontological strife are Dasein and Being inceptively granted their belonging-together in the openness of truth and in the There of Being-in-the-world: “What is this originary turning in the appropriating event? Only the onset of Being [*Seyn*] as appropriation [*Ereignung*] of the There brings *Being*-there to itself and thus the carrying out (preservation) of inwardly grounded truth into beings that find their abode in illuminated concealment of the There” (*BP* 407). In the Open of a polemically revealed world of sense and meaning, Being and Dasein belong together reciprocally as Being-there, as Dasein.

As we have seen, in polemos Dasein confronts and appropriates its own historicity and interpretedness. “Turning is re-turning [*Kehre ist Wider-kehre*]” (*BP* 407). Time is circular (*GA* 24, 336), but not crudely repetitive. Our discussion of inception indicates that the hermeneutic circle itself receives the originary impetus of its movement from the empowering *arkhē*. But the first inception encompasses and grounds all inceptions in the entire history of the West, understood as the history of Being as metaphysics. Hence the confrontation between the first and the other inception constitutes the entrance into the overarching hermeneutic circle of the history of the West as a whole: the turning of the appropriating event. For Heidegger, the first inception of the history of Being with the Greeks is the originary Earth that Dasein must confront to ground its World anew in the epoch of the radical triumph of nihilism. Polemos is the revolution of this overarching, and over-*arkhē*-ing, circle. This revolution moves to uncover and set to work possibilities contained but passed over in the first inception. Through this revolutionary confrontation, individual Dasein forges its fate within the destiny of a historical people that grounds itself in the other inception. Heidegger understands his own polemos as the preparation

for the awakening of the polemical inception as the engendering conception of Dasein's mission that is to be set in motion in the present for the sake of an authentic future. What remains for us to understand, in our discussion of polemos and politics, is how this polemical revolution sets to work upon Dasein's destiny when its destiny is understood as the Being that gathers a Volk together.



## Chapter 4 Polemos and the Revolution of Politics

Heidegger's defenders and detractors often have one point in common: they question whether anything resembling "political philosophy," in the ordinary sense at least, can be found in his work.<sup>1</sup> Their reservations are undoubtedly sound if by political philosophy we understand something like Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke's second treatise, for example, provides the reader with a highly organized account of fundamental principles of politics and goes on from these to detailed arguments about the form that government should take if it is to accord with these principles. But one simply does not find such technical discussions in the large corpus of Heidegger's writings. Neither does he analyze forms of government, nor, even during his most direct engagement in politics in 1933–34, make explicit arguments in favor of specific forms for the organization of the new German state. One might say that when Heidegger speaks of knowledge service, military service, and labor service in the 1933 rectoral address, he is consciously drawing on the Socratic categorization of the three classes of citizens in Plato's *Republic*. But his fleeting reference in the *Rektoratsrede* hardly suffices to flesh out a Heideggerian political philosophy.

### HEIDEGGER'S "POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY"

Nevertheless, even if we agree that Heidegger has no political philosophy in the sense of an explicit argument about the form that a good (or even the best) government should take, we should not be misled into thinking that he has nothing whatsoever to say about politics. That he has should be clear from the discussion in the previous chapter, where we saw that remembering the question of Being calls for a revolution in the history of Being itself. Indeed, Karl Löwith reports that in a 1936 conversation, Heidegger acknowledged that it was his understanding of Dasein's historicity that had led him to his option for the Nazis.<sup>2</sup> In reading Heidegger, we must recognize that political philosophy, if taken conventionally as the study of human nature, the factual conditions of society, and the best means for organizing institutions, must count as an *ontic* discipline, for it is the study of a realm of beings. But this still leaves open the possibility of understanding politics *ontologically*, as the realm in which everything political comes to have meaning for historical Dasein. Such an ontological understanding of politics may seem too abstract to have concrete political consequences. Nevertheless, in the first part of this chapter I shall argue that Heidegger's ontological understanding of the polis and of polemos contributes directly to his option for National Socialism.

While one can find passages in various of Heidegger's works that involve an intense discussion of the meaning of the Greek polis, or of justice understood as *dikē*, such isolated passages still hardly suffice to extrapolate a conventional political philosophy. Rather, it is in his discussion of the ontological conditions of Dasein's Being-together with other Dasein, or to put it in more prosaic language, of the conditions for human community, that we can find Heidegger's deeper contribution to political thought. Such conditions for human sociality cannot be understood as the material or developmental conditions that an anthropologist or sociologist might regard as the preconditions for developing an advanced society, one that we might recognize as having a "political" aspect. These are, rather, the *ontological* conditions that allow human beings in the first place, as Dasein, to encounter one another in a social space, a space within which Dasein may then enter those relations that we ordinarily call political. For Heidegger, as we have tried to show in the previous chapter, these conditions are historical. Dasein's authentic historicity demands an ongoing renewal through a confrontational appropriation of a tradition. Now we will try to show how, for Heidegger in the 1930s, this revolution in history had to usher in a revolution in politics.

Those inveterately hostile to Heidegger tend to understand his involvement with the Nazis in one of two ways. Either they believe that Heidegger found in National Socialism a confirmation of his philosophy, or they think that the very obscurantism and mysticism of Heidegger's thinking lent itself readily to seduction by the equally irrational doctrines of the Nazis. Obviously, these two interpretations may overlap. Proponents of the first tend to pay a bit more respect to the content of Heidegger's philosophy but then lament its consequences: because Heidegger sees human existence as tied radically to a historical time and place, he cannot recognize any fundamental moral or political absolutes, and moreover, precisely because of this groundlessness, he then opts for a resoluteness and a belonging that cement the individual to a particular historical moment.<sup>3</sup> The latter criticism tends to be much more dismissive: Heidegger's supposed "philosophy" of Being is precisely the sort of muddled, romantic thinking that encourages such monstrously intoxicated irrationalities as the National Socialists' doctrine of the master race.<sup>4</sup> The interpretations we shall explore here, however, will be those which endeavor to take seriously the connection between Heidegger's thinking and his politics, for good or for ill.

#### POLIS AND POLEMOS

One way to think about the relation of Heidegger's thought to his politics is to ask what relation politics has to the horizons of intelligibility, the play of the unconcealment and concealment of truth. In previous chapters, we have argued that for Heidegger, this alethic horizon of sense and meaning gets established, destroyed, and reconstituted through polemos, and that this cycle of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction underlies his understanding of history. For Heidegger, each generation finds itself, in its historicity, at issue: it must forge a place for itself and the way it understands the world by both breaking with and drawing upon a tradition. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in a discussion of the words *hupsipolis* *apolis* in the famous choral passage of Sophocles' *Antigone* (lines 332–72), Heidegger writes, "One translates *polis* as 'state' [*Staat*] and 'city-state,' but these do not touch the full sense of the word. Rather, *polis* means the site [*Stätte*], the There [*das Da*], within which and as which Da-sein, Being-There, is historical. The polis is the site of history, the There, *in* which, *out of* which, and *for* which history happens. To this site of history belong the gods, the temples, the priests, the festivals, the games, the poets, the thinkers, the rulers, the council of elders, the assembly of the Volk, the army, and the fleet" (*EM*, 117).

Heidegger confers an ontological status on the polis: the political, religious, and social organization of the city appears only on the horizon of the polis as this abode, the *Da* of Da-sein. As we have seen, this There, the Openness of Being, is set out and opened up through polemos, the Aus-einander-setzung of truth as unconcealment. In this section, we shall argue that the polis, broadly understood, is this polemical emplacement of historical Dasein in which Dasein finds and understands its Being-with other Dasein as a confrontation over the meaning of this Being-together.

The *ontic* meaning of the things of the city—"the gods, the temples, the priests," and so forth—first finds its orientation and its articulation as a whole for Dasein in an *ontological* dispensation of the sense of Being in the polis. We take a being to be divine, or a person to be free, only on the basis of an understanding of Being that adumbrates the meaning of the holy or of freedom that we can share as members of a given community. But if the polis is the site of a *political* unconcealment of beings in their Being, then the political must also share in polemos. This interpretation of the polis as the site of polemical truth is corroborated by Heidegger's discussion of the polis in his 1942–43 course on Parmenides.<sup>5</sup> This course seeks an understanding of Parmenides' teaching on *alētheia* as un-concealment in its connection to *lēthē*. From the outset, Heidegger dwells on the strife (*Streit*) between *alētheia* and *lēthē* in the unconcealment of truth, asserting that we have lost the originary understanding of the conflictual essence of truth intimated by the polemos of Heraclitus' Fragment 53 (*GA* 54, 25–26). "We therefore do not grasp how far the essence of truth itself, in itself, is strife" (*GA* 53, 26). Such discussions are by now familiar to us. But Heidegger further suggests here that "the essence of the Greek polis is grounded in the essence of *alētheia*" (*GA* 54, 132). The polis must therefore share in the polemical nature of truth as unconcealment.

Heidegger emphasizes the centrality of the "city" for Greek Dasein: "Polis is the *polos*, the pole, the place, around which everything that appears to Greek humanity as a being turns in the manner proper to it" (*GA* 54, 132). We put "city" in quotation marks because Heidegger clearly does not mean a place bounded by walls and defined by institutions; his polis is the ontological "pole" around which these ontic features take form. As this pole, the polis grants to beings and Dasein a center, a place of belonging where Being-in-the-world has its determinate, historical sense and orientation. "The pole neither makes nor creates beings in their Being, but rather as pole, it is the site of the unconcealment of beings as a whole. The polis is the essence of place [*Ort*] or, as we say, the settlement [*Ortschaft*] for the historical dwelling [*Aufenthalt*] of Greek human-

ity" (*GA* 54, 133). The polis is not some supersubject that engenders beings; rather, it is this abode, this uniqueness of place that historical Dasein inhabits and within which a horizon is unconcealed in its singularity. (We must hold off from the question of whether *only* Greek Dasein can inhabit such a site; as we shall see, Heidegger believes that the Germans can renew the situated, polemical belonging to the polis-polos and thereby lead the way for all historical peoples make their way "home.") Polis as polos centers the beings revealed to Dasein and grants them a wholeness and an orientation in a site grounded in Dasein's historicity.

Heidegger asserts that "according to its root, this word *polis* is the same as the ancient Greek word for 'to be' — *pelein*: 'to rise up, emergent into the unconcealed' (compare this with Sophocles, *Antigone*, *polla ta deina . . . pelei*)" (*GA* 54, 133). With this reference to Sophocles' verse, "Many are the terrible and wondrous things" (*Antigone*, line 332), Heidegger draws on the same choral ode on man as he did in *Introduction to Metaphysics*. And now again, as before, Heidegger is fascinated with line 370 of this passage, and particularly with the phrase *hupsipolis apolis*, which he deems Sophocles' deepest characterization of human Being, and which he translates as "rising high over the abode, deprived of abode [*hochüherragend die Stätte, verlustig der Stätte*]" (*GA* 54, 134). Here, Heidegger characteristically departs from conventional renderings of the ode. For example, Elizabeth Wyckoff translates lines 361–72 of *Antigone* in the following manner:

Clever beyond all dreams  
the inventive craft that he has  
which may drive him one time or another to well or ill.  
When he honors the laws of the land and the gods' sworn right  
*high indeed is his city; but stateless* the man  
who dares dwell with dishonor. Not by my fire,  
never to share my thoughts, who does these things.<sup>6</sup>

Heidegger draws the *hupsipolis apolis* off from the immediate logic of the choral speech, taking this alliterative pair of words as a single unit, without regard for punctuation (as, indeed, there was no punctuation in the original Greek). We must understand that for Heidegger, *apolis* is anything but apolitical here. For Dasein to be *hupsipolis apolis* denotes a decisive moment in politics, one in which Dasein both transgresses and returns to the Da of its everyday Being to confront and reforge this abode as the site of Being's unconcealment and of Dasein's habitation.

Whatever we might think of Heidegger's exegetical maneuvers, his rendering of these words as "rising high over the abode, deprived of abode" only *seems* to contradict his earlier assertion that the polis is the site of Dasein's inhabiting its Being-in-the-world as Dasein-with other Dasein. Indeed, he says that "the polis is the abode that gathers unto itself the unconcealment of beings" (*GA* 54, 133) and that "the polis is the essential abode of historical humanity, the Where in which human beings as *zōon logon ekhōn* belong, the Where from which alone the order is ordained for human beings in which they are ordered" (*GA* 54, 141). As we shall see later, Heidegger's thinking about this gathering of the logos as language has great importance for his conception of the belonging of a Volk to its historical place. For now we must ask how it is that human Dasein is also "rising high over the abode, deprived of abode" if precisely this site as polis is what bestows order and meaning to Being-in-the-world, gathering Dasein and beings together in the logos of truth.

Precisely because truth, as *a-lētheia*, is polemical, the polis as *polos* and as *pelein* is not a constant, secure being, a permanent political and social order, upon which some secure, objectifiable horizon of intelligibility can be erected. "The polis itself is only the pole of the *pelein*, the manner in which the Being of beings in its disclosure and concealment disposes a Where for itself, in which the history of a people [*Menschentum*] is gathered" (*GA* 54, 142). The key here is the "disclosure *and* concealment," the poles of the polemos itself. For Heidegger, the Greek polis is not a utopia, a place—a being—defined by certain ontic features so perfect as to never require change, but rather a *topos* for polemos. "If now, however, as the word itself says, a conflictual essence belongs to *alētheia*, and if the conflictual [*das Streithafte*] also appears in the oppositional forms of distortion and oblivion, then in the polis, as the essential abode of human beings, every most extreme counteressence must hold sway and, therein, every excess [*Un-wesen*], for the unconcealed and for beings, that is, unbeings [*das Unseiende*] in the multiplicity of their counteressence" (*GA* 54, 133). The thrust of this difficult passage seems to be that, rather than establishing some absolute intelligibility, the polis must hold open for Dasein the possibility of confrontation and dissolution in the understanding of its world.

The dying out of this ontological strife, then, must lead to the decline of the polis as the site for Dasein's encounter with Being. Heidegger cites the words *dikē eris* from Heraclitus' Fragment 80 and asserts that "Recht *ist* Streit" — "justice *is* strife": "Ordinary understanding thinks: 'Justice, that's something written down somewhere, and with its help and its application, strife will be resolved and set aside.' No! Originally and according to its essence, justice sets

itself forth as such, forms and proves itself, becomes true through strife. This lays down the parties, and one side is only what it is through the other, in mutual self-recognition [*im gegenseitigen Sichanerkennen*]” (GA 39, 126). Ontologically, justice cannot be understood as the rectification of squabbles and differences within the polis. Rather, in this almost Hegelian passage, justice allows the Dasein that assembles around the pole of the polis to recognize and appropriate as its own the various interlocking, if confrontational, tasks given to it as a historical Volk; justice and polemos are equally primordial. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger discusses dikē (justice) as *Fug* (EM, 123). Justice as *Fug* is a “jointure,” an articulation of an interpretative whole within which Dasein uncovers the dispensation of its Being-in-the-world. The way in which beings gain articulation as a whole, within the full horizon of practices that unite beings and Dasein around the pole of the polis, is through a justice that polemically articulates the joints and seams (*Fugen*) of meaning among disparate beings. The same articulation, through the “mutual self-recognition” of strife, must orient Dasein in the polis as well. Justice arranges the world of the polis into the joints and harmonies of its structure (*Bau*), a structure that necessarily stands, like a stone archway, through the dispensation of stress and opposition.

#### POLEMOS AND FOUNDING

In Heidegger’s interpretation of the choral ode in *Antigone*, human Dasein most properly abides in the polis as the site of a historical belonging by being hupsipolis-apolis: “These are the frightfulness, the awfulness, the calamity that belong to the Greek polis. This is the rise and fall of human beings in their historical abode of essence—hupsipolis-apolis—rising high over the abode, deprived of abode, as Sophocles (*Antigone*) names human beings” (GA 54, 134). The polis is the abode of Dasein and a site for the polemos of the truth of Being, not because it institutes an enduring political order, but rather because it holds itself open to “calamity” (*das Unheil*)—that is, to the dissolution of instituted order and to demolition of the meaning of beings and the sense of Being that go with that order. In such calamitous transgression brought on by the apolis figure, everything is *aus den Fugen*, out of joint: the articulated cosmos of meaning dissolves in the face of a new founding, or else collapses entirely into oblivion.<sup>7</sup> It is this sort of vision that we might well call Heidegger’s *apocalypticism*, in the etymological sense of that word: a revelation, an unveiling, precisely in the midst of, if not *as*, utter catastrophe.

Returning to *Introduction to Metaphysics*, we read in Heidegger’s interpreta-

tion of the choral passage that human beings are *to deinotaton*, the strangest, most terrible beings of all, *das Unheimlichste*, the ones who are uncanniest and most deprived of a home, who “step out, move out of the limits that at first and for the most part are accustomed and homey, because as those who do violence, they overstep the limits of the homey, precisely in the direction of the uncanny in the sense of the overwhelming” (*EM*, 116). Again, the essence of the apolis human being seems far removed from a comfortable abiding in a given Being-in-the-world.<sup>8</sup> Heidegger’s sense of the political, then, is that it must provide the space for this transgressive, apocalyptic reconstruction of meaning between Dasein and the polis: “The polis is political, that is, the site of history, only inasmuch as within it true poets, true thinkers, true priests, true rulers, are. *Are*—that is, using power-wielding violence and becoming pre-eminent in historical Being as creators, as men of action. Preeminent in the site of history, they become at the same time apolis, without city and abode, lonesome, uncanny, among beings as a whole but with no way out, at the same time without ordinance and limit, without structure and fit, because they *as* creators must first ground all this” (*EM*, 117).

Heidegger here understands violence in light of the dual meaning that he discerns in *deinon* as it appears in the first two lines of the choral passage: “polla ta deina kouden anthrōpou deinoteron pelei.”<sup>9</sup> “The Greek word *deinon* has that uncanny ambiguity with which the saying of the Greeks traverses the opposed *Aus-einander-setzungen* of Being” (*EM*, 114). On the one hand, for Heidegger, the *deinon* (conventionally translated as the terrible, the awesome, the wondrous or strange) is the “overwhelming sway” (*das überwältigende Walten*) of Being itself that throws Dasein into its Being-in-the-world within a horizon of history and place that Dasein cannot choose. On the other hand, human Dasein is itself *deinon*, both because Dasein is exposed to this overwhelming sway of Being and because Dasein wields violence (*gewalt-tätig ist*) in confronting the horizons of sense and meaning given by Being, challenging Being with new interpretations. The *deinon* seems to describe an aspect of the *Kehre* between Being and Dasein: the terrible violence with which Being and Dasein confront each other in the polemos.

Heidegger makes a careful distinction: “Here, we give the expression ‘violence-doing’ [*Gewalt-tätigkeit*] an essential sense that in principle reaches out over the usual meaning, which generally signifies nothing but brutality and arbitrariness” (*EM*, 115). Heidegger’s ontological violence is done to the “ordinance and fit” (*Bau und Fug*) of the reigning dispensation of meaning as it stands in the polis. But while this violence is not mere “brutality and arbitrariness”



ness,” Heidegger makes no attempt to deny that the ontological catastrophe (in the sense of its Greek roots as upheaval and overturning) wrought by the apoleis creators has ontic repercussions. He derides ordinary people, with their peace-loving ways, as incapable of comprehending the transgressive genius of violence: “Violence is usually seen in terms of the domain in which concurring compromise and mutual assistance set the standard for Dasein, and accordingly all violence is necessarily deemed only a disturbance and an offense” (*EM*, 115). The apolis figure in the polis must therefore employ an ontological violence to prevent Dasein’s home in Being from becoming too comfortable: “Essential de-cision, when it is carried out and when it resists the constantly pressing ensnarement in the everyday and the customary, has to use violence. This act of violence, this de-cided setting out upon the way to the Being of beings, moves humanity out of the hominess [*aus dem Heimischen*] of what is most directly nearby and what is usual” (*EM*, 128). Apolis Dasein hazards the violence that *das Unheimliche* does to everyday Being-in-the-world in order to secure the polis as a site for Dasein’s authentic encounter with its own Being. Such Dasein is *authentically* amoral in that its violence steps beyond (*hupsipolis*), transgresses conventional mores, thereby either renewing them or destroying them in preparation for a new dispensation.

This deployment of this ontological (and possibly ontic) violence for the sake of a renewed belonging to Being recalls the discussion in our previous chapter about the polemical destruction of the history of Being and, more specifically, the destruction of the fabric of sense and meaning within which each generation finds itself historically at issue. The other inception in the history of Being requires a revolution in the Being of the polis. But in the passage cited above on the apoleis creators, Heidegger expresses this confrontation in political terms, albeit in the sense of a grand politics in which the entire horizon of the Being of beings becomes reconstituted. The polis is the pole, the abode, around which beings and Dasein find their intelligibility and meaning in Being; this order has its enduring “ordinance and fit,” but only, paradoxically, because the polis remains open to an ontological overturning (*kata-strophē*) by those who trespass that order.

Heidegger draws again on the choral passage to express this transcendent, apolis transgression. Lines 370–71 read in full: “hupsipolis apolis ho tō to mē kalon / xunesti tolmas kharin.” A conventional translation might read: “Hupsipolis apolis is that man who, out of audacity, consorts with evil.” But for Heidegger, *tolma* (which he translates as *Wagnis*—audacity, daring, venturing, risk-taking) defines the uncanniness, the homelessness, of the apolis figure who

exposes himself to the overwhelming violence of the powers of Being. In tolma, the apolis one ventures into the ontological uncertainty beyond everyday Being-in-the-world, bursting, hupsipolis, out of the encircling boundaries of sense and meaning. The condemnation of the chorus (“mēt’ emoi parestios/ genoito mē t’ ison phonōn/ hos tad’ erdoi”) only confirms the homeless one’s creative overstepping of the limits of conventional morality in the polis, his bold, de-constructive rupturing of the world’s jointure. “The *violent one*, the creative one who sets forth into the unsaid, who breaks into the unthought, who compels what has never happened and makes appear what is unseen—this violent one stands at all times in daring (tolma, *Antigone* 371)” (*EM*, 123).

In their amoral daring, the apoleis creators accomplish for the polis what the polemical destruction accomplishes for the history of Being: “they *as* creators must first ground all this.” These apoleis figures ground an inception, an Anfang. In their confrontation with Being, they provide the arkhē for the polis. Granted, Heidegger’s tone here seems quite Nietzschean, and this resonance has led some readers to quarantine and subsequently excise this phase of Heidegger’s thinking as metaphysical and voluntarist (in the sense of making the will of the self-creating subject the highest ontological principle).<sup>10</sup> And yet, the apoleis creators do not create ex nihilo, from the sheer force of a will to power. Their tolma, their daring wager, encompasses the possibility that the founding might founder catastrophically in the overwhelming sway of Being, because Dasein cannot overpower Being and simply, willfully, *impose* an interpretative horizon upon it. Polemical destruction does not dispense with history in the interpretative return to the origins; these apoleis creators transcend the polis by returning to it. The cycle of rupture and refounding essentially parallels the revolution of history in confrontation of inceptions: the arkhē of the polis must be wagered in deconstructive-reconstructive polemos with the boundaries of meaning, the “walls” of the city.

As we have seen, Heidegger’s vision of this at once transgressive *and* redemptive journey is essentially tragic and apocalyptic. Those who in their daring confront the horizons of the polis in order to engender and renew the polemos with Being are destroyed by Being as the site of the event (*Ereignis*) of Being: “This necessity of shattering [against the overwhelming sway of Being] can subsist only insofar as that which must shatter is forced into such Da-sein. But the human being is forced into such Da-sein, thrown into the needfulness of such Being, because the overwhelming as such, to appear as holding sway, *needs* a site of openness” (*EM*, 124). Dasein cannot overstep Being itself, for Being is what grants intelligibility in the first place, but, as the site of Being, Da-sein can

dare to challenge the horizon of sense and meaning given by Being. “The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is, because from the ground up, it deals with and conserves the familiar only in order to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in. Being itself throws humanity into the course of this tearing away, which forces humanity beyond itself, as the one who moves out to Being, in order to set Being to work [*um dieses ins Werk zu setzen*] and thus to hold open beings as a whole. Therefore the violence-doer knows no kindness and conciliation (in the ordinary sense), no appeasement and mollification by success or prestige and by their confirmation. . . . For such a one, disaster is the deepest and broadest Yes to the overwhelming [power of Being]” (*EM*, 125). This setting-to-work of Being through the audacity of the uncanny human being recalls the *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen* of the *Aus-einander-setzung* of polemical truth, discussed in the previous chapter. Again, the key is the *Setzen*, the positing, the founding, that transpires through a conflict over the horizon of the world’s intelligibility. By igniting this conflict with Being, uncanny *Dasein* grounds the inceptive *arkhē* by both deconstructing and founding the polis in the polemos.

Political founding, ordinarily understood, establishes the social and political order of a regime by which human beings take their measure and find their bearing. Heidegger understands such founding ontologically as an interplay of the work of Being and the apolis founder in *Aus-einander-setzung* as the *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen* of the truth of Being. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger compares *Setzen* and *Stellen*, two German words that denote placing, setting, establishing. In doing this, he relies on his interpretation of *logos*, derived from *legein*, as meaning a laying out and setting forth, a gathering into an intelligible account. “We must think of ‘*Stellen*’ in the sense of [the Greek] *thesis*” (UK, 68). Also: “*Setzen* here means ‘to bring to stand’” (UK, 25). The founding work of the *Setzen* of the *Aus-einander-setzung* both places beings in their unconcealment around the pole of the polis and establishes, in an act of *thesis*, the *nomoi*—the social, legal, and religious norms that govern *Dasein*’s Being-with-one-another. In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger compares the modern idea of nature to the Greek understanding of *phusis*, and he reflects upon the origin of the distinction between nature and convention: “As a counterphenomenon [to the Greek idea of *phusis*] there arose what the Greeks call *thesis*, positing [*Setzung*], ordinance [*Satzung*], or *nomos*, law [*Gesetz*], rule in the sense of mores. But this is not what is moral [*das Moralische*], but instead what concerns mores [*das Sittenhafte*], that which rests on the commitment of freedom and the assignment of tradition; it is that which con-

cerns a free comportment and attitude, the shaping of the historical Being of humanity, *ēthos*, which under the influence of morality was then degraded to the ethical” (*EM*, 13).

Note Heidegger’s emphasis here on words rooted in *Setzen* that indicate law, principle, and foundation.<sup>11</sup> In the *Aus-einander-setzung* with overpowering power of Being as phusis, *Dasein* establishes (*setzt*) a realm of transient finitude around the pole of the polis, and this realm is governed by what stands as fixed (*tithenai*) in the disclosing dispensation of mores and law (*thesis*).<sup>12</sup> It is in this sense of law as thesis that Heidegger in *Being and Time* argues that all interpretative ventures always already operate within a horizon of *Vorhabe*, *Vorsicht*, and *Vorgriff* that is “*gesetzt*” (*SZ*, 150). Each of these (fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception) establishes the “prior” interpretative take on the world that all understanding is simply given, without reflection and without being able to refuse, before *Dasein* engages in any active work of interpreting the world in the more usual sense. The *Setzen* grounds the circularity of all interpretation by first *giving* to *Dasein* the horizons of its understanding. Polemos itself has this character of founding, in that it sets beings out into the truth of Being in an ordered cosmos. The *Setzen* grounds a logos within which the beings disclosed in polemos are assembled for the polis and made intelligible for a plural *Dasein*; *Ge-setz*, as the gathering of the mores and laws that ground a community as whole, reflects for the polis the *es gibt* of Being, its unavoidable “overwhelming sway.” Convention as first founded comes to have meaning only in the *Aus-einander-setzung* with Being. The construction (*Bau*) of a moral and political world is grounded in this ontological event; Heidegger’s scorns “the ethical” as a set of supposedly absolute imperatives that, in fact, fail to grasp their own derivative, metaphysical status. The entire cohesion of this founded cosmos may—indeed, *must*—come into question again in the transgressive, deconstructive (*abbauend*) polemos of the unhomed, apoleis creators. Polemos creates *and* it destroys—or, rather, *as* it destroys. And destroys *as* it creates. This is the affirmative catastrophe, that necessarily appears as a merely nihilistic outrage to “the ethical.”

The apolis founder has the power to ground an unconcealment of Being only by engaging in the polemos with Being, and it is properly polemos itself that founds and grounds the polis through the *Ereignis* of the founder’s transgressive thinking and deeds. During the rectorate, Heidegger identifies the triad of poet, thinker, and statesman as those who engage the polemos. Against the overwhelming power of Being, they “cast the counterweight of their work and capture in this work the world that is thereby opened up” (*EM*, 47). This

triad serves as the apolis founding: the poet bestows a new world as opened up in language, the thinker grounds this world in thought, and the statesman secures this world in deed. It is in the sense of this triad that Heidegger the thinker turned to Hölderlin on the one hand, and to Hitler on the other.

#### KHAOS, GROUND, AND THE NEARNESS OF DISASTER

But upon what ground does the apolis founder land, stand, and then establish this logos, thesis, and polis if founding itself forges the grounding origin of history? When we speak of ground, we often mean that which sustains us, giving our world its earth to stand on, so that we can confidently and without reflection go about our everyday business. This imagery extends to our seeking “grounds” for our hopes, beliefs, and arguments. But for Heidegger, this understanding of ground pertains to the first inception of Western history, in which ground is understood metaphysically as *a being* that serves as the last foundation for knowledge and certainty. In the last chapter we saw how Heidegger connects ground with *arkhē* as both inception and mastery: the first inception has run its metaphysical course in a modernity where both science and politics seek a totalizing dominion over all beings based on the sure possession of the foundation of Being. This boundless and hubristic quest for complete mastery underlies both the essence of modern technology and modernity’s nihilistic crisis.

Whereas the leading question of the first inception seeks the metaphysical ground (*Grund*) of beings, according to Heidegger, the grounding question of the other inception seeks Being (*Seyn*) as ontological grounding (*Gründung*). An important division of *Contributions to Philosophy*, “Die Gründung,” explores this grounding of the other inception of history. Ground understood as this ontological grounding is not a thing, a being, a basis upon which ontic structures and calculations can be founded. Rather, the grounding is Being (*Seyn*) itself, understood as the polemical opening of the truth in which all intelligibility and all ontic grounds first become possible. Let us recall a passage from the *Contributions*: “At times those who ground the abyss [*jene Gründer des Abgrundes*] must be immolated in the fire of what is brought to endure as truth, in order that Being-there [*Da-sein*] may become possible for humans and that constancy in the midst of beings be saved, so that beings themselves undergo a restoration in the Open of the strife between Earth and World” (BP, 7).

As we know from Chapter Two, the strife between Earth and World ex-

presses the polemical confrontation between the unconcealed horizon of intelligibility of Being-in-the-world and the concealed trajectory of history that both sustains and threatens the coherent sense of that horizon. Heidegger's founders, political in the ontological sense he employs, both secure a community's footing in an everyday world and expose that security to catastrophe. Thus the founder instantiates the strife between World and Earth. But for Heidegger, the place beyond the comfortable given forms of everyday intelligibility is not a mere chaos, in the usual sense of that term. In German, abyss is *Abgrund*—'unground.' The unhomed creator wagers a leap into an abyss, thereby either grounding or dismantling (or both) Dasein's Da, the site of its polemos with Being.<sup>13</sup>

Heidegger understands this abyss as the Greek *khaos*. In one of his Nietzsche lectures, Heidegger links the *khaos* of Hesiod's *Theogony* (lines 116–117) with a lost experience of truth as *alētheia*. (*GA* 47, 149–50). The lines of Hesiod read: "For truly *khaos* came first into being, and then / Broad-bosomed Earth, firm seat of all things for ever." In Greek, the word *khaos* stems from the verb *khao-mai*, meaning to gape, to yawn open. Chaos in the ancient sense as *khaos* is itself an abyss, or a yawning gap, an un-ground (*Abgrund*), that precedes all ground and upon which the "firm seat" of Earth is set.<sup>14</sup>

Heidegger insists that our modern understanding of chaos differs fundamentally from Hesiod's *khaos*. "Chaos does not just mean [for us now] the unordered, but this as well: the disturbed in its disturbance, the muddled together [*das Durcheinander*] in its convolution" (*GA* 47, 150). By contrast, when Heidegger seeks to explain Hölderlin's vision of nature as "generated from holy chaos" in the poem "Wie wenn am Feiertage," he writes, "Khaos means above all the yawning, the gaping cleft, the primally self-opening Open, wherein all is swallowed. The cleft denies every support for the distinct and the grounded. And therefore, for all experience that knows only what is derivative, chaos seems to be the undifferentiated, and thus mere disturbance. Nevertheless, the 'chaotic' in this sense is only the degraded and contrary essence of what 'chaos' means. Thinking it in accord with 'nature' (*phusis*), chaos remains that gaping apart out of which the Open opens itself and by which this Open grants truth [*gewähre*] to each differentiated thing in a bounded presencing. Hence Hölderlin names 'chaos' and 'disorder' as 'holy.' Chaos is the holy itself" (*EHD*, 62–63).

The daring leap into *khaos* is a leap into the polemos that grounds the open realm of the *Da*. This leap, this Sprung, to an ungrounded ground, is also an *Ursprung*, an origin, the inception of a new dispensation of Being. It is an ontological act of founding. Metaphysically understood, chaos denotes a tumult

of beings, mere undifferentiated ontic convolution, a *Durch-einander-setzung*. But ontologically, khaos names the action of the truth of Being in a space where Earth and World clash and that sets beings apart from one another and out into an Open in *Aus-einander-setzung*. As such, the grounding and founding work of the creators seeks no single *being* as ground and indeed forsakes such foundation, whether in a creator God or in an ultimate theory of physics (*BP*, 380–81).

Heidegger once proclaimed that “questioning is the piety of thinking” (*TK*, 36). Genuine philosophical questioning unsettles the ground on which one stands—it reveals the abyss, the khaos, which Hölderlin names the holy. Such questioning has its piety in relying on the khaos itself, not on a theological or scientific ultimate being, to sustain thinking. Only in release to this free fall can *Dasein* confront Being—Heidegger’s Holy. Piety resides not in acquiescence, but in the daring playfulness of the “Why?”<sup>15</sup> To dare to challenge the powers of Being in polemos is to leap to a ground that only the yawning khaos can first sustain—if it does so at all. In this way, holy khaos itself bestows the new forms that creation discovers. The founders do not create *ex nihilo*; through the daring leap into khaos, they engender what is unconcealed to them in the polemos with Being. And the founders may well be swallowed by this chasm in their moment of triumph. Indeed, their triumph is defined by the hurtling leap into the gaping khaos, for only in this plunge (which is *not* the “falling” of *Being and Time*) do they renounce all the security of both understanding and mores that grounds ordinary Being-in-the-world in order to lay themselves open to the *possibility* of engendering and founding new forms. The founding itself is not up to them; only the leap is. The founding may be granted only by Being, but only after the founders take the leap.

#### THE VOLK AND THE REVOLUTION OF THE POLIS

An important question remains from the discussion in the previous sections: even if we are to understand the polis in Heidegger’s sense as the *Da*, the horizon of both ontological sense and the historical belonging of community, how are we to conceive of this polis beyond its incarnation in its very determinate role as Greek city? What is the meaning of the polis during what Heidegger deems to be the crisis of modernity? In March of 1933, after his participation in a conference of educators devoted to the National Socialist reorganization of the university, Heidegger wrote a letter full of excitement and enthusiasm to his friend Elisabeth Blochmann: “The current happenings have for me—precisely

because much remains dark and unmastered—an unusual focusing force. They strengthen the will and the certainty in the service of realizing a great task and of contributing to the construction of a world grounded in the Volk. The pallor and the shadows of mere ‘culture’ and the unreality of so-called values have long since sunk to nullity for me and left me to seek a new foundation in Da-sein. We will find [this foundation], and at the same time, the calling of what is German in the history of the West, only if we expose ourselves to Being in a new manner and appropriation. Thus I experience the present occurrences entirely out of the future. Only in this manner can a genuine participation come to fruition, as well as *incisive taking-a-stand* in our history, which surely remain the preconditions for a true actualization” (HB, 60).

In previous years, as we have seen, Heidegger spoke regularly of the destruction of the history of Being and the deconstruction (*Abbau*) of the world of sense and meaning. What is remarkable about this passage is that Heidegger now speaks of the *construction* (*Bau*) of a world, a world grounded in the Volk. This construction can take place only in that historical moment when history has been grounded through the creative confrontation with Being. For Heidegger, the “current happenings” of the National Socialist revolution offered just such a moment of grounding and renewal, one in which he, as a thinker, could serve as an apolis founder. We will argue in this section that the form that the polis takes for Heidegger, in the epoch of the crisis of modernity, is the Volk. As Robert Dostal has shown so clearly, Heidegger’s valorization of the Volk places him squarely in the tradition of those who seek to preserve the organic belonging of *Gesellschaft*, genuine community, against the artificial togetherness of *Gemeinschaft*, mere society.<sup>16</sup> Heidegger intensifies this problematic: the meaning of the Volk will remain an important *ontological* question as he searches for intimations of the other inception of “the history of the West.” In this discussion, as in the foregoing, *Volk* will be left untranslated, because the abstract and generalizing English words “people,” “nation,” and “community” convey none of the atavistic sense of belonging that is implied by the German word and that Heidegger manifestly exploits during this period.

There can be no mistaking what Heidegger means by the “current happenings” in his letter to Blochmann: he means the events of Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist revolution. The letter is dated March 30, 1933. On January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler had been made Reich chancellor, and he subsequently won a majority in the parliament by demanding new elections. On March 12, Hitler defied the constitution by ordering that henceforth the swastika be raised along with the black, red, and gold flag of the Reich that had been flown during the



Weimar Republic. In March, the Reichstag passed laws granting Hitler nearly dictatorial powers, including the Enabling Act of March 24, which allowed the chancellor, not the president, to draft legislation. Also in March, Hitler began his *Gleichschaltung* to coordinate both German society and the German political system with the National Socialist German Workers' Party. On March 28, Hitler directed the functionaries of the NSDAP to commence a boycott against the Jews of Germany, and during April 1933 the Sturm Abteilung (SA) and other Party organs brutally enforced this policy.<sup>17</sup> During this time, Heidegger had already been active in organizing the KADH, the Kulturpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Hochschullehrer (the Political-Cultural Labor Association of German University Professors), an organization committed, as Farías describes it, "to a National Socialist renewal of the universities."<sup>18</sup> The KADH included Ernst Krieck, Friedrich Neumann, Lothar Wolfe, Oskar Becker, and Erich Jaensch; Heidegger was a founding member.<sup>19</sup>

In his letter to Blochmann, Heidegger already indicates that the Volk that he has in mind is the German. Heidegger envisions his own "service" to a "great task" as bound up with a German calling to appropriate Being anew and to free the Volk from pale concepts such as "culture" and "values," which Heidegger associates with the metaphysical subjectivism of the decadent world that is being overthrown. This language recalls what we have learned before of the polemical task of the "other inception" of Western history: the revolution of the hermeneutic circle of history is accompanied by a revolution in politics. In his letter to Blochmann, Heidegger warns against a superficial and precipitate fascination with the current politics: this confused and perhaps frightening political situation "can be only *one* path of the first revolution." But, he continues: "Certainly, for many this can be and has been a path of first awakening—provided that we are resolved to prepare for a second and deeper one" (*HB*, 60). The Volk may indeed be drawn into the revolution by the exigencies of immediate political and social concerns, but the Volk must also be awakened to the deeper "great task" laid out for Germany, its "second" revolution: a renewed polemos with Being. Heidegger adds as clarification that the present political conflict both with Marxism and with the (Christian-Democratic) *Zentrum* will lose its meaning if it loses its sense as an "Auseinandersetzung with the contrary spirit of the Communist world, and no less with the dying spirit of Christianity" (*HB*, 60). Current events have meaning for Heidegger only as manifestations of a polemos between ontological worlds—in this case, between the new Germany emerging in the present revolution and Communism and Christianity, which Heidegger believes share roots in the history of Being.

For Heidegger, as we know, “world” is not to be understood as a subjective worldview, but as the horizon within whose bounds sense, meaning, and intelligibility become possible in Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. The worlds of Communism and Christianity must be confronted because, in contrast to the world grounded in the Volk, the first two espouse a belonging grounded in forms of universalism, whether this universalism is given by the logic of a materialist dialectic of history or by the soteriology of the Logos or the Holy Spirit. If the deeper, ontological revolution is not sustained, Heidegger warns, the present revolution, to be grounded anew in Being and “our Volk,” will simply repeat the errors of the Bismarckian era of 1871–1900, which is to say it will expend its energies in a fruitless *Kulturkampf*, a cultural war merely with the institutions of Christianity, and, by extension, the Communist movement (*GA* 43, 190–93). Heidegger is concerned not simply that a historical opportunity might be wasted, but rather also that an appropriate and authentic response be made to the history of Being itself.

#### “WHO ARE WE?”

But what makes a Volk “our Volk”? During much of the principal period of our study (from *Being and Time* to the end of the Second World War), Heidegger regularly asks a simple question: Who are we? *Wer sind wir?*<sup>20</sup> He begins asking this question in his lecture course of 1929–30, when the world suffered the first shocks of the global economic collapse, and it is an important theme in the *Contributions to Philosophy*. In 1929, Heidegger recognizes that “everywhere, there are convulsions, crises, catastrophes, emergencies” (*GA* 29/30, 243)—but he understands these as simply the foreground to a more fundamental emergency: the question of who we are in our belonging to Being. “Not this social distress, not that political confusion; not this impotence of science, not that corrosion of art; not this groundlessness of philosophy, not that feebleness of religion—the urgent need is not that this or that emergency presses us in one way or another. Rather, what oppresses in a concealed, yet most profound, manner is this: *the lack of an essential oppression [Bedrängnis] of our Dasein as a whole*” (*GA* 29/30, 244).

This *lack (Ausbleiben)* of a great burden leaves Dasein facing—not a revelatory *Angst* before the abyss—but a concealed terror before the timeless boredom of an ontological void (*die langweilende Leere*). The economic, political, social, and cultural crises of the world depression in general and of the Weimar Republic in particular do not in and of themselves concern Heidegger, for these

too are at most signs of Dasein's inability to take on the burden of Being. The search for reforms and solutions will only cover over completely the "concealed" emergency. So instead, Heidegger seeks the way in which "our Dasein" is capable of accepting its burden (*GA 29/30*, 248), "our" op-pression by the insistent call of a destiny to confront Being as Da-sein and so to confront the question of who we are.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, as we shall see, his answer is that "we" are the German Volk, but that as an answer to the question, the Volk must remain a response, not a resolution. "Who are we?" must *remain* at issue in the awakening of a new attunement to Being.

The question Who are we? is akin to a question implied by the polis. What is the scope of political belonging? With whom is the abode of a historical community shared? The ancient "city" of Athens extended beyond the walls, homes, shops, public buildings, and temples of the urban area to the outlying farms, estates, and silver mines, and even to Athens' colonies and subject allies. Still, these ontic, geographic features do not define the polis. As Hannah Arendt has emphasized, Pericles knew of the Athenians that "Wherever you go, you will be a polis"<sup>22</sup>—having witnessed the polis survive despite the evacuation of the whole population by sea and the destruction of the city by the Persians. The polis is the ontological pole around which a historical Volk finds its horizon, and this pole is always ontologically in question in polemos. Similarly, the question Who are we? first looks like an ontic question, that is to say, conceived broadly, as a question about our nature as human beings (perhaps biologically as *homo sapiens*, or metaphysically as the rational animal), or, conceived more narrowly, as a question about our identity as a distinct community defined by a common history, or perhaps geography, religion, political ideology, ethnicity, race, or language. But as we shall see, Heidegger will treat the "Who are we?" not as an ontic question, but rather as an ontological one about the Being that "we" share, that we "are," and how this Being makes us "who" we are.

When Heidegger takes up the question of the human being, of who we are,<sup>23</sup> he answers tentatively at first: "Who are *we*, then? How do we mean us, if we now say 'us'? We, this quantity of human individuals who have come together in this space? Or 'us,' to the extent that here at the university we stand before certain tasks of study in the disciplines? Or 'us,' to the extent that we, as belonging to the university, are also bound up in the process of the development of the spirit? And this history of the spirit—is it only a German, or an occidental, and further, a European historicizing? Or should we draw still wider the circle of within which we stand? We mean 'us,' but in which situation, in which marking off and out of this situation?" (*GA 29/30*, 103–4). In 1929–30,

Heidegger asks this We-question in the context of a broader task: the awakening of a grounding attunement of *our* Dasein (*die Weckung einer Grundstimmung unseres Daseins*).<sup>24</sup> He also poses this philosophically: “The grounding task consists now in the awakening of a grounding attunement of our philosophizing. I say with intent: *our* philosophizing, not an arbitrary philosophizing, nor indeed philosophy in itself, which does not exist. A grounding attunement, which our philosophizing must bear, is to be awakened, and not *the* grounding attunement” (*GA 29/30*, 89). The attunement cannot be general; it must be “*a* grounding attunement” appropriate to how a particular Volk is situated in its own historical belonging to Being. For Heidegger, the connection of philosophy and the grounding attunement is crucial: “Philosophy always historicizes in a grounding attunement” (*GA 29/30*, 10, emphasis removed). The notion of *Stimmung* is an important theme in *Being and Time* (*SZ*, §29 and *passim*), and the word is commonly translated as “mood.” Mood is an *existentiale*; in its mood as *Befindlichkeit*, Dasein is brought before—factically thrown into—its Being in such a way that beings are revealed upon a definite horizon.

The attunement Heidegger examines in the lecture course of 1929–30 is not anxiety (as in *Being and Time*), but rather deep boredom (*die tiefe Langweile*), a mood in which both Being and beings slip into unrelieved inconsequence and confront Dasein with a mere emptiness and void: the *Auseinandersetzung* finds nothing to come to grips with—but precisely this Nothing is what “we” must confront as our crisis. In *Being and Time*, anxiety confronts Dasein with its nullity, its groundlessness in the face of Being, and so with the possibility of Dasein’s seizing its thrown possibilities in resolute authenticity. Deep boredom, by contrast, confronts Dasein with the horror of an emptiness that can never be filled up ontically with either the exigencies of suffering or the distractions of entertainment. Whereas anxiety strips Dasein away from its immediate concerns and leaves it open to the *possible* appropriation of its Being in resolute authenticity (*SZ*, 344), ontological boredom negates all possibility of Dasein’s appropriating itself in such authenticity. Boredom reveals a Nothing that offers no redemption to Dasein. For Heidegger, despite the excitement and pain involved in the contemporary economic and political crises, the defining mood that reveals Dasein’s belonging to Being is one of profound boredom; our Dasein cries out for a bracing awakening. Is it any surprise then that the Heidegger who sought an awakening (*Weckung*) of a new attunement to Being would opt for a movement whose clarion call was “Germany, wake up!” (*Deutschland Erwache!*)?

Here, I translate *Stimmung* as “attunement” because in the 1929–30 lecture

course, Heidegger explicitly discusses *Stimmung* as musical, as that which grants the tone to Dasein's Being (*GA* 29/30, 101). Attunement establishes the temporal rhythm in which Being and beings are disclosed to Dasein. "In attunement, precisely *beings as a whole* and we ourselves within this whole are revealed dispositionally" (*GA* 29/30, 410). The "music" of attunement reveals to Dasein a particular articulation (*Fug*) of beings in their Being as having an interweaving, interdependent harmony of significance (*Fuge*). Moreover, Dasein is not attuned as an isolated individual: "Attunement is not a being that appears in the soul as an experience but rather is the How of our Dasein-with-one-another [*Miteinander-Dasein*]" (*GA* 29/30, 100). In attunement, Dasein shares a Being-in-the-world constituted in its Being-with other Dasein, a shared inhabiting within which our disposition toward and within beings as an intelligible, articulated whole is forged and tempered. A grounding attunement establishes the harmonics within which "we" find our historical Dasein at issue in its Being. To awaken a new grounding attunement would be to engender an inception, an *arkhē*, in which "our" Being would be renewed as a question, a task, and a burden: "Only he who can truly give himself a burden is free. To ask about this grounding attunement means: to ask about *that which the grounding attunement in itself gives for questioning*" (*GA* 29/30, 248). Philosophizing, in wagering the confrontation with Being, can only prepare, never force, this awakening (*GA* 29/30, 510). Attunement is a matter of the giving of Being and the thrown fatefulness of historical Dasein, not of the will or cunning of human beings. The burden of freedom, to be addressed only in the polemos with Being, is the question of who we are as historical Being-there-with-one-another.

In a rich passage of the *Contributions to Philosophy*, section 19, "Philosophy (On the Question: Who Are We?)," Heidegger argues that the question of the We is intimately connected to the question of the Self: "The Who-question poses the question about Being-a-Self [*Selbst-sein*] and, with this, the question of the essence of Selfhood [*Selbstheit*]" (*BP*, 51). Asking about who we are forces us to ask about the unifying identity of the Self. Questioning the Who of the We demands what Heidegger calls here a meditation upon the Self (*Selbstbesinnung*), the same meditation he calls for in the rectoral address (*RR*, 9, 19). Heidegger declares: "Selfhood is more originary than any I and Thou and We. These first collect themselves as such in the *Self* and thus become in each case 'themselves'" (*BP*, 320). In *Being and Time*, the Self plays a central role in the existential analytic of the Who of Dasein: "Dasein is its Self in each case only in *existing*" (*SZ*, 117). Heidegger understands the Self not as yet another present-

at-hand substance, but as an ontological characterization of Dasein's Being. In the *Contributions*, the Self remains in question as that which underlies how community (*Gemeinschaft*) becomes intelligible to us as Dasein in the Being-with of We and You and I and Thou (*BP*, 322). "Selfhood belongs to the intimacy of strife as the struggling forth of the Ereignis" (*BP*, 322). Polemos over the meaning of the Self precedes any concrete disclosure of the horizons within whose bounds Dasein understands its community. The *question*, Who are "we"? always precedes particular, ontic determinations of the scope of belonging: "And how is the essence of a Volk determined? It is immediately clear in how that which is to be interrogated is put into question: 'we' already contains a decision about the Who. This means: we cannot, untouched by the question of the Who, just set up the 'we' and the 'us' as something present-at-hand. In this question, too, lies a reflection of the Kehre" (*BP*, 48–49).

The Kehre describes polemos between Dasein and Being. The ontological strife between Earth and World, in which the sense of Being is granted and appropriated in the Ereignis, must also remain at work in a Self whose Being is a polemos as a generative ground for the understanding of a Volk's historical Being. The Self grounds the site in which the I and the We come to presence in their Being both as individual Dasein and as Being-there-with-one-another, and these two aspects of the Self cannot be disentangled except artificially, as moments in an existential analysis. The Volk has meaning only so long as the Self remains polemically at issue in the Kehre.

#### LANGUAGE, POLEμος, AND THE TASK OF THE GERMAN VOLK

For Heidegger, the Self exists temporally through *language*. The theme of language, especially in the later Heidegger, has been enormously influential, and we cannot exhaust it here, but we can address the matter as it relates to his thinking about politics and the Volk. One of Heidegger's most famous sayings, from "Letter on Humanism," is, "Language is the house of Being" (BH, 145). Language is not just another tool (a tool for communicating) at the disposal of Homo sapiens, the clever animal, a device through whose terms, syntax, and grammar propositions are transmitted from one subject to another: "Language is nothing that human beings have, among other abilities and tools, but rather that which has human beings, disposing and determining their Dasein from the ground up in this or that manner" (*GA* 39, 67). Dasein finds its home, its house in Being, its Da, *through* language and *as* language. This home is given to

Dasein; we do not create it. Dasein's home in language is given by the thrown historicizing of Being as destiny, through the interweaving of the Being-in-the-world of a communal Dasein and the concerns it must share and communicate. Only through language are beings open to us as what they are in our Being-with other Dasein.

A house is a place, a site, where we feel situated, where beings are manifest and familiar to us, and where we expect to encounter other beings like ourselves. In this sense, the "house of Being" is another name for the polis in which our shared ontological situatedness is disclosed. But the familiarity of this inhabiting an abode depends on language. Only because Dasein is always already in language is it possible for Dasein to share a Being-in-the-world with other Dasein and then to break with this world in the hupsipolis leap of apolis founding. Heidegger calls language the house of *Being*, not of Dasein. Although Being *needs* Dasein, in the Kehre, to inhabit this house for the sake of Being's unconcealment, Dasein is still a guest. Language, as logos, collects beings into an interpretative structure for Dasein and allows Dasein to disclose these beings to other Dasein with whom Dasein shares a Being-in-the-world. Language, then, is not a grammar, syntax, and distinct vocabulary, but rather an ontological mode of Dasein's Being that underlies these linguistic elements and that discloses beings and Being-in-the-world to Dasein in such a manner that Dasein can share that Being-in-the-world with other Dasein.<sup>25</sup>

For Heidegger, if Dasein can engage the naming power of language in polemos, this confrontation may generate the inception of a renewed world, not because Dasein, by force of will, imposes new names on an underlying reality, but because this naming in the polemos of language forges Dasein's Being-in-the-world and the beings that Dasein encounters in its Da. "Because the fate of language is grounded in the particular *relation* of a Volk to *Being*, the question about *Being* will be most intimately intertwined with the question about *language* for us" (*EM*, 39). Dasein is the site for the dispensation of Being in the polemos of language, not as isolated individuals, but as historical *Völker* who each abide in their historical languages through Dasein's Being-with-one-another in Being-in-the-world.

This opening of beings in their Being to historical *Völker* through the naming power of language underscores the importance of poetry as the supreme art for Heidegger. Poetry is the originary locus of the revelatory power of language. "*All art*, as what allows the approach of the truth of beings as such to be seen, is *in essence poetry*" (UK, 58). Language has its pre-eminent power in its naming of beings and in articulating our comportment toward these beings as they are set

out into the open. To step into the power of this naming is to be inspired poetically. And in a new naming, a new world, and new future may open up. “But language does not begin as, and is not merely, an audible and written expression of that which is to be communicated. Language does not in the first place just transmit in words and statements what is meant as obvious or covert but rather first and foremost brings beings as beings into the Open. Where there is no language, as in the Being of rocks, plants and animals, there is also no openness of beings, or of nonbeings and emptiness. Insofar as language first names beings, this naming brings beings to word and to appearance. This naming nominates beings *to* and *from* their Being” (UK, 59).

Language as this ontological naming is what first gives beings their definition. This happens well before language can busy itself with everyday communication. Painting and sculpture, and even, by extension, statecraft, function with the forms already given by poetic naming (UK, 60). Poetry, as Dasein’s originary encounter with Being, in which Dasein confronts beings and names its world, is the true architecture that founds Dasein’s home in language. In naming, language first bestows upon each being its outline (*Riß*) and shape (*Gestalt*).<sup>26</sup> This bringing into the open of determinate beings parallels the delineation and setting of boundaries between things in the action of the *Auseinander-setzung*. Thus poetry is a mode of founding. In another discussion of thesis, which he regards here as “to set firm” (*Feststellen*, ordinarily, to “establish”), Heidegger writes, “‘Firm’ means: outlined, released into boundaries (*peras*), brought into outline. Boundary in the Greek sense does not block off, but rather brings that which is present itself forward into appearing. Boundaries release the unconcealed; through its outline, in a Greek light, the mountain stands in its towering stillness. The boundary that makes fast is stillness—namely in the fullness of being moved. This all is taken in the Greek sense of *ergon*, whose ‘Being’ is *energeia*, which gathers infinitely more motion in itself than modern ‘energy’” (UK, 68–69). The *energeia* of language generates words that make the world richly intelligible through bounded forms. But the *energeia* of poetry also instantiates the polemos between Earth and World in a naming that leaves these names open to renewed interpretative confrontation.

The imagery of the “house” of Being will lead us astray if it invites us to think of language merely as a comfortable, bounded enclosure in which we can settle into the familiarity of the everyday without further thinking. In the discussion of the unhomed apolis founder, we have seen that for Heidegger, Dasein is at home in Being only to the extent that this home remains in question. Dasein must tempt and attempt khaos. Let us recall a passage from *Introduction*



to *Metaphysics*, where Heidegger again comments on Fragment 53: “The polemos named here is a strife that holds sway before everything divine and human, not war in the human sense. As Heraclitus thinks of it, struggle first and foremost allows the things that essentially unfold to presence to step apart from one another into opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up. In Aus-einandersetzung, a world comes to be. [Aus-einandersetzung does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). Polemos and logos are the same.]” (*EM*, 47).

The three sentences inserted by Heidegger in square brackets are certainly remarkable. He calls logos and polemos the same (*dasselbe*), and not identical (*das Gleiche*), indicating an ontological identity, a sameness in the manner of their Being, rather than an identity of ontic attributes. For Heidegger, logos is a gathering that assembles particular beings and gives them unity, a gathering that is the primordial activity of language in its poetic work of naming. But we have seen that polemos, as Auseinandersetzung, in its action and motion (its en-ergeia), also performs just this task of unifying and differentiating, of placing boundaries, of making firm identity and difference between beings. The “unity” of a world, and Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, rests in this ontological differentiation (*polemos*) and gathering (*logos*) of beings into a whole within which Dasein finds itself open to and free for its Being. Heidegger calls language the house of *Being*, not of Dasein. And yet, at least in my reading of these strands of Heidegger’s ontological imagery, as a guest, or perhaps a steward, in the house of Being, Dasein’s role in the Kehre is to shake this house to its foundations, to preserve it, paradoxically, by risking everything in an apolis leap into khaos. For Heidegger, this contradictory task constitutes the work of language in a great poet such as Hölderlin.

Heidegger gives no indication of when he inserted the sentences on logos and polemos in the passage just cited, but a passage from the 1934–35 lecture course on Hölderlin’s hymns demonstrates that the thinking is not alien to this period: “Language, however, is not merely expression, ‘formulation,’ and communication to the public realm; rather, language bears and leads the Auseinandersetzung with the violent reign of Being [*mit dem gewaltsam Gewaltigen*]. Language itself has this character of *Being*, a character that it opens up and delivers to human beings. In language as such takes place the Aus-einander-setzung of Being [*Seyn*] and not-Being [*Nichtsein*], the stepping out against one another [*Gegeneinander-Auftreten*] of violent forces and the standing firm, and the succumbing, in this struggle—but also the devastation in the indifference

of omniscience and omnipotence. How far all this is from the characterization of language in the common understanding according to its usual service for expression and its role as means of transaction!" (*GA* 39, 66).

Note that "the devastation in the indifference of omniscience and omnipotence" is here opposed to "the Aus-einander-setzung of Being and not-Being," but that both are expressions of language. By "omniscience and omnipotence" Heidegger means that pretension to universal power which characterizes modernity's nihilism, because this pretension can lead to forgetting that the disclosure of sense and meaning, and the Being of beings, which transpires and stands "firm" in language, also involves a concealment, a "succumbing" of sense and meaning. In all interpretation and understanding of the world, there occurs a polemical event of truth, an event (*Ereignis*) that comes to presence for Dasein in language. But all such interpretative understanding must be wrested from not-Being and also causes other structures of meaning to succumb to not-Being in this struggle; not-Being (*Nichtsein*) here is understood as a dissolution, or an absencing, of a sense of Being in which a particular cosmos of beings can come to presence for us and have meaning in a distinct, historical Being-in-the-world. Even modernity's hubris is a derivative moment of this event of truth in language, but a moment that tends to devastate the polemical essence of language by excluding the pole of not-Being through the pretense of a total knowledge and power over Being that would render beings predictably manageable. Such nihilism treats language as terminology, the stuff of user manuals for the domination of beings.

A house has walls, but it encloses a space that cannot be calculated in merely geometric dimensions. It is rather an abode, a *Da*, in which a particular understanding of Being and Being-in-the-world is familiar and ready to hand. Language is historical, as is Dasein; and Dasein, in language, as a Volk inhabits a historical abode. Language bears a shared understanding of Being in the destiny of a Volk. For this reason, for Heidegger, it is a symptom of the crisis of modernity and the fulfillment of nihilism that language has been reduced to a tool for communication, to something so indifferent that historical languages might be shoved aside in favor of artificial constructs such as Esperanto and programming protocols. As a mere tool, language must not have walls but must bow to the universal requirements of technology, whose essence is to make all beings as readily manipulated and available as possible. No longer are logos and polemos the same; the differing abodes of truth in which Dasein has its historical Being, and in which historical Völker find their Being polemically at issue, must be torn down and amalgamated in a space where meaning and interpreta-

tion are fixed and total. Language is no longer the poetic house of Being, but rather a lexical warehouse for beings.

To respond to this nihilism, Dasein must address through language, but not definitively answer, the question of who we are. In the previous chapter on polemos and Dasein's historicity, we considered the passage in *Being and Time* where Heidegger writes: "In communication and in struggle the power of destiny first becomes free" (SZ, 384). Communication and struggle; logos and polemos. In language, Dasein as Volk confronts its destiny as a task. The "answer" to the question of the "we" is not a new, definitive set of ontic criteria to identify who "we" are (for example, Germans of a certain race). The response to the question must make the Being of the We all the more questionable. And yet, for Heidegger, the response can be engaged only by a community that shares a language. The We can come into question only as a Volk that shares a historical language, and so a common residence for its Being-in-the-world. Through language, the Volk remains a polis. But for Heidegger, language is not an ontic condition of belonging, as would be race, religion, legal requirements for enfranchisement, or the like, but rather the ontological condition for sharing a polemical task in a historical destiny.

It is for this reason that Heidegger seizes upon Hölderlin as "the poet of the Germans" (GA 39, 214). "The poetic turning to [Hölderlin's] poetry is possible only as *thoughtful Auseinandersetzung with the revelation of Being* [*Offenbarung des Seyns*] that is fought out in this poetry" (GA 39, 6). When Heidegger names Hölderlin "the poet of the Germans," then, he does not mean this "of" in the sense of a poet who belongs pre-eminently to the Germans; rather, Heidegger means that through his poetry itself, Hölderlin is the source (*Ursprung*) of the Germans; for the Germans can be themselves as a polemos, an *Auseinandersetzung* with Being, only through the language in which their historical Being is revealed to them *as at issue*, as something replete with the possibility of another inception. *Through* the language of Hölderlin's poetry, the Being of the German Volk is at issue, is "fought out." Hölderlin serves as a source, an *Ursprung*, to the extent that his language can serve the inception. In his first lecture on Hölderlin, Heidegger writes: "The historical Dasein of human beings is, from the ground up, born and led by Being, which the poet has experienced in advance, which the poet has for the first time wrapped in words and thus placed into the Volk. This happening we grasp as a whole when we say: The poet finds Being" (GA 39, 184). The poet "finds" (*stiftet*) Being, grants the Volk an *arkhē*, not by creating Being in the words of poetry, but by bringing to pres-

ence a world opened up to Dasein through the polemos with Being in language. The poet gives a people their inception *as their future* by making manifest how their own Being is polemically at issue in their language.

Heidegger began his lectures on Hölderlin during the academic year following his resignation as rector in 1934. Through Hölderlin, Heidegger tried, in vain, to wrest the revolution in the German Volk away from the party hacks whose opposition led him to resign, and so it is no mere chance that his first lecture course on Hölderlin fastens on the poem *Germanien*: “*The ‘fatherland’ is Being itself*, which from the ground up carries and articulates the history of a Volk as one that exists as Dasein [*die Geschichte eines Volkes als eines daseienden*]: the historicity of its history. The fatherland is no abstract, supratemporal idea in itself, but rather the poet sees the fatherland historically in an originary sense” (GA 39, 121). And: “[Hölderlin] means the ‘land of the fathers,’ he means us, this Volk of this earth as historical, in its historical Being. But this Being [*Seyn*] is established by poetry, articulated and placed into knowing in thinking, and, through the activity of the founder of the state, rooted in the earth and in historical space” (GA 39, 120). In the language of the poet, Heidegger seeks to found the revolution of Being he did not find in conventional politics; this search inspired by Hölderlin continues through the monumental *Contributions to Philosophy*, and it resonates throughout his work after the war. For Heidegger in this middle period, the thinker and the political founder must first find their polemos with Being in the realm of language opened up by the poet.

This turn to language and poetry underlies Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.” Though one of Heidegger’s most widely read works, its political implications and German nationalism are seldom treated. After declaring that the work of art is the origin of the historical Dasein of a Volk, Heidegger ends the original essay by asking: “Are we, in our Dasein, historically at the origin?” (UK, 64). The nationality of the We of those who must stand before the decision of an inceptive origin is perfectly clear when, in conclusion, Heidegger holds up Hölderlin as “the poet who stands before us, whose work the Germans have yet to stand up to” (UK, 64). Hölderlin “stands *before* us”: poetry delineates the polemos of our (that is, for Heidegger, the German) future. Ontologically, the “origin” lies ahead of us, as the inceptive polemos over the meaning of our history, not behind us as an ontic fact on the time line.

Language is the home in which a historical Volk finds its Being at issue, and Heidegger is thinking of the German Volk’s Being in particular. But this Being

is always in danger of lapsing into an indifferent, unchallenged familiarity, of becoming too comfortable: “[Poetry] is the primal language of a Volk. But poetic saying declines, becomes good and then bad ‘prose,’ and this finally becomes chatter” (*GA* 39, 64). It is also not merely the happenstance of a useful exegetical strategy that Heidegger’s first published discussion of Heraclitus’ Fragment 53 is to be found in the lecture course on Hölderlin’s *Germanien* (*GA* 39, 123–29). Heidegger’s Hölderlin incites both a conversation and a struggle with the Greeks, a conversation and struggle in language that bears both the thinking and the political founding of the other inception in *Auseinandersetzung* with the first inception among the Greeks. “Insofar as we fight the struggle of the Greeks, but in the reversal of the front, we will become not Greek, but German” (*GA* 39, 293). For Heidegger, the Greeks accomplished the task and burden of their history by being given over to the overwhelming power of Being, and by nevertheless establishing the work of art (in poetry, thinking, and politics) to stand against this overwhelming power; to the Germans is given the mission of carrying forward this task and burden of the Greeks but in obverse form: to preserve and uphold what is founded and established, without succumbing to the oblivion of the overwhelming power of Being (*GA* 39, 290–93), a nihilism that conceives the work of planning, establishing, and managing as the simple and positive domination of nature by man, the rational animal. The Greeks stand at the first inception of history because they stood up to Being in the founding of their cities, their art, and their thinking; in this confrontation they inaugurated Dasein’s polemos with Being *as* their task and brought being to light as the *deinon*. Germany has as its task the grounding of history in an epoch of the oblivion of Being:

This fortune, which is hard to bear, is given as a task to the Volk of this land: to be a Between, a Center, out of which and in which history will be grounded. This can happen only if this Volk itself grounds and founds its Dasein, that is, first names Being [*Seyn*] again originarily, founds it in poetic thinking . . . Then this land, its Volk, that is, the German historical Dasein, is of such a kind that it gives “weaponless counsel all around / To kings and Völker” (lines 111ff. [these are the last lines of the poem *Germanien*]). This weaponlessness does not mean . . . the laying aside of weapons, weakness, and the evasion in the face of struggle. This “weaponlessness” means a historical greatness that no longer requires defense and resistance, that is victorious through *Da-sein*, inasmuch as this brings beings, as they are, to appearance through actualized standing-in-themselves. Not empty and pedantically garrulous advice and prescription—but rather that most powerful and most immediate showing of the ways, a showing that thereby ensures that these ways are *undergone*, a showing that grounds Dasein for itself. [*GA* 39, 289–90]

Through Hölderlin, Heidegger conceives of the historical task of the German Volk as showing a way beyond nihilism to the other Völker caught in modernity's oblivion of Being—a task to be accomplished through Germany's poetic renewal of its Being in confrontation with the tradition handed down from the Greeks. With the understanding we have been developing, we are now prepared to interpret in full an important passage from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, one in which the ontologically political task of the German Volk, as the “center” of Europe and the middle of the confrontation over the destiny of Being, is set out:

“How does it stand with Being?”—a sober question perhaps, but certainly a very useless question, too. And yet a *question, the question*: “Is ‘Being’ a mere word and its meaning a vapor, or is it the spiritual destiny of the West?”

This Europe, in its awful blindness always on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today between the great pincers of Russia on the one side and America on the other. Russia and America are, seen metaphysically, both the same: the same wretched frenzy of unchained technology and of the boundless organization of the average man. When the farthest corner of the globe has been technologically conquered and can be economically exploited; when any incident you like, in any place you like, at any time you like, becomes accessible as fast as you like; when you can simultaneously “experience” an assassination attempt against a king in France and a symphony concert in Tokyo; when time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all Völker; when a boxer counts as the great man of a Volk; when the tallies of millions at mass meetings are a triumph; then, yes, then, there still looms like a specter over all this uproar the questions: What for?—Where to?—and What then?

The spiritual decline of the earth has progressed so far that the Völker are in danger of losing their last spiritual strength, the strength that makes it possible even to see the decline [which is meant in relation to the fate of “Being”]<sup>27</sup> and to estimate it as such. This simple observation has nothing to do with cultural pessimism—nor with any optimism either, of course; for the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free has already reached such proportions over the whole earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long since become laughable.

We lie between the pincers. Our Volk, as standing in the center, suffers their most intense pressure—our Volk, the Volk richest in neighbors and hence the most endangered Volk, and for all that, the metaphysical Volk. We are sure of this vocation; but this Volk will secure a fate for itself from its vocation only when it creates *in itself* a resonance, a possibility of resonance for this vocation, and comprehends its tradition creatively. All this implies that this Volk, as a historical Volk, should set it-

self—and thereby the history of the West—out from the midst of its coming happening, into the originary realm of the powers of Being. Precisely if the great decision regarding Europe is not to go down the path of annihilation—precisely then can this decision come about only through the development of new, historically *spiritual* forces from the center.

To ask: How does it stand with Being?—this means nothing less than to *repeat and retrieve* the inception of our historical-spiritual Dasein, in order to transform it in the other inception. Such a thing is possible. It is in fact the defining form of history, because it has its outset in the grounding happening. But an inception is not repeated when one retreats to it as something that once was, something that by now is familiar and is simply to be imitated—but rather when the inception is begun again *more originarily*, and indeed with all the strangeness, darkness, insecurity that a genuine inception brings with it. Repetition as we understand it is anything but the ameliorating continuation of what has been, by means of what has been. [EM, 28–30]

By reading the passage in full, we see that for Heidegger, the burden of the repetitive retrieval of the history of Being itself lies with “our Volk”—the German Volk, which stands in the “center” of Europe. Heidegger certainly plays on a traditional theoretical theme of German international politics: that Germany, as “the Volk richest in neighbors,” holds a pivotal position in European politics and history as the conduit between East and West.<sup>28</sup> But for Heidegger, being the “Center” and the “Between” as a Volk goes beyond mere geopolitics; it is an ontological calling, a vocation (*Bestimmung*) to stand as a counterforce to the “pincers” of America and Russia—capitalism and Communism. These two nations are metaphysically “the same” in the way they are gripped by the oblivion of Being and the impetus of modern nihilism: in such nations, the essence of technology has reduced human beings to a “mass” and has obliterated the difference of belonging to a historical time and place, all in the service of reducing Being itself to a calculable quantity at the disposal of the human will. To resist such nations is to attempt the repetitive retrieval of Being in the other inception of Being, and this is Heidegger’s vision of the historical vocation of the German Volk.

Heidegger speaks prophetically here of things “spiritual” and of Germany’s catalytic role in “the spiritual destiny of the West.” Derrida has introduced the argument, in *De l’esprit*, that Heidegger’s discussion of *Geist* in this period of political engagement is evidence of his regression to a naïve understanding of Dasein as a subject, as a metaphysical agent endowed with a will, poised to inflict itself on Being.<sup>29</sup> This supposed regression becomes an explanation for Heidegger’s association with the Nazis.

But it can be shown that, far from breaking with, or, indeed, failing to consummate his previous work, Heidegger's discussion of spirit continues themes in his thinking on the polemos. In 1931, Heidegger compares an "aristocracy of the spirit" with the reigning "academic proletariat," who have "no inkling of the highest realm of the spirit, which is struggle, nor of the inner power to bring it to mastery" (*GA* 33, 82–83). And in a 1939 essay on Hölderlin, Heidegger attempts to understand what the poet, rather than the metaphysical tradition, might mean by nature in the poem, "Wie wenn am Feiertage": "Nature in-spires [*be-geistert*: en-spirits] everything as the omni-present, the all-creating. Nature itself is 'the inspiration.' Nature can in-spire only because it is 'the spirit' [*der Geist*]. Spirit holds sway as the sober, though bold, *Aus-einander-setzung*, which sets all that presences into the well-demarcated boundaries and jointures of its presencing. Such *Auseinandersetzen* is essential thinking. The ownmost 'of spirit' is 'thoughts,' through which all things, because set out and apart from each other [*auseinandergesetzt*], precisely belong together. Spirit is the unifying unity that allows the togetherness of everything real to appear in its collectedness" (*EHD*, 60).

In attempting to think of nature ontologically, as he does with the holy chaos of which Hölderlin speaks in the poem under consideration, and which we discussed earlier, Heidegger explicitly links spirit with polemos as *Auseinandersetzung*. Again, he touches on the close relation of logos and polemos, collectedness and demarcation; through Hölderlin, Heidegger appropriates the metaphysical concepts of nature and spirit, and grants them ontological meaning as names for the powers of Being at work. Thus, when Heidegger writes of "the spiritual destiny of the West" and the "historical-spiritual Dasein" of a Volk in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, we must be alive to the possibility that he does this as a deliberate reappropriation of the notion of spirit as *Auseinandersetzung*, as an event in Being that gives a Volk its Self, not as a substantial, collective subject, but as a site for an ongoing historical confrontation with Being and so with the meaning of its own history. Far from being a relapse into a metaphysical, subjective notion of the Self, Heidegger's appropriation of the concept of Geist in this time of his preparation for the revolution of Being can be understood as a manner of thinking about how a Volk is situated in its historicizing confrontation with Being.

### THE POLITICAL WRITINGS OF 1933

We are now prepared to examine some of Heidegger's more explicitly political writings from the period of the rectorate (1933–34). Heidegger delivered these



as speeches while he was rector of Freiburg University and in his capacity as member of the Nazi Party.<sup>30</sup> It was during this period that Heidegger, to use the words of Richard Rorty, “fought like a tiger to become the official philosopher, the intellectual leader, of the National Socialist Movement.”<sup>31</sup> Rorty is right again when, in describing Heidegger’s ambitions at the time, he says, “One cannot exaggerate the degree to which Heidegger took philosophy, and himself, seriously.” We have tried to explain the content of Heidegger’s ambition for Germany as the political site for the salvation of the history of Being, and for himself as the apolis thinker who would prepare the Volk’s encounter with its destiny at this site. Rorty, summarizing the research of Hugo Ott and Victor Farías, succinctly captures the scope of Heidegger’s hopes during the months of his tenure as rector: “His dream was to become head of a governmental body that would first reorganize, and then control, all the German universities. His big idea was to combine university study with lots of hiking, camping, ROTC-style drills, and WPA-type work in the forests (and also with a lot of teaching in adult education courses, getting the new national spirit across to the non-academics). He wanted to bring the future leaders and protectors of the destiny of the German Volk back to the rootedness in landscape (the granite, the forests, the mountain trails) that the ancient Greeks had once enjoyed.”

My goal in this section will not be to elaborate on the details of Heidegger’s political maneuverings and eventual defeat as rector. Though much remains to be examined in closed archives, this ground has been gone over by Ott and Farías well enough to establish that Heidegger sought a decisive role for himself as the leading National Socialist pedagogue and the spiritual leader of the movement. Moreover, Heidegger’s tenure was so short-lived that we really have only scant indication about how the programmatic details of his ambitions would have developed. What interests me here instead, in the works of the period of political engagement, is the confirmation, and to some extent the elaboration, of the ontologically grounded political thinking we have discussed so far. Certainly the most famous of the texts of this period is the rectoral address (*Rectoratsrede*) itself, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” delivered by Heidegger on May 27, 1933, at Freiburg University. In the years after the war, Heidegger and his defenders promulgated the myth that he assumed the post of rector as a defensive tactic while he was under duress, and that the “self-assertion” (*Selbstbehauptung*) in the title of the address indicated a determination to protect the university’s independence against the excesses of politicization by the Nazi Party.<sup>32</sup>

We know now that this exculpatory claim is false, that Heidegger aggres-

sively sought this important educational office, that he had conspired for some time with other National Socialist academics before winning the post, and that he joined the party on May 1, 1933, with considerable pomp and fanfare, to take rhetorical advantage of the fact that this was May Day, the Day of Labor.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the letter of March 30, 1933 to Blochmann, Heidegger takes his friend into his confidence on one of his most cherished concerns: the question of the university. Shortly before he wrote this letter to Blochmann, Heidegger had attended (as Freiburg's "confidential representative") a meeting of the Kulturpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Hochschullehrer (KADH).<sup>34</sup> Heidegger tells Blochmann of his impression of Krieck, one of the leading National Socialist pedagogues, a doctrinaire propagandist for the racial party line in education. He complains to her that "in Frankfurt I was at this point able to have only an *inhibiting* effect" because Krieck had published a cultural-political program that was "downright second-rate," although guided by "some genuine impulses" (*HB*, 60–61). Heidegger judges Krieck in the following manner: "He will never overcome the defensiveness of a little man who is working his way up, and so he will encumber his work with unfreedom—nevertheless, I believe, his character and his experience will have some meaning" (*HB*, 61). At that time, Heidegger sought to bring Alfred Baeumler into the KADH.<sup>35</sup> Baeumler and Krieck would later become inveterate ideological opponents of Heidegger within the party.

Heidegger's activities in the KADH before April of 1933 demonstrate his earlier commitment to the radical nationalist revolution within the university, a commitment that belies the postwar defense that he assumed the post of rector as a sort of apolitical guardian of the academy. But the continuity runs deeper than this. We have already seen, in Chapter Three, that Heidegger's conception of polemical deconstruction demands that one confront one's own hermeneutic Situation. Heidegger understood his own Situation to be, among other things, the university. Heidegger regarded university educators as unable to provide students with a locus for genuine polemical confrontation with their *Dasein*, that is, both with their fate as individuals and with their destiny as members of a Volk. Heidegger viewed the progressive isolation of the disciplines as evidence of the debility of the university. In his 1929 inaugural lecture at Freiburg, "What Is Metaphysics?" Heidegger criticized the isolation that permits students to ignore a confrontation both with the grounding principles of the disciplines and with the role and meaning of research as a whole. Thus, Heidegger's understanding of the "self-assertion" of the German university must be seen in context with the other concerns from the outset of Heidegger's

career after the First World War. The “self” that is to be asserted is the Self we examined earlier in this chapter: a Self construed, not as a thing, substance, or essence, but rather as a Da-sein that is always polemically at issue. To assert the Self, then, would be to rekindle this question of the Self and the We, understood ontologically.

And yet, in the rectoral address, Heidegger speaks of the self-assertion *of the German university*, an institution, it would seem, rather than a Volk. But here we must grasp the breadth of Heidegger’s ambition: the question of the university and the question of the meaning of knowledge *are* the locus for the grounding of the Self of the Volk. “The self-assertion of the German university is the originary, common will to fulfill its essence. The German university serves us as the ‘high’ school that, from science and through science, educates and disciplines the leaders and guardians of the destiny of the German Volk. . . . Science and German destiny must come to power in the will to fulfill our essence *together*” (RR, 10). It is true that Heidegger mentions neither Hitler nor the Nazi Party in the rectoral address, but the words *Führer* and *Führung* appear often. The stakes wagered in the self-assertion of the German university are those of the “spiritual leadership” (*geistige Führung*, RR, 9) of the revolution as the movement that will carry forward the destiny of the Volk, and so the self-assertion of the university *is* the assertion of the Self of the German Volk. For Heidegger, this wager rests on the meaning of science (*Wissenschaft*), and, more deeply, of knowing (*Wissen*) in general.

Already in March of 1933, Heidegger was uneasy with his teacher-colleagues in the party, for they were drifting toward a notion of a politicized science, knowledge placed in the service of a political program. Such a science would reduce thinking and philosophy to servants of an ideological will to power.<sup>36</sup> For Heidegger, by contrast, philosophy—understood as genuine knowing, science, or thinking—must be the origin, the ground, the *arkhē*, of any authentic political program. In the rectoral address, therefore, he returns to the theme of the inception of all knowledge with the Greeks: “All science remains bound to this inception of philosophy” (RR, 11). This inception of knowing among the Greeks bestows the decisive “spiritual task” on the university and the German Volk to which Heidegger alludes at the beginning of the rectoral address (RR, 9), the same “great task” he had proclaimed to Elisabeth Blochmann: the reappropriation of the inception of history among the Greeks and the construction (*Bau*, not *Abbau* here) of a world grounded in the German Volk. “The inception still *is*. It does not lie *behind us* as something long since bygone, but rather it stands *before us*” (RR, 12–13). This futural task is, we recognize readily

enough, the engendering of the polemos between the first and the other inception. And as the site of the enterprise of knowing and science, it is the university that must assert itself as the locus of this polemos of inceptions through which the German Volk will find its Self.

It is the polemos of Heidegger as rector, his own fateful task as thinker within the task and destiny of the German Volk, to guide the sense in which this Self understands the knowing that grounds its revolutionary world. For Heidegger, science as knowing is not composed of the methodologies and discoveries of the various academic disciplines but rather is constituted by a manner of Being, by a manner of *questioning* that can serve to ground and unite the dispersed disciplines. "Questioning is then no longer merely a preliminary to be overcome on the way to an answer, but rather questioning itself becomes the highest form of knowing" (RR, 13). This knowing as questioning underlies a sense of what "science" should be, in resolute opposition to what Heidegger considers the Cartesian model of certainty grounded in modern science. "If we will the essence of science in the sense of the *questioning, uncovered taking-a-stand in the midst of the uncertainty of beings as a whole*, then *this* will to essence will create for our Volk its world of innermost and most extreme danger, that is, its truly *spiritual* world. . . . Spirit is originally attuned, knowing resoluteness toward the essence of Being" (RR, 14).

The danger (*Gefahr*) named here is, once again, an *ontological* danger: waging the leap into the un-grounded chaos, into that open realm of Being where familiar meanings of beings and the customary sense of Being find their dissolution, but where these may also find their reappropriation in an other inception. The university must lead Germany into, and perhaps through, this dangerous knowing, understood as both questioning and self-assertion. Knowing (*Wissen*) as *questioning* first grounds the Being-in-the-world through which knowledge as science (*Wissenschaft*) finds its place: "This originary concept of science obligates us not merely to 'objectivity,' but first of all to the essential simplicity of questioning amid the historical-spiritual world of the Volk. Indeed, objectivity can truly ground itself, that is, find its nature and boundary, only in this" (RR, 17). The university is to be the site where the apolis thinker sets out to ground the polis anew, even in the face of disaster, for this un-grounded grounding takes place precisely in the zone of uncertainty and danger. Spirit, then, as we have seen before, is not some transcendental, national subject, but rather the resolute openness of a Volk to the ongoing polemos with Being—engendered by teachers and a university equal to their task—that grants that Volk its belonging to a homeland and to a history. "The *spiritual*

*world* of a Volk is not the superficiality of a culture, any more than it is the armory for applicable information and values, but rather it is the power of the deepest preservation of the Volk's earth- and blood-bound strengths as the power of the innermost arousal and the broadest unsettling of its Dasein. Only a spiritual world vouchsafes a Volk greatness" (RR, 14).

This passage comes closest to the *Blut und Boden* rhetoric of typical Nazi propaganda. But it is important to understand also that in speaking of "the spiritual world of the Volk," Heidegger means an arena of questioning, an openness to the Volk's own Being-at-issue in which the Volk attains greatness only by confronting its history and Being. Recent commentators have argued that Heidegger's language of spirit indicates that in this period, by hypostatizing the Volk as a kind of spiritualized supersubject, he betrayed his thinking's revolutionary movement away from the traditional metaphysics of the subject. But we have endeavored to show that this language is fully in accord with Heidegger's overall ontological project, however troublesome that coherence may be to those seeking a thoroughgoing critique of modernity and the West in Heidegger, while at the same time rejecting his ties to National Socialism as an aberration from the thrust of that critique.

Given the leadership role that Heidegger envisions for the university in the German revolution, he proclaims three bonds (*Bindungen*) and three corresponding forms of service (*Dienst*) for the German student body. The first bond is to the Volk community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), and it has its corresponding labor service (*Arbeitsdienst*) that applies to "all the estates and parts of the Volk" (RR, 15). This is the "socialist" aspect of National Socialism for Heidegger: the restoration of the belonging to a Volk with a distinct place and history takes precedence over all distinctions of class and privilege in providing for the material needs of the nation—although we should note that in addressing the students of the university, Heidegger is talking to a rather elite group.<sup>37</sup> The second bond is "to the honor and destiny of the nation among other Völker," and this demands military service (*Wehrdienst*, RR, 15). The third bond of the German student is "to the spiritual task of the German Volk," and this bond requires knowledge service (*Wissensdienst*, RR, 15).

Heidegger's division of obligation and service to the Volk unmistakably echoes Socrates' tripartite division of the citizens of the ideal regime in Plato's *Republic*. Despite the criticism that Heidegger levels at Plato in essays such as "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," the honor that Heidegger continues to bestow on that thinker is evident in a passage such as the following, from his 1931–32 lecture course on the analogy of the cave in the *Republic*:

The authentic guardians of the Being-with-one-another of human beings in the unity of the polis must be men who philosophize. Philosophy professors should not become chancellors of the Reich, but rather philosophers should become *phulakes*, guardians. Men who philosophize, who, from the deepest and broadest, freely questioning knowing, establish measures and rules, disclose pathways of decision, should permeate rulership and the organization of the rule of the state. As ones who philosophize, they must be in position to know, in clarity and strength, what the human being is and how it stands with human Being and Being-able-to-be. “Knowing” [“*Wissen*”] does not mean to have heard, to opine, and to repeat, but rather precisely to have appropriated this understanding [“*Erkenntnis*”] along the way that belongs to it, and to appropriate this ever and again; it is that understanding [“*Erkennen*”] that has gone out ahead of itself, and keeps traversing this way, back and forth. (*GA* 34, 100–101)

As early as 1931–32, then, Heidegger had approvingly appropriated Plato’s idea of the philosopher-king—not as one who rules directly as *Reichskanzler*, but as one who, through the same “questioning knowing” advocated in the rectoral address, establishes (*setzt*) the horizons within which the order of rule takes shape. So, while Heidegger insists in the rectoral address that the three bonds and duties of students “are equally necessary and of equal rank” (*RR*, 16), it is what he calls knowledge service that takes precedence in establishing the *ontological* rule, the *arkhē* and grounding inception, of the Volk as polis. Thus: “Knowing does not serve the professions, but rather the reverse: the professions effect and conduct that highest and essential knowing of the Volk concerning its whole Dasein. But this knowing is for us not the detached taking in of essences and values in themselves, but rather the sharpest endangering of Dasein amid the overpowering of beings” (*RR*, 16). All those who plan one day to enter the educated professions must first submit to the “danger” of a knowing that challenges and thereby articulates their lifework within the destiny of the Volk. Students in the professions must first experience this destiny as a *question* before they take in the merely “objective” information that pertains to their particular callings. Without this exposure to the polemos of destiny as a question and unifying task, Heidegger fears that the professions will remain as fragmented in the Volk as the disciplines in the university.

And here, in the discussion of knowing and “knowledge service,” the language of polemos enters the rectoral address. “This [German] Volk works at its destiny insofar as it sets forth its history into the openness of the overpowering of all world-building powers of human Dasein, and insofar as it fights out [“*erkämpft*”] for itself, ever anew, its spiritual world. . . . The very questionableness of Being forces the Volk into labor and into struggle and forces the Volk

into its State [*Staat*], to which the professions belong" (*RR*, 15–16). For a Volk to be spiritual, according to Heidegger, it must put its Self and its Being into question, it must risk the danger of revolution and the reconstitution of meaning; only in this way can it establish a polis that is ontologically grounded in its history and its home. But precisely this risky questioning of the ontological political horizons is polemos, a struggle over the meaning, the sense, and the direction of one's own destiny as a Volk. The dangerous knowing is never a static gathering of information about beings or the dissemination of values, but rather an ongoing confrontation concerning the horizon within whose compass such knowledge and such mores have their place. Heidegger's ambition is to unite all the faculties of the university through the ignition of this polemical knowing, for the sake of the destiny of a historical Volk, as the deeper calling for all educated Germans.

This ambition brings Heidegger to unite struggle with leadership, Kampf with Führung.

But the community in struggle [*Kampfsgemeinschaft*] of teachers and students will recreate the German university as a site of spiritual law-giving, and actualize in it a center for the most disciplined preparation for the highest service to the Volk in its state [*Staat*], only if the body of teachers and the body of students dispose over their Dasein more simply, more severely, and more modestly than all others of the Volk fellowship. All leading [*Führung*] must grant to those who follow their own strength. Such following, however, bears in itself resistance. This essential opposition in leading and following must not be muted, nor indeed extinguished.

Struggle alone holds open this opposition and implants in the whole body of teachers and students that grounding attunement out of which the self-assertion that gives itself its boundaries empowers resolute self-reflection and self-administration. [*RR*, 18–19]

It was just such pronouncements that gave Heidegger's enemies in the party ammunition to accuse him of subscribing to a *Privatnationalsozialismus*. He speaks of Führung, but not of *the Führer*. And in this silence concerning Hitler himself, Heidegger has the audacity both to arrogate Führung to the university faculty and, moreover, to announce that following this leadership contains an element of resistance, a notion certainly not in keeping with the standard notion of the *Führerprinzip*. But for Heidegger, leadership does not involve a structure of command in which the leader functions as a master switch that dominates every circuit beneath it. This would be an ontic and metaphysical understanding of leadership.

Heidegger's understanding of leading here is ontological, with roots already

evident in his earlier work. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger describes one way of being involved in the concerns of another Dasein's Being-in-the-world: this form of solicitude (*Fürsorge*) leaps into the care (*Sorge*) of the Other and assumes the Other's Being-able-to-be. "In such solicitude, the Other can be reduced to someone dependent and dominated, even if this domination is tacit and concealed from the one dominated" (*SZ*, 122). Such a domination of another's Dasein does not exercise some occult possession of another's soul but simply takes away from the Other the autonomy of the confrontation with his *own* Being-able-to-be. But Heidegger describes another mode of solicitude: "In contrast, there is the possibility of a solicitude that does not so much leap in for the Other as much as it *leaps ahead* of him in its existentiell Being-able-to-be, not in order to take away his 'care' from him, but rather first to give it back authentically as such. This solicitude essentially touches upon authentic care—that is, upon the existence of the Other and not a *What* with which he concerns himself; it helps the Other toward becoming transparent to himself *in* his care and *free for it*" (*SZ*, 122). Such a solicitude, as an ontological leading, would allow the Other to come into confrontation with the sense of the horizon of his own Being-able-to-be *as* his own, as authentic. This solicitude and leadership is a way of Being-with-one-another that permits the Other to be free as Dasein.

Returning to the rectoral address, we can see that Heidegger aspires to just this sort of positive solicitude in leading the students. It is not the institution of a system of command and obedience, but rather a "community in struggle": "We choose the knowing struggle of those who question" (*RR*, 18). With this language, Heidegger certainly does not advocate tense and bitter conflict between faculty and students. In the struggle within which teacher and students stand together, the teacher must lead the students into an understanding of *how* to engage the polemos with Being as that which is most their own, and to do this, the students must be free honorably to confront the understanding of Being laid open by the teacher. Knowing, as the necessarily insecure leap into questioning, demands this shared polemos. The *Kampfsgemeinschaft* of faculty and students embraces a polemical struggle both between students and teachers and between the university as a whole and the historical destiny of the German Volk.

Such a confrontational pedagogy, while perhaps expressed obscurely, might well seem in keeping with the ideal of a liberal education, were it not for Heidegger's emphasis on the belonging of both student and teacher, in their work, to the historical destiny of the Volk. Both together confront Being as members of a Volk, and more precisely, as members of the *German* university, whose



“task” is a self-assertion on behalf of the destiny of the *German* Volk. The teacher leads by showing the student the path to freedom, but for Heidegger, this freedom always lies within the ambit of a polis in which one’s own fate is always already bound up in the destiny of the Volk. This concept helps us to understand an infamous passage from the rectoral Address. “To give oneself the law is the highest freedom. The much-sung ‘academic freedom’ will be expelled from the German university; for this freedom was ungentle, because it was merely negative. It meant chiefly lack of concern, indifference of intentions and inclinations, license in what was done and left undone. The concept of freedom of the German student will now be brought back” (*RR*, 15). And from here, Heidegger launches into his exposition of the three bonds and the three services to the Volk in which the student finds genuine, positive freedom. For Heidegger, “academic freedom”—so essential to the liberal notion of the university—seeks to negate the claim of such duties; such freedom gives itself the law as a rootless, random exercise in mere intellectual curiosity, a freedom *from* the meaning of place and history as these impinge on one’s own Being as a *Da-sein* that is also *Dasein*-with others (*Mitdasein*). By contrast, positive freedom in the *German* university will free the German student *for* the task of a questioning knowing that will restore the Volk to its revolutionary task in the polemos of the history of Being. As Gregory Schufreider cogently argues, this positive freedom in the university depends, for Heidegger, on the *Kampfsgemeinschaft*, the collegial opposition, of students and faculty both confronting *each other* and confronting the nation’s destiny *together*.<sup>38</sup> Students and teachers, in the struggle of leading and following, ensure that the work of the university has bearing on the polemical work of the historical Volk in engendering the other inception of the history of Being.

Heidegger made other public speeches during his tenure in office, from the perspective both of a thinker and of philosophy professor, and in his official capacity as rector. In his 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger vigorously defended the rectoral address as the expression of his thinking at the time; the other speeches he concedes were marred by “compromises” forced on him by the political situation.<sup>39</sup> Despite this disavowal, the other political pronouncements of the rectoral period show considerable continuity with the rectoral address itself. We simply do not have the space here to determine just what, if any, “compromises” Heidegger made in them. But let us look at one crucial example that develops certain themes only hinted at in the rectoral address.

On November 11, 1933, before an audience of German university professors, Heidegger delivered an impassioned speech in favor of a referendum an-

nounced by the National Socialist regime on the question of whether Germany should leave the League of Nations. We have analyzed parts of this speech before. Otto Pöggeler has suggested, on the evidence of Heidegger's letter of November 4, 1945, to the rector of Freiburg University, in which he sought to be reinstated as a professor, that Heidegger, along with many both in Germany and abroad (including President Roosevelt), had been persuaded by Hitler's earlier, and infamous, "peace speech" of May 17, 1933.<sup>40</sup> In this speech, Hitler claimed that the National Socialist revolution sought only an internal renewal, that, by its very principles, the party must respect the right of each other Volk to its respective national determination, and that Germany would regard another European war as a terrible threat to its own recuperation.<sup>41</sup> Of course, Hitler said all this as part of an extended strategy of opposition to the League of Nations and the Treaty of Versailles, which hindered his goal of rearming Germany. The League of Nations had long been an affront to the nationalist pride of veteran National Socialists, and they regarded it as a tool for the oppression of Germany by the Entente powers who had set the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, so crushing to both Germany's economy and its sense of military honor. Of Heidegger's views on these matters, Pöggeler writes: "The 'uprising' to which Heidegger attached himself in 1933 was nationalist, one that sought to restore the honor of Germany and to align itself—according to Heidegger's conviction and also according to the express words of Hitler's speeches—with the Wilsonian program of the self-determination of Völker."<sup>42</sup>

In his speech on the November referendum, then, Heidegger declares: "The National Socialist revolution is not merely the taking over of a present-at-hand power in the state by another party that has grown sufficiently [strong] for it, but rather this revolution brings *the complete overturning* [*Umwälzung*] of our *German Dasein*."<sup>43</sup> Given the depth of this revolution, Heidegger says of the referendum: "This ultimate decision grasps outward to the most extreme boundary of the Dasein of our Volk. And what is this boundary? It consists in that fundamental demand of all Being, that it retain and save its own essence. Thereby a barrier is deployed between what can be expected of a Volk and what not. On the strength of this grounding law of honor, the German Volk stands true to the dignity and the decisiveness of its life. The will to self-accountability [*Selbstverantwortung*] is not only the basic law of the Dasein of our Volk, but also the fundamental process of the securing of its National Socialist state" (*NH*, 148).

In the rectoral address, Heidegger had spoken of *Selbstverwaltung*, *Selbstbesinnung*, and, as the fulfillment of these, for both the We of the university

and the We of the Volk, *Selbstbehauptung*. The correlate to the self-assertion by which a Volk in the revolution of its history confronts the task of its communal destiny is then a self-accountability (*Selbstverantwortung*) in the community of Völker—a necessary correlate if the revolution is to succeed both nationally and in its relation to other Völker and states. Here we can see what Pöggeler means by the sense Heidegger might have had that his understanding (and, putatively, Hitler's) might coincide with the principles of Wilsonian national self-determination. But for Heidegger, a supranational apparatus such as the League of Nations infringes on the unconditionality of the Volk's Being-answerable for itself. Heidegger himself seems to have been persuaded by the party propaganda at that time, which insisted that the withdrawal was by no means meant as a hostile gesture; he proclaims:

Neither ambition nor thirst for glory nor blind obstinacy nor lust for dominion, but solely the clear will to an unconditioned self-accountability in the bearing and mastering of the fate of our Volk demanded from the Führer the withdrawal from the "League of Nations." This is not a turning away from the community of peoples [*Gemeinschaft der Völker*], but on the contrary: Our Volk, with this step, sets itself under that essential law of human Being to which every Volk must render allegiance, if it wishes to remain a Volk.

Precisely from this allegiance, equally observed, to the unconditional demand of self-accountability does the possibility of taking one another seriously arise, and so, then, of affirming a community. The will to a true community of the Volk [*Volks-gemeinschaft*] holds itself as much aloof from an untenable, bondless reduction to world brotherhood as from a blind domination by violence. This will operates beyond these two opposing poles; it creates the open and manly standing by and up to one another [*Auf-sich- und Zueinanderstehen*] of Völker and states. What happens in such willing? Is this descent into barbarism? No! [*NH*, 148–49]

It is striking that in the context of a discussion of a Volksgemeinschaft, a community of the Volk, Heidegger employs the term "fate" (*Schicksal*) to address the self-accountability of Germany as a Volk. In *Being and Time*, individual Dasein has its fate; it is in a community that individual fates are gathered together "in communication and in struggle" (*SZ*, 384)—in logos and in polemos—into a communal destiny (*Geschick*). But now to describe a single Volk as having such a unitary fate implies that Heidegger is thinking that each Volk is an individual in relation to the community of peoples as a whole, a broader community that in turn has its own destiny that enfolds the multiplicity of Völker.<sup>44</sup> We have already seen just how significant a role Heidegger assigns to Germany in this all-embracing destiny: to Germany goes the task of re-

newing the very polemos of Being, and so of countering the nihilism ascendant in the history of the West. That Heidegger envisions Germany at home in, if not the leader of, such a community of peoples also implies that, just as one Dasein can, in authentic solicitude (*Fürsorge*), lead another Dasein into an encounter with its own Being-at-issue, so too can one Volk guide another authentically into confrontation with its particular historical destiny. Just as this ontological friendship precludes dependency and domination in *Being and Time* (SZ, 122), so too does “the possibility of taking one another seriously” as Völker preclude “a blind domination by violence.” In the referendum speech, Heidegger declares: “We are certain of this: if the will to self-accountability becomes the law of the Being-with-one-another of Völker, then each Volk can and must be for every other Volk the teacher [*Lehrmeister*] of the wealth and the strength of all the great deeds and words of human Being” (NH, 150).

Heidegger’s aspiration for an international order within which Völker can allow one another to encounter and appropriate their own historicity, through a conversation in confrontation (by no means necessarily military), is nicely illustrated by a short work from 1937, “Paths to Discussion” (“Wege zur Aussprache”). In this essay, Heidegger speaks of what he calls the two “neighboring peoples” (*Nachbarvölker*), the French and the Germans, and asks why it is so difficult for each Volk to come to an “understanding” (*Verständigung*) with the other (WA, 15). He argues that genuine understanding between Völker is possible only when they can recognize each other in what is most their own (*das Eigenste eines Volkes*) as given to them by their own historical traditions and tasks: “Genuine mutual understanding among Völker begins and fulfills itself with one thing: this is the contemplation of what is historically given to them together and given as a task, which fulfills itself in creative conversational exchange” (WA, 15). At stake in this conversation, “in the present hour of the world,” is the “saving of the West” (WA, 16). At issue in such encounters of Völker are not “external determinations and delineations of present-at-hand properties of French thinking in contrast to the German” (WA, 20)—Heidegger is not after taxonomies of national character. Rather, he seeks that which is still at issue in the work of those figures of both traditions in which each respective Volk’s history is concentrated into its most pressing questions. With Descartes, for example, is grounded the beginning of modern mathematical knowledge, and with Descartes, the German thinker Leibniz stands in *Ausinandersetzung* (WA, 19). Only by following through the confrontation concerning the Being of nature, engendered by such thinkers, can we now (we Germans and French, and we Westerners in general) confront the meaning of

the essence of technology and the dispensation of Being over beings that this essence bears with it. “The fundamental questioning concerning nature, and concerning the truth-character of the knowing of nature, contains within itself an Auseinandersetzung with the beginning of modern French philosophy” (WA, 19). For Heidegger, then, Germany cannot fulfill its task of saving the West by acting alone. Unless the neighboring Völker take “one another seriously,” Germany cannot confront its own destiny: “Understanding one another here is also—and here above all—a struggle [*Kampf*] of an alternating putting-oneself-into-question. Only Auseinandersetzung sets [*setzt*] each one into his very ownmost, if Auseinandersetzung gathers up and endures otherwise in the face of the threatening uprooting of the West, an uprooting whose overturning [*Überwindung*] demands the initiative of every Volk capable of creativity. The grounding form of Auseinandersetzung is the actual conversational exchange of the creative ones themselves in a neighborly encounter” (WA, 20).

Of course, in the matter of a few years, instead of the “neighborly encounter” Heidegger had perhaps naïvely called for, Hitler’s tanks invaded France. But here it would be difficult to underestimate the importance of the “conversational exchange” Heidegger seeks; in his commentaries on Hölderlin, Heidegger devotes much attention to one line from a fragmentary poem of the poet: “Seit ein Gespräch wir sind” (*GA* 39, 68ff). In conversation, as the polemical sharing of language, the whole horizon of the world and Dasein’s mortality opens up. The extent to which for Heidegger this polemical conversation is not materially warlike may be gathered from the conditions that he places on a genuine encounter among Völker: “The conditions are twofold: the enduring will to listen to one another [*der lange Wille zum Aufeinanderhören*] and the restrained courage for one’s own vocation” (WA, 21). For Heidegger, then, the League of Nations acts only as an impediment to the genuine confrontation of Völker in the tasks of their respective histories, because it substitutes the homogenization of “world brotherhood” for the mutual discovery of “one’s own vocation.”

The encounter with the Other as Other is therefore an unconditional necessity for the polemical appropriation of the tasks of one’s own Volk’s historical destiny. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this feature of the “international” scope of the polemos. “A historical Volk is, as Volk, a community only if it knows this, and that means wills it: that community as historical can only be if it dares and bears those Others, as Others, in their Being-Other”

(*GA* 39, 284). In his 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin, Heidegger puts it this way: “The historical spirit of the history of a human community [*Menschen-tum*] must first allow itself, in Being-uncanny and without home, to come up against the foreign, in order to find in the Auseinandersetzung with this, that which is its destiny for the return to the hearth” (*GA* 53, 156). Spirit (*Geist*) demands a polemical “appropriation of one’s own” through a “traveling out to what is foreign [*das Fremde*]” (*GA* 53, 156). In order to ground their polis in the hearth and home of an ongoing polemos with Being, a Volk must undertake the same journey of wrenching departure and difficult homecoming as the hupsipolis apolis founder in the choral passage of *Antigone*. *Heimat* (home-land) cannot be discovered as an ontic region, bounded by geographical markers; it must continually be sought through the wanderings of Dasein’s homelessness. For Heidegger, Germany’s greatest Other, to which it must journey in ontologically inceptive confrontation, is the Greece of the first inception of history.

Returning to the League of Nations referendum speech of 1933, we recall that this conversation in confrontation among Völker must also forsake an “untenable, bondless reduction to world brotherhood.” Heidegger rejects superficial and artificial community just as much as violent domination, because both obviate the possibility of a genuinely productive polemos among Völker. To the extent that in his conception of the Volk as a Gemeinschaft, a community, he rejects the notion that politics may properly be grounded in the institutions and civil society of the liberal regime, Heidegger also rejects the idea of such a *Gesellschaft* among nations. World brotherhood and world imperium, while not ontically identical, are the same when considered as aspects of the global phenomenon of modernity’s nihilistic ambition: both annihilate the horizon at which distinct traditions can meet, *as* distinct, in polemical conversation. Both universal brotherhood and universal imperium may serve a planetary technology whose essence is to reduce the Being of beings to a readily calculable and available quantum of power. Indeed, the victory of either of “these two opposing [though essentially identical] poles” of planetary politics would signal the death of historical Dasein for Heidegger, for when the conversation of Völker halts, no Volk is further challenged authentically in its historical destiny. In the universal essence of such planetary brotherhood and imperium, the very horizon of Da-sein’s Being-in-the-world vanishes, precisely because this universalism denies a delimitation to Dasein as belonging to a determinate, situated, historical destiny. In this horizonless, un-worlded world, Dasein be-

comes the universal subject for whom dominion over the globe, as a unitary whole, becomes the fundamental task, rather than grounding the site for the world-engendering and ongoing polemos with Being.

It is the ontological sameness of cosmopolitan brotherhood and universal imperium that prompts Heidegger, in the League of Nations speech, to say, “We have declared independence from the idolatry of a foundationless, powerless thinking. We see the end of the philosophy that serves it. We are sure that a clear hardness and a laboring certainty of simple, unyielding questioning of the essence of Being are returning. The originary courage either to flourish or to break in the Auseinandersetzung with beings is the innermost ground for the movement of a Volk’s science. For courage lures forward, courage untangles itself from what has been hitherto, courage dares the unusual and the unaccountable. . . . For us, questioning means putting ourselves out into the sublimity of things and their laws, not closing ourselves off to the terror of the unfettered and the disorientation of the dark. . . . We know that the questioning courage to experience the abysses of existence and to withstand the abysses of existence is in itself a *higher* answer than any all-too-easy response of artificially constructed systems of thought” (*NH*, 149–50).

In the language of daring and abyss, we recognize Heidegger’s Sophoclean hero who ventures the leap into khaos through his questioning thinking. But what is the “foundationless, powerless thinking” (*boden- und machtloses Denken*) and “the philosophy that serves it” that Heidegger opposes to the thinking of a Volk alive to the demands of spirit? What Heidegger means here might be given several names: nihilism, metaphysics, humanism, modern scientific rationalism, subjectivism. In the period of the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38), Heidegger also uses the term “Liberalism.”<sup>45</sup> For him, Liberalism is much more than a term for a political program or theory of government. Liberalism is a name for the broad modern project of liberating the human subject from history and circumstance, a project militantly on the march since the Enlightenment and, indeed, by Heidegger’s account, rooted in the history of Being since the first inception among the Greeks and the subsequent appropriation of Greek philosophy by Christian theology.

The progress that Liberalism promises to grant its liberated, self-certain, ahistorical subject is power over Being—Being, that is, understood as a Nature vulnerable to conquest by the discipline of mathematical physics and through the technologies and knowledge granted by the research of the sciences. Michael Allen Gillespie rightly argues that for Heidegger, the critique of the

modern Self understood as subject is not limited to the simple “individual” so commonly the focus of liberal-democratic thought: “Nor does Heidegger mean to assert that modernity is characterized by individuality. Subjectivity is not individuality. In fact, as a way of being, subjectivity in his view belongs as much to the We as to the I.”<sup>46</sup> Liberalism as a grand political project reflects the universalizing spirit of modern science by deducing principles that apply to a homogeneous human subject, granting to each certain rights, and globally prescribing political dispensations that accord with “natural law,” without regard to the meaning of Dasein’s belonging to a particular history and place. Civil society as the agglomeration of a mere “public” (*Gesellschaft*) takes the place of rooted belonging (*Gemeinschaft*).<sup>47</sup> Liberalism deploys what Heidegger in the *Beiträge* calls “a ‘total’ worldview” and “total political belief”; such overarching concepts and systems are closed to true creation because they obviate all “genuine struggle” (*BP*, 40–41). “The renunciation of essential decisions lies at the core of such total orientations. Their struggle is no creative struggle, but rather ‘propaganda’ and ‘apologetics’” (*BP*, 41). Liberalism’s polemos is not genuine, but rather a mere struggle for dominion.

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger goes so far as to identify as an aspect of this totalizing Liberalism the biologically grounded “breeding” (*Züchtung*) of the Volk espoused by the prevailing Nazi racial ideology. “*The essence of the Volk is to be grasped only by way of Da-sein*, and this means to know the following as well: that the Volk can never be a goal and aim, and that to believe so is only a ‘völkische’ expansion of the ‘liberal’ ‘I’-thinking and of the economic representation of the preservation of ‘life’” (*BP*, 319). In the *Contributions*, Heidegger struggles, against the prevailing biological-racial idea of the Volk, to uphold his own ontological conception of the Volk as Being-at-issue in the polemos. According to Heidegger, biologicistic, racial doctrines of the Volk constitute an aspect of the *modern* self-understanding (*BP*, 493). His own understanding of the Volk as spiritual requires that the Volk remain ontologically in question as a site for the polemos with Being. To conceive of the Volk in biological and racial terms as the agent of history is to treat the Volk as a kind of supersubject, and so to shift the actor in Liberalism’s “progress” from the individual “I”-subject to the collective Volk-subject: “The most dangerous [of the forms of ‘I’-consciousness] are those in which the worldless ‘I’ has seemingly given itself up and given itself over to an Other that is ‘greater’ than it and to which it is allocated as parts or organs. In the dissolution of the ‘I’ into ‘life’ as Volk, a path is paved here for an overcoming of the ‘I’ at the expense of the first condition of such an



overcoming, namely, the meditation on Being-a-Self and its essence, which determines itself through a carrying over and forward of the appropriation of what is one's own" (*BP*, 321).

For Heidegger, whether the "science" of biological-racial Volk-lore (*Volkskunde*) proves to be "good" or "bad" science is irrelevant, because science itself is not the core of the question. (However, he does heap scorn on such "national" science: "The pure idiocy of saying that experimental research is Nordic-Germanic, and rationalist research by contrast *foreign!* Then we must resolve ourselves to count Newton and Leibniz among the 'Jews'" (*BP*, 163).) At issue, rather, is whether human *Da-sein* is to be reduced to an object of universal, "objective" science, regardless of whether this science is put to use for the sake of the global promulgation of the Rights of Man or instead for the classification of all the human racial types across the planet for the ultimate global dominion of the master race. In the rectoral address of 1933, Heidegger had understood science as a *Wissenschaft* that would beckon the German Volk to a renewed questioning of its Being. In the *Contributions* of 1936–38, Heidegger speaks derisively of the official Nazi doctrine of science based on race as "this biological Liberalism" (*BP*, 53), effectively condemning National Socialist science as a mere variation of that which it presumed itself to be overcoming.<sup>48</sup> "The 'völkische' 'organization' 'of' science moves along the same path as the 'Americanistic,' and the question is merely, on which side will the greater means and energies be placed at disposal more quickly and completely in order to drive the *unaltered* essence of modern science—which also in and of itself cannot be altered—up against its most extreme and ultimate condition. This is a 'task' that can yet lay claim to centuries and that ever more conclusively shuts out any possibility of a 'crisis' in science, that is, an essential transformation of knowing and of truth" (*BP*, 149).

This apocalyptic pronouncement, prophetic in its vision of the total mobilization of the coming world war, appears after Heidegger's own failed attempt as rector to guide spiritually (that is, ontologically-polemically) the National Socialist conceptions of Volk, knowledge, and science. By deciding on an ontic rather than on an ontological task for itself, Nazi Germany takes its place alongside America and Russia as a purveyor of metaphysics and nihilism.<sup>49</sup> For Heidegger, the history of Being had moved beyond the site at which a revolution of Being might be engendered through the self-immolating sacrifice of *Dasein* to Being in polemos. Thenceforth, both in the period of the *Contributions* and after the war, thinking could at best provide a preparation (*Vorbereitung*) for that moment when "only a god can save us." For Heidegger, *Da-sein*'s sacrificial

role in the inception of another history of Being ended with the failure of his own intervention in the National Socialist revolution. Heidegger's own polemos—to serve as the conduit for the confrontation between Being and the spirit of the Volk, an Auseinandersetzung that would carry forward this renewed history—shattered against realities of party politics and the real aims of the Nazi Party.

## Chapter 5 Polemos, Postmodernism, and Derrida

Postmodernism and its attendant phenomenon of deconstruction call for special attention in this study. I cannot deal here with everything that falls under the rubric of postmodernism; the field is simply too vast.<sup>1</sup> The subject is of relevance here because Heidegger must be counted as one of the greatest influences on postmodernist thought—even, with Nietzsche, as one of its chief “founders.” Moreover, it has often been postmodernist thinkers who have engaged in the most sustained reflections on the meaning and implications of Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism. At their best, such postmodernist writers do not limit themselves to treating this as a problem of intellectual history: they approach the issue of Heidegger’s politics as one that unavoidably introduces profound political questions for all of us who live in this supposedly postmodern era. I concentrate chiefly on the arguments of postmodernists who would agree at least in principle with John Caputo in his rejection of Richard Rorty’s position “that Heidegger’s political engagements were entirely fortuitous, an unfortunate offshoot of bad political judgment, having nothing to do with the matter to be thought.”<sup>2</sup>

But even once we restrict ourselves to the consideration of postmodernists who take Heidegger's political stance seriously, the field remains dauntingly broad. I have reserved the largest portion of this chapter for a discussion of Derrida, in part because it seems fitting here to treat at least one postmodernist critic with the same careful attention we have devoted to Heidegger. I have not chosen Derrida because he can stand for the others as their "representative." Derrida's *problematizing* reading, as well as his broad and detailed reflections on Heidegger, will help us gain insight into the kind of questions that postmodernists raise in thinking about Heidegger and politics. Although we will take Derrida's method of reading as exemplary, it would be a mistake to lump together the individual critics' *responses* to the problem, which vary widely. Derrida deserves particular attention because, perhaps more than any other contemporary critic, he has influenced serious postmodernist (and deconstructionist) reactions to Heidegger's politics. Further, this study shares something with Derrida's problematizing approach. I am in full agreement with this programmatic declaration of Derrida's: "I believe in the necessity of exposing, limitlessly if possible, the profound adherence of the Heideggerian text (writings and acts) to the possibility and reality of all Nazisms . . . I believe this abysmal monstrosity should not be classified according to well-known and finally reassuring schemas" (PH, 186). Derrida at his best gives us postmodernism at its best: an attempt to put seriously into play what remains *at issue* in the Being of our politics.

First, we need to address a terminological problem, for it applies not only to Derrida, but to this general school of thought. Some commentators in fact refuse to call such authors postmodernists. Niall Lucy puts the objection quite succinctly: "Today's 'post' . . . contains a widespread belief that 'today' is radically and fundamentally different from the past. Especially in the name of 'postmodernism' (or in what is often attributed to it), extreme versions of this belief have resulted in ridiculous assertions of how 'we' can escape from binarity and therefore be no longer in the thrall of such oppositions as creative/critical, imagination/history, philosophy/politics, man/woman, and so on. There are good reasons for regarding what may be called, oxymoronicallly, the 'post-modern project' as idealist, romanticist, and rhetorical—in a word, logocentric—rather than radically pragmatic. But there are no good reasons for regarding Derrida as a postmodernist."<sup>3</sup>

Lucy is certainly correct in saying that there are those who go by the name of postmodernists who understand the "post-" as the mark of a passing beyond modernity, who believe that we can simply emancipate ourselves from or get

beyond “binarity” (that is, the mode of metaphysical thinking that binds us to limiting oppositional pairings such as those Lucy mentions). Lucy is also right to deny that Derrida belongs to such an unequivocally triumphalist school of postmodernism, that is, one that seeks a final victory over and departure from the metaphysical hubris and political oppression of the Western tradition. But Lucy goes too far in saying that “there are no good reasons for regarding Derrida as a postmodernist”—provided we recognize that postmodernism is a broader phenomenon encompassing more than just the triumphalist position. Some postmodernist authors do treat the “post-” of postmodernism as a question, a problem, a promise, or a quandary, but not as a *fait accompli*, as a historical phase that has or that will simply put modernity behind it. As Gianni Vattimo puts it, this is the problem of postmodernity as the *overcoming* of modernity or of metaphysics. But even those thinkers who treat the “post-” as a problem rather than as a triumph subscribe at least to this much: that modernity has come radically into question and that we can neither return to a pre-modern condition nor shore up modernity without unintentionally aggravating its worst features. In this, they share much with Heidegger. For these postmodernists, the “post-” points to an ongoing and indefinite struggle with the lingering shadows of modernity; not a passing beyond modernity, but rather a trespassing of modernity, a continual engagement with and violation of its bonds and bounds in order to push forward the ever-threatened and ever-threatening project of emancipation. Paradoxically, in their allegiance to this liberational project, such postmodernists remain heirs of modernity, if not its stewards.

#### POSTMODERN—SINCE WHEN?

Postmodernity, perhaps by its very nature, evades ready definition because it calls into question the very notion that phenomena can be classified and ordered by the touchstone of “nature.” Jean-François Lyotard famously characterized the postmodern attitude as a certain “incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>4</sup> This definition describes not an intellectual movement, postmodernism, but rather something that Lyotard takes to be an “objective” feature of contemporary life itself. Postmodernity, or “the postmodern,” would then describe something that has happened, or is happening, or perhaps is about to happen in its fullness, to us and to our world. Lyotard’s gloss refers in part to the bewildering fragmentation in the vast array of sciences and scholarship that eludes the net of an all-encompassing account. But there is more to it than this

sense of disconnection or diffusion in the contemporary “condition of knowledge,” as Lyotard describes it in his “Report on Knowledge” (1979). The incredulity supposedly applies to all forms of comprehensive explanation.

The notion of the narrative is dear to postmodernism, for it implies that all accounts, all arguments, all *logoi*—scientific, philosophical, religious, historical, and so forth—are best understood as *stories*, or, as John Caputo puts it, as *myths*. “Narratives” do not describe an objective reality; rather, they cobble together disparate features into a meaningful, albeit limited, whole—one open to the endless interpretation of literature rather than the sparse “True” or “False” of the supposedly objective sciences. This brings us to a key feature and leading metaphor of much postmodern thought: it “textualizes” all accounts, all narratives, treating each as if it were a literary text, a weaving of interrelated forces, influences, and tendencies, but not a comprehensible whole or cosmos. (We will be seeing more of this “textile” metaphor as we proceed, especially in Derrida.) Hence, postmodernists are in the habit of referring, in the “de-construction” of a given account or narrative, to context and “constructs.” That postmodernists evince “incredulity toward metanarratives” means simply that they regard with extreme skepticism and suspicion any overarching explanation that would presume to account for all of the more limited, or “local,” narratives. Such metanarratives could range from Christian eschatology to the dialectics of a Hegel or a Marx to the hypotheses of evolutionary biology or the latest findings of astrophysics.

Elsewhere, I have argued that if the premodern world can be understood broadly as having relied on a traditional authority, whether revealed or secular, and the modern as one that rejects received authority in favor of that founded on our own reason and efforts, then postmodernity can be understood as characterized by the rejection of both forms of authority.<sup>5</sup> Postmodernism treats both revealed religion and the scientific rationalism of the Enlightenment as suspect metanarratives. The typical postmodernist trope is one that challenges the legitimizing authority of such metanarratives and often their more local representatives (as, for example, when liberal jurisprudence grants legitimacy to the coercive power of the state by reference to an overarching political theory based on the doctrine of natural rights). Instead, postmodernist authors tend to champion excluded narratives, those which remain “unauthorized,” at the “margin” of the dominant discourse—at least until these succeed in seizing center stage for themselves, along with the power and legitimizing authority of their former oppressors. For this reason, postmodernism, at least as a hodgepodge of intellectual and political trends, tends to seem anarchic, always “sub-

versive,” attacking the powers that be, affirming little except the cause of the underdog, the excluded, and the marginalized.<sup>6</sup>

But postmodernism presumably describes more than a general fashion in antiauthoritarian intellectual style. As intimated, “the postmodern” makes a larger claim: it offers itself as a name for an epoch, indeed, for *this*, our epoch, or at least for the epoch into which we are about to enter. It may well strike some readers as patently absurd to call modernity into question at a time when the pace of the triumphs of science and technology continues to accelerate. But if the Baconian project of science as the relief of man’s estate in part defines modernity, then precisely the acceleration of technological innovation indicates an aspect of the postmodern condition: that the very science and technology that were supposed to serve as tools for our autonomy and for our mastery over nature have instead mastered us, forcing us to keep up with them in much the same way as we already were forced to “keep up with” the exigencies of a hostile nature. Postmodernity as an epoch does not deny the continued success of modern science, but it does ask whether this “success” belongs more properly to science than to us.

Of course, anyone familiar with Heidegger’s 1953 essay “The Question Concerning Technology” knows that he insisted that the essence of technology is nothing technological. It is, instead, the mode of Being in which beings manifest themselves in the technological epoch, that is, as “standing reserve” (*Bestand*). In “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger calls language “the house of Being” (LH, 311). To expand on Heidegger’s language, the essence of technology is to transform Being into a warehouse, a container for beings that lie at the disposal of ever more efficient networks of power. There is little poetry to the language of the warehouse of Being; terminology and user manuals take its place. Thinking becomes cybernetics and calculation. Even human beings get reduced to this standing reserve of homogenized energy-stuff: “manpower” and “labor force.”

While Heidegger maintained almost complete silence concerning the Holocaust, postmodernism takes Auschwitz, where the warehouse logic attained its horrific extreme in the liquidation of human beings like so much industrial waste, as the confirmation of the catastrophic crisis of modernity. This is certainly Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s view. Even while confessing that we are “entirely without resources” for legitimizing our ethics, he writes, “If it is true that the age is that of the accomplishment of nihilism, then it is at Auschwitz that that accomplishment took place in the purest formless form. God in fact died at Auschwitz—the God of the Judaeo-Christian West at least. . . . That is why this event—the Extermination—is for the West the terrible revelation of its

essence.”<sup>7</sup> But while Lacoue-Labarthe takes the position that Heidegger’s political engagement was “neither an accident nor an error,”<sup>8</sup> like many other readers who stand aghast at Heidegger’s moral obtuseness and inability to take responsibility for his own complicity, he still looks to Heidegger’s path of thinking to understand this catastrophe.<sup>9</sup>

In a now infamous passage from a 1949 lecture, Heidegger writes, “Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starvation of nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs” (*GA* 79, 27). This statement has invited controversy and outrage because it seems to equate the extermination of human beings with the similarly mechanized application of technology in industrial agriculture. As Leslie Paul Thiele explains, this pronouncement constitutes a pernicious apologetics: “The effect of these comparisons, and probably their intent, was to diminish the significance of the Nazi atrocities.” According to Thiele, insensitivity to the suffering of the victims blinds Heidegger to the difference between “the hateful, cruel, and genocidal intentions of the Nazis and the generally irresponsible and covetous ones of agribusiness” (*TM*, 143). John Caputo notes a similar blindness to the suffering of the victim: “The victim never comes to presence, never makes an appearance on the scene of the history of Being. . . . That is why the gas chamber is the same as the tractor, as motorized farm equipment. The victim is invisible in the history of Being, is not a matter of concern, is not what is at issue” (*DH*, 144).

For Caputo, Heidegger’s mythology of the history of Being, characterized by a great Greek beginning and a heroic German attempt at salvation, must be *demythologized*, to be replaced with new myths that allow us access to the stories and histories of the oppressed. Such postmodernist readers of Heidegger as Thiele and Caputo want to sensitize us to the plea of the victim to whom Heidegger turns a deaf ear, to hear the victim as an Other whose cry can never simply be assimilated and thus muted by the homogenizing force of “our” discourse. This victim is one who disrupts our schemes, conceptual and otherwise, and so gives us pause, just as the Holocaust has (or should have) “given pause” to modernity’s arrogant self-satisfaction and optimistic progressivism.

For such postmodernists, this gift of the interruptive pause offered by the plea of the victim was one Heidegger could never hear, with tragic, or perhaps simply appalling results. Nevertheless, they want to retain Heidegger’s insight into the essence of modern technology, while at the same time humanizing (to use a risky word) this understanding. So, for example, Thiele writes: “Heideg-



ger's comparisons [between the gas chambers and agribusiness], while certainly objectionable in the ways outlined, should not be dismissed. Nazism was a technologically driven enterprise in which concern for the world was denied so that the lust for domination might run rampant. Agri-business, in turn, is a technologically driven enterprise in which concern for the world is subordinated so that the lust for profit may run rampant. In each case, technological mastery overwhelms the needful relations human beings might establish with the earth and with each other. Still, intentionality is of the essence here, even if it retains no monopoly on the means of evaluating human action. Heidegger's moral obtuseness is more evident in this regard, for Heidegger rarely paid attention to the significance of pain and suffering and the pervasiveness of cruelty" (*TM*, 143–44).

While recognizing that Heidegger fails to take account of the ethical moment in these phenomena, Thiele also wants to salvage Heidegger's insight into the technological nihilism of our age, as defined by its extreme, the Holocaust. Postmodernists tend to share with Heidegger, at least in its broad outlines, the interpretation of the history of Being as a history of metaphysics that culminates in a physically globalizing and a conceptually universalizing attempt to maximize power without heed for its destructive potential, whether human or environmental, although Heidegger is not concerned so much about the destruction of beings as about the oblivion of Being.

#### IF I HAD A HAMMER:

#### A POSTMODERN NIETZSCHE

*The Twilight of the Idols, Or How to Philosophize with a Hammer*: this is the full title of one of Nietzsche's last books. He explains in his preface what philosophizing with a hammer might mean: "This little book is a *great declaration of war*; and as regards the sounding out of idols, this time they are not just idols of the age, but *eternal* idols, which are touched with the hammer as with a tuning fork: there are no more ancient idols in existence—and none more hollow."<sup>10</sup> Walter Kaufmann remarks: "It is usually assumed that he means a sledge hammer," as if Nietzsche advocated a brutal and indiscriminate destruction.<sup>11</sup> But Kaufmann's gloss serves only to muffle the impact and to ease the weight—of Nietzsche's hammer. This hammer may well be *like* a delicate tuning fork in some respects. As an "instrument," for example, it sounds out the idols, assaying them to determine which ones are hollow. But Nietzsche has de-

clared *war*, and a hammer is not a tuning fork, nor is it only a laborer's or an artisan's tool. It is also a weapon:

The *greatest* struggle: for this a new *weapon* is needed.

The hammer: to invoke a terrible decision, to set before Europe the *consequences* of whether its will "wills" destruction [*Untergang*].

Warding off reduction to mediocrity. Better destruction! [*Will to Power*, 1054]

Where the idols ring hollow, the hammer will smash. And what are the idols that threaten Europe with mediocrity, compared with which none are more hollow, and thus most supremely deserving of downfall and destruction?<sup>12</sup> God. God—and the idea of an *eternal* truth, a Truth wedded to the shadow of God even in the most atheistic of positivisms, for even such truth depends on a Platonism that promises us a final referent, an ultimate security. The book that follows *Twilight of the Idols* is *The Antichrist*, intended as the opening salvo in Nietzsche's "Revaluation of All Values" (a book planned but never completed) as the positive act of creation to follow the destruction of these greatest of idols.<sup>13</sup> And what is the hammer itself? Perhaps it is the very philosophizing of the free spirit, or the Overman; perhaps the *declaration* of the death of God and the will to live with the decisive "consequences" of this death; perhaps Nietzsche's myth of the eternal return, a doctrine designed to discover through auscultation the spiritual health of human beings by testing their resentment against the passage of time. Or perhaps the hammer is some combination of all of these things.

In any case, there can be no doubt: postmodernism takes up Nietzsche's hammer and sets to work smashing the same idols of God and Truth, or more abstractly, the idol of some ultimate foundation to serve as the secure referent for all understanding. John Caputo agrees with Allan Bloom's characterization of postmodernists "in a grumpy but accurate complaint, [as] the Nietzscheanized left"—indeed, Caputo applauds this Nietzscheanization while he seeks to go further by drawing out certain ethico-political possibilities from Heidegger as an intensification of deconstructive postmodernism (*DH*, 93). This Heideggerian-Nietzscheanization recurs repeatedly in postmodernist treatments of politics. The key is the double destruction of the twin idols of God and Truth as these have been understood in metaphysics, for the one has secured the foundations of society (including morality and politics), the other, the foundations of the sciences (both human and natural). The Heideggerian link between the two is the metaphysical (or "onto-theo-logical") understand-

ing of Being as a Supreme Being, a final referent for both morality and cognition, for the correctness of actions and the correctness of representations.

Allan Bloom observes that Nietzsche experienced the death of God not only as profoundly liberating, but also as terrifying, dangerous, and indeed even tragic. In *The Gay Science* (125), a shunned and desperate madman delivers the news of the death of God; whatever new dawn this death might announce, it must also take its toll in anguish for lost support and security, for we have been uprooted from the divine guidance, the personal love—and from the righteous anger—of a God the Father.<sup>14</sup> As Thiele, an avowed postmodernist, puts it: “Nihilism tortured Nietzsche in large part because he foresaw that it would be accepted with complacency” (*TM*, 34). Postmodernism eagerly accepts the prize of liberation from absolutes, but it deems insistence on the experience of anguish and terror to be a grumpy, conservative complaint because it impedes the full, democratic dissemination of Nietzsche’s announcement. Liberation from the twin absolute authorities of God and Truth serves as the impetus to postmodern politics, and this liberation must be of a kind that the masses of ordinary human beings, and not just Nietzsche’s elite Zarathustras and Supermen, can live with joyfully. Or at least complacently. With the death of God, to borrow from one of Nietzsche’s most famous chapter headings in *Twilight of the Idols*, “the ‘real world’ has finally become a fable”<sup>15</sup>—and postmodernism might add that, with the death of the metanarrative, the world becomes not just *a* fable, but an indefinite multiplication of fables. As Reiner Schürmann puts it, “The post-modern age, inaugurated by Nietzsche, is the one in which the availability of referential truth for purposes of legitimation becomes suspect” (*HBA*, 149). Schürmann insists on a politics divorced from the dream of metaphysical foundation, the *arkhē*; instead, he advocates an-archy. Postmodernists insist that we should renounce foundation and ground, that we should step out over Nietzsche’s abyss—yet without the anguish and nostalgia inspired by what we are leaving behind or the terror provoked by the chasm ahead.

Gilles Deleuze, one of the most influential thinkers to have seized on Nietzsche for the purposes of a radical liberation, characterizes the post-idolatrous world in this way in his 1962 work, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*: “The sense of Nietzsche’s philosophy is that multiplicity, becoming and chance are objects of pure affirmation. The affirmation of multiplicity is the speculative proposition, just as the joy of diversity is the practical proposition. The player only loses because he does not affirm strongly enough, because he introduces the negative into chance and opposition into becoming and multiplicity. . . . We affirm the chance and the necessity of chance; becoming and the being of becoming;

multiplicity and the unity of multiplicity. Affirmation turns back on itself, then returns once more, carried to its highest power. Difference reflects itself and repeats or reproduces itself.”<sup>16</sup>

Again and again in postmodernist thought, one finds variations on this affirmation of multiplicity, diversity, and difference. With the death of Being as the supreme referent, “we” must affirm becoming and chance, we must hazard, Deleuze says, a throw of the dice without expecting to master becoming, and so celebrate what becomes as such, for such abyssal affirmation overcomes resentment against both time and the becoming that seem always to undermine “Being.” The question then becomes, what will be the politics of such a pluripotent affirmation? For Deleuze, and his close colleague Félix Guattari, it must be a politics of liberating the multiplicity of desires, of shattering the unity of the subject and thus embracing the “nomadism” to which we have been consigned by the death of God and the destruction, down to its foundations, of our home in Him. Michel Foucault, another champion of the Nietzscheanized Left, advocates not so much the end of repression as the interruption of totalizing systems of power that *produce* desire in a monolithic form; instead, Foucault seeks a proliferation of local economies of power, and so a manifold increase in the production of desires.

Gianni Vattimo welcomes Nietzsche’s active or accomplished nihilism, which he also understands as encapsulated in the declaration of the death of God. Accomplished nihilism grasps this event as an *opportunity*, whereas passive, reactive nihilism responds to the collapse of foundations as a cause for exhaustion and suicidal pessimism—or worse, for the herdlike complacency of the “last man” who numbs himself with mindless comforts and entertainments. Vattimo understands the dictum that the true world has become a fable in the light of an interpretation of nihilism in Nietzsche and Heidegger mediated by Marx: “When read in the light of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the accomplishment of nihilism, this occurrence [the world’s becoming fable] can be understood in terms of the generalization of exchange-value in our society: it is that same occurrence which appeared to Marx to be still definable strictly in the moralistic terms of ‘generalized prostitution’ and the desacralization of what is human” (*EoM*, 25–26).

With the advent of nihilism and the death of God, things lost their place in a structure of absolute value (or, to use the Marxist term, use-value) and became objects of a homogenizing system of exchange. Vattimo identifies this tyranny of exchange-value, this dissolving of Being “in the indefinite transformations of universal equivalence” (*EoM*, 22), with Heidegger’s notion of the

*Ge-Stell*, the en-framing that is the essence of technology that reduces all beings to accessible and deployable units of power. And yet Vattimo criticizes Marx's disdain for this "generalized prostitution" as well as the efforts of the Frankfurt School to rescue supposedly genuine culture from mass culture because such attitudes—quite despite themselves—reflect a nostalgia for the dead God, the ultimate referent for values that cannot be reduced to exchange (*EoM*, 26). In keeping with the postmodernist democratization of Nietzsche, Vattimo seeks to collapse the pathos of distance between the license of the liberated superman and the populist proclivities of the last man.

Vattimo discerns a refinement by Heidegger of Nietzsche's nihilism that we may take as paradigmatic for a Heideggerianized postmodernism. For Heidegger, the event of nihilism must be apprehended by approaching it *as* event, as Ereignis. The liberation of thought is not as easy as simply embracing nihilism. Vattimo, as well as Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, have recognized a danger in such thoughtless nihilism: in the world become fable, one might just glorify and sacralize some other particular fable, rather than God and Truth, and this takes us to the brink of self-conscious, fascist mythologizing.<sup>17</sup> But to consider the *Ge-Stell* and nihilism as an event is to fulfill nihilism, according to Vattimo, because such thinking releases us to the historical happening of Being, its presencing and withdrawal in the *Lichtung*, the a-lêtheia, within which any and all fables first become possible. Vattimo's radical ontological relativism would then open us up to a new "piety," to a kind of hypertolerance: an appreciation for the pluralism of the epochal sendings of Being in its historical manifestations (*EoM*, 177). The *opportunity* presaged by Nietzsche's nihilism, but realized only by Heidegger, is for us to affirm the errant multiplicity of becoming, the concomitant dissolution and proliferation of "fables" in the eventuation of Being. Only this sensibility to proliferation will protect us from the nostalgic resacralization of specific myths. This, at any rate, is the gamble that Vattimo believes a postmodern nihilism must take (*EoM*, 205). But in this defense of a multifarious Being for its own sake, Vattimo's postmodern nihilism does not yet address the problem, to which we will return as we proceed, of how politics will defend oppressed peoples and cultures without affirming a form of self-assertion in their resistant identification.

Thiele elaborates another aspect of the simultaneous admiration for and dissatisfaction with Nietzsche in postmodernist politics. Acknowledging the death of God does not alleviate life's sufferings, but a Nietzschean overcoming of resentment against life must affirm suffering even in the absence of a redeeming God. Thiele writes, "What allows Nietzsche to celebrate life despite

any objective grounds for its evaluation is this heroic disposition. To be heroic, tragically heroic, is constantly to taste the terrible mystery of life and willingly to risk all in the adventure" (*TM*, 20). While admiring this heroic stance, Thiele also identifies some problems with it. Whereas Deleuze advocates a Nietzschean nomadism, Thiele reproaches Nietzsche for promulgating a form of heroic individualism that "amounts to an extreme homelessness" (*TM*, 21). Furthermore, this radical individualism prevents Nietzsche from escaping from metaphysics, because it entrenches a form of subjectivism in his thinking, even as he topples the idols of God and Truth. Thiele's argument is that the Nietzschean self, liberated by the active nihilism that smashes these ancient idols, is left radically unmoored and homeless—so much so, in fact, that this self, with its subjective will, risks becoming the only arbiter of value. The Nietzschean hero stands alone and lonely on his mountaintop, affirming the world of his own creative will; but this solitude merely reproduces the metaphysical paradigm, though at a solipsistic, monadic level: "What is remarkable is that Nietzsche's rejections are so complete: nothing remains but a nomadic self, cut off from meaningful rapport with others, proscribed from finding any residence in the world and in the present time, held together from disintegration by the sheer force of its will" (*TM*, 33).

Thiele envisions two futures for postmodernity, given its Nietzschean parentage. On the one hand, Nietzsche's radical nihilism, his subsequent homelessness, and his final, deranged decade of silence already find their "cultural analogue in the jaded complacency of postmodern times" (*TM*, 39). Thiele is certainly on to something here: we see it in the ennui of contemporary, rough-and-ready nihilism, the disaffected detachment of a "Generation X" that seems as global as the dissemination of Western mass culture. For Thiele, such "nomadism," once the model of liberation for Deleuze and Guattari, can hardly redeem us from the destructiveness of reactive, metaphysical nihilism. The willful, solipsistic "monad" is more than just an anagram for the unmoored "nomad." But Thiele discerns an alternative: "Complacency in homelessness threatens to become the postmodern condition. The alternative to such homelessness entails acknowledging the world as the place of human dwelling. Such an acknowledgment would maintain humanity as the discloser of the world, rather than its master and possessor; the earth as an abode in need of caretaking, rather than as a resource awaiting exploitation; and human relations as the partnerships—undeniably agonistic at times—allowing for the discovery of our tasks and potentials, rather than raw material for administration. The learning of such guardianship in the realm of worldly things is inseparable

arable from the learning of guardianship in the realm of thought. And this entails leaving metaphysics alone" (*TM*, 34).

The direction of Thiele's recuperative reading of Heidegger as the lens for understanding the positive opportunities offered by a Nietzschean nihilism ought to be obvious from his language here. Thiele hopes to recover a kind of communitarian and ecological postmodernism from Heidegger to counter the threat of a deracinated, jaded postmodernism as the decayed legacy of a Nietzsche who failed to get past the subjectivism of metaphysics. "We are not actually living in postmodernity. Modernity is still in its twilight" (*TM*, 41). Clearly, Thiele belongs to the school of postmodernists who believe that something radically new may "actually" be realized—and that we have an obligation, while modernity's shadows fade, to clarify the dangers and opportunities of our nearly postmodern present, which may have misfired, for the sake of this brighter future.

Consider again Nietzsche's hammer: it is not *just* another kind of tuning fork, though it serves to assay idols; it is also a weapon of destruction. Postmodernists such as Vattimo and Thiele take up this weapon and wield it, but they attempt to modify the impact of its blows through a Heideggerian tempering. Furthermore, even though Thiele seems alive to the dangers of a widely disseminated nihilism, such postmodernists believe that *all* human beings, all citizens of the postmodernity-to-come, must be mustered out with this weapon into the postmodern theoretical militia: we must *all* be able to liberate ourselves from the idols of metaphysics, to smash them down *for ourselves*, although not as isolated monads (who are easy prey for both consumerism and paranoid politics), but rather as members of a new, an-archic, *multivalent* community, one no longer erected on exclusionary, metaphysical principles.

The postmodernists thus either implicitly or explicitly reject what both Nietzsche and Heidegger embrace: order of rank. In Nietzsche, the free spirits may wield the hammer to destroy, but even they cannot accomplish what the Overman will make of this destruction. In Heidegger, we have seen that only the triad of poet-thinker-statesman can engage in the hupsipolis-apolis confrontation with Being that simultaneously shatters the world and forges a new one. This brings us to another use for the hammer. The final section of *The Twilight of the Idols* begins:

#### The Hammer Speaks

"Why so hard!" the charcoal once said to the diamond; "for are we not close relations?"

Why so soft? O my brothers, thus I ask you: for are you not—my brothers?

And it ends:

For all creators are hard. And it must strike you as bliss to imprint your hand upon millennia as upon wax, bliss to write upon the will of millennia as upon metal—harder than metal, nobler than metal. Only the noblest is perfectly hard.

This new law tablet I set over you, O my brothers: Become hard!<sup>18</sup>

The hammer does not only assay, does not only smash; the hammer also constructs and hammers out; it molds and chisels and presses, like a hand upon wax. It not only destroys the law—what has been laid down in the *nomos* and the thesis of tradition—it also does the work of founding and establishing; it engenders a new thesis. The hammer is a tool for both de-struction (or de-construction) and con-struction. Certainly, the postmodernists understand the hammer of an active, positive nihilism in the double sense of tearing down and (re)building. So do Nietzsche and Heidegger. The difference lies in the democratic distribution of the hammer to all who wish to wield it. Of course, as Thiele's observations about contemporary jaded nihilism point up, the weapon has already been passed around. But who can wield it *properly*? The destruction of idols can harm those whom democratic postmodernism most wishes to protect. After all, Nietzsche extols the hammer as *hard*. Heidegger's aristocratic hammerings led to fascism for him. Is there any reason to believe that a post-modern, democratized nihilism will end otherwise, either in mass disaffection or in what readily follows in the wake of such dislocation (as Vattimo fears), that is, once again, in fascism? The fate of Weimar should stand as a warning. Despite the denials of some, in accepting the broad outlines of Heidegger's history of Being, postmodernists do risk treating postmodernity as inevitable. Perhaps we ought to wonder whether our fate is really so decided.

#### DERRIDA: "BEYOND THE TEXT . . ."

I have chosen to examine the work of Jacques Derrida here because, I submit, he gives us the most concentrated access to the postmodernist response to the problem of Heidegger's politics. Derrida's reading of Heidegger has been very influential in the recent debates. Furthermore, Derrida is one of the few interpreters to take the role of the polemos in Heidegger seriously. Of most concern to us, finally, is that while Derrida's reading of Heidegger is very provocative, it also demonstrates just how deficient is the postmodernist response to Heidegger's politics and to what extent this politics *remains* a problem.



The political trajectory in Derrida's work is not easy to define, especially for those who have not invested themselves in a thorough familiarization with his complex and idiosyncratic language and style. Some detractors on the Left have even gone so far as to argue that Derrida has no politics, because his work has no programmatic strategy, or even intention, for the application of theory to practice. But if politics is to be reduced to a set of causes and public stances, then Derrida is a "man of the Left," a citizen of the 1968 generation of Paris as Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut would like to paint him.<sup>19</sup> In a critique of one of Derrida's pieces on apartheid ("Racism's Last Word"), Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon take issue with him: "If . . . Derrida seeks not merely to prise open certain covert metaphysical assumptions but also to point to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime, then the strategic value of his method has to be considered seriously"—and presumably condemned as highly dubious and ineffectual.<sup>20</sup> Derrida responds with scornful irony to this characteristic criticism on the Left that alleges that "in order to act (!) in the area of *real* politics, in history (!), these poor 'deconstructionists' should go '*beyond* the text,' into the field, to the front! As you do, I suppose."<sup>21</sup>

On both the Right and the Left, as Derrida himself notes, this charge is typical: deconstruction, as "method," cannot "act," cannot be properly political, the allegation stipulates, because it confines itself to the text, to library shelves, to lecture halls, and to ivory towers. It cannot engage reality, and what is worse, the critique implies, it in fact raises an obstacle to effective action (such as organizing a political movement to oppose the power of capital, the state that serves it, or whatever) by imagining that to engage in the (perhaps instructive) interpretation of words and texts is already to have done something, as it were, *actual*.<sup>22</sup> We shall return later to this question of action, which Derrida flags with his sardonic punctuation (in part because those *academic* critics can hardly claim to be "acting" politically, either), but for now we note that, to this charge concerning text and politics, Derrida replies: "*Text*, as I use the word, is not the book. No more than writing or trace, it is not limited to the *paper* which you cover with your graphism. It is precisely for strategic reasons . . . that I found it necessary to recast the concept of text by generalizing it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit, without any limit that *is*. That's why there is nothing '*beyond* the text.' That's why South Africa and *apartheid* are, like you and me, part of this general text, which is not to say that it can read the way one reads a book. That's why the text is always a field of forces: heterogeneous, differential, open, and so on."<sup>23</sup>

For Derrida, text is always already con-text—a context that is not to be un-

derstood merely as the socio-historical milieu in which books are written, published, and read. “Text” in this larger sense closely resembles Heidegger’s notion of world as the opening of the truth of Being. Hence Derrida’s language of “textuality” and “textile”: the meaningfulness of this world is interwoven—and frayed, or even torn—like a fabric. This “general text,” as Derrida calls it, is the con-text as the whole fabric of meaning that gathers understanding and enables us to read situations as well as to interpret books; we are all “part of” this expansive con-text whose limits Derrida does not want to set. But we are also able to de-*con*-struct this general *con*-text. In each case, the *con*-intimates an integrated intelligibility, whether drawn together as a woven whole (*con*-text), or pulled apart (de-*con*-struction) (and here we have an echo of Heidegger’s identification of logos and polemos). Though inscribed as a whole, however, the con-text is never simply a closed, unitary world capable of a final, finite reading. We can fray and unravel the fabric in its gathered and woven intelligibility, but we can never take control of the context as a whole, for that would be taking the place of God as authors of the “book” of the world. For Derrida, then, to deconstruct is also to “act” politically, because to pull apart the authority of texts, and to show how meaning can escape any “authorized” intent to control it, is a political undertaking as much in the realm of authors and books as in the realm of rulers and regimes, since both books and regimes are *text* in context.

To construe the world as text obviously elevates the activity—and the problems—of interpretation to a new level. To insist on the world as text and not book means that the world is not a bounded, unitary whole, with the potential for uncovering the true intent of the author, whether God or Nature, of this whole. This text may not be limited to a single correct meaning, for Derrida, but we are nevertheless left with the question of how it is that given interpretations at least *seem* to strike us as compelling. When asked in an interview whether deconstruction leads to interpretative pluralism and “the view that any interpretation is as good as any other,” he answers, “I am not a pluralist and I would never say that every interpretation is equal, but *I* do not select. The interpretations select themselves. I am a Nietzschean in that sense. . . . I would not say that some interpretations are truer than others. I would say that some are more powerful than others. The hierarchy is between forces and not between true and false. There are interpretations which account for more meaning and this is the criterion. . . . Meaning is determined by a system of forces which is not personal. It does not depend on the subjective identity but on the field of different forces, the conflict of forces, which produce interpretations” (IJD, 21).

"I do not select." Derrida's Nietzscheanism seems to consist in recognizing this polemos of forces that guide us in the assigning of interpretations rather than in ascertaining a "true" instead of a "false" reading. The individual always already resides in this "field of different forces," and it is that the "more powerful" interpretations tend to sweep *us* up in their meaning than that we produce and master these forces ourselves. Granted, it is not entirely clear what this distinction means here (and it does seem that Derrida relies somewhat on Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche), but Derrida appears to be saying that the subject, the "I," as a node in this field of forces, cannot simply float indifferently among an indefinite array of possible interpretations. Meaning always already engages us; to be the author or the authorizer of meaning is not the first step. On this account, the author's intent "behind" the text cannot suffice for the determination of its meaning: "I would not say that there is no interest in referring to the intentional purpose. There are authors, there are intentionalities, there are conscious purposes. We must analyze them, take them seriously. But the effects of what we call the author's intentions are dependent on something which is not the individual intention, which is not intentional" (IJD, 21).

So Derrida does not go so far as some detractors of deconstruction would have it: he does not dismiss the author's intention as mere illusion or as simply irrelevant to the construal of meaning. But he does insist that neither author nor reader can serve as the definitive locus or the source for assigning the "correct" meaning to a text, whether we understand "text" in the conventional sense as book, or in Derrida's broader sense as con-text, as world, as an indeterminate whole. But then what is the "something" that controls even the "effects" of the author's intention—and, we may add, the receptivity of the reader's interpretation? The historicizing play of interpretative forces, which bind author, text, and reader in one con-text. Derrida explores this play through several of his neologisms, such as *différance* and "iterability," which we shall explore as we proceed. But the key here is that deconstruction cannot be the merely willful imposition of the isolated, putatively free-standing reader-author-critic. Asked about the distinction between reader- and author-based literary theories, Derrida answers, "I do not accept this opposition between reader-based and author-based meaning. It comes from a misunderstanding of deconstruction, one which sees deconstruction as free interpretation based only on the fantasies of the reader. No one is free to read as he or she wants. The reader does not interpret freely, taking into account only his own reading, excluding the author, the historical period in which the text appeared and so on" (IJD, 22).

Deconstruction operates both through the reader and author *and* in the text itself. In this sense, it resembles polemos, which transpires necessarily through Dasein, but not as the tool or possession of Dasein. As we shall see, for Derrida, it makes more sense to say something like “deconstruction happens” than to think of it as an ideological weapon that “I” may or may not choose to employ. Deconstruction happens *in* the con-text; it happens *to* the con-text as a function of the play of forces. For Derrida, the “activity” of deconstruction as an identifiable literary or political “movement” is to point out and clarify the possibilities opened up by this more impersonal movement of deconstruction in the field of meaning itself. “Text” itself is polemos for Derrida; deconstruction is the warp and woof of this textuality.

### THE POLITICS OF DIFFÉRANCE

Derrida has said (1992) that “Deconstruction is justice” (FL, 15). The stakes implied by this assertion are high. When Paul de Man, a friend and fellow deconstructionist, was discovered to have written articles for a pro-Nazi newspaper in the early 1940s, after the occupation of Belgium, many of those hostile to deconstruction took this revelation as an opportunity to impugn this “method” of reading: Does not de Man’s own onetime fascism, and his failure to come to terms with it during his lifetime, indicate something at bottom rotten in deconstruction?<sup>24</sup> Is it not telling that a man who dissembles about the truth of his own compromised past should champion the mode of criticism that denies that there can be fixed truth in interpretation? Not only, then, is deconstruction discredited because it allows fascists to obfuscate the truth, but deconstruction itself can now (allegedly) be identified with fascism.

Without going into the details of Derrida’s defense of de Man here, suffice it to say that, in “Paul de Man’s War,” Derrida argues that de Man’s later work, his struggle to appropriate deconstruction for himself, can and should be read as a decisive “rupture” with the fascism he had entered into as a youth, not as its continuation. Derrida defends deconstruction against the more general charge that it somehow gives aid and comfort, or worse, to fascism: “Deconstructions have always represented, as I see it, the at least necessary condition for identifying and combating the totalitarian risk in all the forms already mentioned . . . What I have practiced under that name [of deconstruction] has always seemed to me favorable, indeed destined (it is no doubt my principal motivation) to the analysis of the conditions of totalitarianism in all its forms, which cannot always be reduced to names of regimes. And this in order to free

oneself of totalitarianism as far as possible. . . . There can still be, and in spite of them [that is, declarations of solidarity against totalitarianism as well as lives of political action against it], residual adherences to the discourse one is claiming to combat. And deconstruction is, in particular, the tireless analysis (both theoretical and practical) of these adherences" (PMW, 647–48).

Derrida is at pains to underline the meaning of his own "motivation," and indeed the "principal" one, underlying his texts. Dare we speak here of an *intention*, indeed, of an *authorial* intention, that we must have first understood to authorize us to interpret his works accurately? Given the doubts that deconstruction habitually raises about the possibility of a text's meaning being encompassed and secured by the intent of its author, Derrida's candid eagerness to provide his reader with a passport to the proper reading of de Man's and his own work is in this case especially striking. Something is at issue here that he does not want mistaken: the political import of his own work, and that of those allied with him.

But let us not begrudge Derrida his concern here, but rather take it at face value: deconstruction (his, at least) *intends* to combat totalitarianism. The question remains whether this intention attains its object, or whether it becomes misdirected. Of course, Derrida construes "totalitarianism" very broadly. It includes the racism of South African apartheid as much as the genocidal imperialism of Nazi fascism. Derrida even implicates existing liberal democracy as a more subtle form of totalitarianism;<sup>25</sup> in the context of his protest against the Western policies toward Vietnam, he writes: "That a declaration of opposition to some official policy is authorized, and authorized by the authorities, also means, precisely to that extent, that the declaration does not upset the given order, is not *bothersome*" (Ends, 114). The implication: we are blind to ways in which even our protests are bound up in a complicity deeper than our ordinary, commonsense notion of a politics of opposition. Even we ourselves, we who engage in a deconstruction like Derrida's in order to free ourselves "as far as possible," are implicated: deconstruction must be an ongoing, "tireless analysis," because we can never simply escape our own "residual adherences" to this expansive totalitarianism. This problem of the residual adherences that endlessly return to haunt us connects with Derrida's recent work on "ghosts" and what he calls "hauntology": deconstruction strives both to accept and to counter this always-already and the ever-after of the ghosts of logocentrism, of metaphysics, of totalitarianism. The haunting can be neither simply denied nor simply exorcised. Derrida's "hauntology" (in French pronunciation, an audible play on "ontology") is therefore connected with the problem of seeking to resist meta-

physics without falling back into its grip through a naïve attempt to “overcome” it—a trope familiar from Vattimo’s and Heidegger’s distinction between *Überwindung* and *Verwindung*—two terms that both indicate an overcoming but that have subtle denotative differences for Heidegger and some of his postmodernist readers, as we shall see (*EoM*, 172–73; *VA*, 68, 74).

But what is totalitarianism, whose reach is so wide that we are free only in constantly waging war with it, even in ourselves? For Derrida, the polemos we are called to is a polemos with this totalitarianism. In the postmodernist discourse, this totalitarianism goes by other names, most prominently: logocentrism, humanism, subjectivism, and metaphysics. Totalitarianism, broadly understood, strives to bring the world to heel as a single, unitary, *bounded* whole, a text that, as a totality, is ultimately entirely legible, provided one has the proper hermeneutic key. This conception of totalitarianism as deeper than mere types of regimes derives essentially from Heidegger’s portrait of the history of Western thinking as metaphysics, and more precisely, the metaphysics of presence: what philosophy as metaphysics has sought all along (even in its most highly scientific, “anti-metaphysical” moods) is a being that would serve as the key to all beings, whether this being is the *eidos* or *ousia* or God or substance or the principles of mathematical physics. Totalitarianism as a political phenomenon, then, is ancillary to totalitarianism as a mode of understanding that has held the history of the West in its grip more or less since Plato, a mode that aspires to offer understanding of all beings in terms of some fundamental principle. This conception of totalitarianism entails all modern forms of politics, almost without exception, for whether these forms are based on the attempt to understand all politics in terms of race or class or natural rights, each of these strands attempts to ground a totalizing picture of political phenomena on a fundamental principle from which no phenomena can escape. “Human rights” is as universalizing a hermeneutic key as “race” or “class”; all are grounded in a metaphysics that seeks a total application.<sup>26</sup>

Derrida’s work on the politics of the totalization of meaning begins with his readings of Husserl and Saussure on the meaning of meaning. In Saussure, it is the “difference” between signs, the fact that signs must differ in order to signify an object, that undergirds the meaningfulness of the system of signs. This difference serves as stabilization to meaning. Derrida’s neologism *différance* amalgamates two senses of the Latin root, *differre*—to differ and to defer or delay. This *différance* serves to erode the notion that a system of meaning could be made fully transparent, fully intelligible in its significance, by means of some final interpretative key; meaning is always on the move, its final codification *de-*

*ferred*. Nevertheless, we—at least the “we” of the logocentric, metaphysical, Western tradition—succumb to a nostalgia for the lost origin that would secure us against the fraying of the meaning of our world. Against the “seminal adventure” (SSP, 292) of the play of *différance*, we resentfully cast down a foundation, hoping to tie down the trace (that is, a bearer of meaning that evolves and erodes) as a stable sign (a referent of meaning that might be secured as the “truth”). This nostalgic yearning that strives to evade or arrest the play of *différance* thus interprets *text* as *book*. “The idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier” (OG, 18). The book is the symbol of comprehensiveness, of a system capable of being treated and understood as a unitary whole, a totality. The idea of the book is a concept of logocentrism for Derrida; it holds out the promise of a “good writing,” a “Good Book,” whether inscribed in the laws of revelation or the laws of nature, that we could then “read” as the re-presentation of the lost origin, the departed god, the vanished lawgiver.

To read the world as book rather than as text means that we can aspire, out of our nostalgia for some imagined lost unity and stability and our resentment against the play of time, to lay hold of the world as a totality, to “take it” seriously and put a halt to the temporal play of meaning. This construction of the world as a founded whole, a comprehensively comprehensible unity, constitutes the guiding impetus for the politics of a logocentric metaphysics as totalitarianism, writ large. But this yearning is always already “negative, nostalgic, guilty” (SSP, 292)—guilty because it denies, in its nostalgia, the unconstrainable play of *différance*. “There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*. . . . [The economic aspect of *différance*] confirms that the subject, and first of all the conscious and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *différance*, that the subject is not present, nor above all present to itself before *différance*, that the subject is constituted only in being divided from itself, in becoming space, in temporizing, in deferral” (P, 28–29).

Totalitarianism, then, for Derrida, is a seriousness that denies the play of *différance* and that will go to terrible, even deadly lengths to maintain its claim to a complete and eternal interpretation of the whole. Thus not only do the regimes of a Nazi Germany or a Soviet Union deserve the name of totalitarianism, but liberal democratic regimes also do, to the extent that they are also founded upon logocentrism. The issue is not the magnitude of suffering inflicted or the degree of (manifest) state control; “totalitarian regimes” ordinar-

ily understood (as forms of modern tyranny) are simply the extreme expressions of a tendency lurking in the West's metaphysical orientation in general.

Derrida makes clear the breadth of his critique in writings such as "Declarations of Independence," a deconstructive reading of Jefferson's famous 1776 proclamation. Derrida focuses on the phenomenon of a *declaration* of independence: Does the declarative act *confirm* an already existing state, or does it *produce* it? Whence the "we" of such declarations, and the later "We the People" of the United States Constitution? Derrida detects what he takes to be an unavoidable contradiction in such performative acts of founding a nation and birthing a people, a "We." Commenting on the Declaration's concluding paragraph, which asserts that "We . . . do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free and Independent States," Derrida writes, "'Are and ought to be'; the 'and' articulates and conjoins here the two discursive modalities, the to be and the ought to be, the constation and the prescription, the fact and the right. *And* is God: at once creator of nature and judge, supreme judge of what is (the state of the world) and of what relates to what ought to be (the rectitude of our intentions)."<sup>27</sup>

God serves as the ultimate signatory to this declaration, the author who guarantees the rightful conjunction, the "and," between "Is" and "Ought." Here, Catherine Zuckert correctly appraises Derrida's deconstruction of the declaration: the West is comfortable in its political foundings only when it can ascribe some ontotheological source to them, a source that can confirm and uphold the principles of the founding.<sup>28</sup> Zuckert puts her finger on the entailments of Derrida's argument: the blatant hypocrisy of slave-holding American Founders—who declare that "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights"—demonstrates that the logocentric, ontotheological impulse in the West serves to mask the violence and racism inherent in such foundings and separations of independence for Derrida. How so? Because even if we interpret "all Men" as meaning all *human beings*, they are still "created" as a distinct, separate human "race," with "certain inalienable Rights" adhering uniquely to them. To distinguish humanity, the rational animal, from all other animals, and to ground our supremacy on either God's favoring us with his image or reason favoring us with its logos, is already (for Derrida) to set the stage for the divisions of race (and, we may add, of gender, class, caste, and so on) among humans.<sup>29</sup>



In “Racism’s Last Word,” a contribution for the catalogue to a 1983 traveling art exhibition, “Art contre/against Apartheid,” Derrida describes apartheid as a “quasi-ontological” category, a term meaning “apartness” as such: “At every point, like all racisms, it tends to pass segregation off as natural—and as the very law of the origin. Such is the monstrosity of this political idiom” (RLW, 292). Precisely this “monstrosity” (“apartitionality” as Derrida sardonically translates *apartheid*) is at issue, as a product of the West: “*Apartheid* is famous, in sum, for manifesting the lowest extreme of racism, its end and the narrow-minded self-sufficiency of its intention, its eschatology, the death rattle of what is already an interminable agony, something like the setting in the West of racism—but also, and this will have to be specified below, racism as a Western thing” (RLW, 292–93). The monstrousness of apartheid resides in what it betrays about the West: a longing for categorizations that rely on nature and origin. To be sure, concedes Derrida in what follows, the West has condemned apartheid, and yet the West instituted it, and continued to arm, support, and trade with it. “Some might say that this is a diversion and a perversion, and no doubt it is” (RLW, 295). Just as, we might add, some might say that American slavery was a “diversion and a perversion” in respect to the principles of the founding of the United States regime. “Yet somehow the thing had to be possible and, what is more, durable” (RLW, 295). The West somehow bears these monstrosities necessarily in all its birthings. When the United Nations declared apartheid a crime against humanity in 1973, Derrida wrote: “If this verdict continues to have no effect, it is because the customary discourse on man, humanism and human rights, has encountered its effective and as yet unthought limit, the limit of the whole system in which it acquires meaning” (RLW, 298). This “whole system,” of course, is the West’s logocentrism, which is wedded to its foundings, groundings, and categorial separations.

Of course, the United States fought a civil war that ended slavery. Women gained suffrage in 1920. The apartheid regime in South Africa has fallen. A partisan of liberalism might well argue that such developments show that the Western tradition can, to use the phrase of Lon Fuller, “work itself pure” of the hypocrisies that contradict its basic principles.<sup>30</sup> Derrida certainly embraces such victories. In *Of Spirit*, he even goes so far as to concede that the “humanist teleology” has “remained *up till now* . . . the price to be paid in the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, racism, naturalism, etc.” (OS, 56). But the question must remain for Derrida whether logocentrism *can*, indeed, *purify* itself, or whether such purification in relation to principles is not itself simply another expression of Western metaphysics—a “price to be paid,” since it does

not escape a logos that threatens more of the same “inversions and contaminations” (*OS*, 56), albeit in other guises. Indeed, purification in respect to some fundamental, differentiating principle has figured essentially within the logic of the worst racisms and “class” cleansings of the past century.

This contamination inherent in the very idea of purity leads Derrida to adopt the Heideggerian notion of a “closure” to the epoch of metaphysics, rather than an “end,” for the latter implies a sort of overcoming, an exertion of the will to power, which itself remains within the domain of metaphysics. An “end,” as well as purity, both imply a kind of exit from a discourse, a stepping out beyond it to something capable of gathering it in as a whole and either disposing over or disposing of it. But *différance* always already *implicates* us in the play of language and the horizon of meaning; there is no purity, no end, no transcendental signified. We cannot simply exorcise the ghosts of the past, which are also the ghosts of our future (hauntology-ontology). This is why Derrida says that even deconstruction is necessarily “constantly risking falling back within what is being deconstructed” (*OG*, 14).

Deconstruction serves then as a kind of endless, vigilant polemos against the totalizing pretensions of logocentrism. But since deconstruction cannot exorcise the “residual adherences” of what it combats, it begins and remains within logocentrism’s ambit: “The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures” (*OG*, 24). Deconstruction displays the movement of *différance*, a movement whose play discloses the rifts and ruptures in meaning within any structure so arrogant as to presume it possesses a total interpretative key—including deconstruction itself. So, while many may think of deconstruction as a tool merely for the abstruse treatment of literary texts, once we recall that “text” has a boundless scope for Derrida, we understand that deconstruction must apply to political structures as well. A “structure,” then, constitutes any system whose significance relies upon an ascription of meaning that can be questioned and subverted. And since the “sign” is inherently unstable as the *trace*, this possibility of deconstruction applies to all systems and structures, including the political, the legal, and so forth. For *différance*, as a movement inherent in the trace weaving through any system of signification, is not simply a possibility, but rather the compass of meaning—a compass that encompasses significance, giving it a multidirectionality, yet without teleology. Deconstruction, as a function of *différance*, is a movement that happens inherently to any system of meaning. Indeed, the cruelty and violence that Derrida regards as by-products of logo-

centric racism, tyranny, exploitation, and so on, derive from the refusal encapsulated in Western metaphysics to acknowledge the “truth” of the inherent deconstruction of “Truth.”

The violence of logocentrism results from a certain kind of response to what Derrida calls iterability. Iterability is a concept that describes the perdurance of the trace’s signification in its *différance*. If the trace (a “sign”) could not *to some extent* retain its capacity to signify in a like manner over time, that is, to re-iterate itself, it simply could not mean anything; difference implies a perduring identity in that which differs. But *différance* also indicates that iterability is errant: in deferring, the trace disseminates and disperses itself; etymologies of common words show that they have evolved sometimes almost unrecognizably from their “roots.”<sup>31</sup> Iterability is not representability. In this sense, iterability is akin to what Derrida writes about the *pharmakon* in Plato’s *Phaedrus*: something that is both a cure and a poison. Iterability entails both the perduring and the dissolution of meaning. Logocentrism seizes upon the moment of perdurance alone, denying the decomposition of the trace, thereby treating a system of meaning as a bounded, comprehensible whole with eternally intelligible significance, provided that one has the right interpretative key, the final logos. Politically, logocentrism then seeks to confirm the purity and seminal transparency of the pretended origin of a regime as something that can endure without decay. In a 1989 essay on Walter Benjamin, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” Derrida describes the “law of iterability” as what “insures that the founding violence [of a regime as a system of meaning] is constantly represented in a conservative violence that always repeats the tradition of its origin and that ultimately keeps nothing but a foundation destined from the start to be repeated, conserved, reinstituted” (FL, 55). A regime’s violent repressiveness is proportional to the sadistic desperation with which it must cover over the scandalous violence of the original act of founding.

As Charles Spinoza has pointed out, iterability also (if not usually) serves as a positive, or at least neutral, term for Derrida: it describes a necessarily cyclical aspect of the temporal movement of *différance* that allows meaning, as a seminal, interweaving trace, to retain a resonance and so continue to *signify*.<sup>32</sup> Without some kind of iteration, language would remain mere indiffer-entiation; without identity, however fleeting, the trace could not trace itself intelligibly from node to node in the fabric of the text, and difference, too, would be unintelligible. There would be no meaning at all. But logocentrism depends on an iterability that re-iterates the origin as a re-duplication: the constantly representable, pure origin that upholds the legitimate authority of a regime. On

this account, the conservative violence of a regime determined to maintain the foundations of its authority cannot bear the playfully serious “violence” of deconstructive interpretation that undermines “author-ity.”

Understood this way, deconstruction, as a movement, is not a political movement in the ordinary sense: it is not organized by an “opposition” and put into play by human actors. Rather: deconstruction happens. Just *happens*. Here the question of action returns. This happening of deconstruction within a system of meaning simply carries us along with it as part of the “seminal adventure of the trace” in *différance*. Indeed, that is why Derrida objects so strenuously to calling deconstruction a method: it is not a theory, a tool, a *thing*, that we as subject-agents may take up for various purposes, whether literary, political, or otherwise. Rather, deconstruction as a movement of the con-text itself takes *us* up in its folds and frayings. It is a mark of logocentrism to grant to some agent, whether human or divine, the power of absolute autonomy, whether creative or destructive, over systems of meaning. No human being, no *being* at all, masters and directs *différance*. *différance* happens in and of itself; the “subject” is *its* product, along with the rest of the con-text. This does not mean we have no freedom; only that we cannot be the source, the authors, of our freedom. Of course, Derrida is well aware that something called “deconstruction” has taken root as a “method” that various scholars and writers practice in various disciplines, in various ways (FL, 56). So we have two things: deconstruction as a movement inherent in the trajectory of *différance* itself, and deconstruction as a mode of interpretation as practiced by human beings.

This problem of the “practice” of deconstruction leads Derrida to make his bold assertion in “Force of Law,” “Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. *Deconstruction is justice*” (FL, 14–15; emphasis added). In this essay, Derrida distinguishes between justice and *droit* as the law that constructs and maintains legitimate authority: “Deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of *droit* (authority, legitimacy, and so on)” (FL, 15). *Droit* is what figures into, and configures, the violence of a repressive iterability: the cyclical reinstitution and reauthorization—reiteration—of the regime’s founding acts of violence. For as Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt agree, all regimes begin with an original, violent rupture that must at once be legitimized (as the source of authority) and forbidden (since the constituted authority must deny the freedom to perform any similar acts of founding violence to those it now governs). Justice exists “beyond” law not just for the ordinary reason that a partic-

ular system of laws may be unjust but because justice requires a deconstruction of the logocentrism implicit in law: the notion that a pure origin, a “just” founding, grants legitimacy to the structure erected upon it, even if this foundation is an “ideal” one in a system working itself pure of its hypocrisies (as one might say that the United States regime is “living up to” the egalitarian ideals of its Declaration of Independence, despite the racism and sexism in the era of the founders). Deconstruction, as justice, denies the finality of authority to any structure, any system, any “text” (whether literary or political) that claims it. Deconstruction does this through the plural deconstructions by displaying the ruptures, the aporias, and the contradictions in the purportedly authoritative origin and its (re)iterations. Justice as deconstruction, then, is always something “to come”: not a definite future to be delivered by some messiah, but what Derrida calls the *à-venir*, an unspecified epoch beyond our present conception that refuses to re-iterate the present and to serve as yet another violent origin that represses the play of *différance*. Deconstruction seems open to a violence (whether actual or conceptual) that would remain open to itself, that would not feel the need for repression, and that would not cover itself over with mythologies that repeat the fiction of a pure beginning.

Here deconstruction runs up against a question: If *différance* and deconstruction are always already happening as the very movement of language, why do we need “deconstructionists” to display it? How is their *activity* not simply redundant? Derrida is not a romantic seeking a return to an earlier homogeneity, a sense of community free from the atomization and individualism fostered by liberalism and modernity. He champions a multiplicity, a flourishing at the margins. Nevertheless, deconstructive politics also seems to assume that something about the West has impeded the movement of *différance*, or at least, in *seeking* to impede it, has engaged in terrible violence and injustice. In liberalism as a mode of metaphysical logocentrism, the “subject” is construed as a rational, self-transparent individual, somehow external to the historicizing nexus that makes significance possible. A kind of therapeutic shaking-up is required to restore a relationship to the structures of intelligibility that does not react with repressive, nostalgic hysteria in the face of the “natural” dissolution of meaning inherent in all text.

This is Derrida’s Nietzscheanism at work (or should we say, at play). Derrida acknowledges that deconstruction must always operate from *within* logocentrism; the notion of overcoming metaphysics, as Heidegger has argued, is itself a metaphysical notion, for no discourse can leap out of its context. Derrida’s justice holds that metaphysics and logocentrism have prevented us from recog-

nizing that destabilization of structures is always already happening. To the extent that deconstruction “acts” as a method, it seeks to free us for a consideration of something we must take into account to avoid injustice: an otherness forced to the margins of any totalizing system. Since we can never simply leave the given structure behind but must always already act and interpret from within it, this deconstruction must endure as a vigilantly ongoing struggle. Deconstruction as a politics, then, invites a kind of perpetual polemos, a ceaseless confrontation with the given structures of meaning and authority. If there is nostalgia in Derrida, it is for a justice that has no homecoming in deconstruction’s destabilizing habitations.

### THE POLEMOS OF DECONSTRUCTION

In “Heidegger’s Ear: Philopolemology (*Geschlecht* 4),” Derrida engages in his most sustained discussion of polemos in Heidegger. Derrida’s exegesis is meticulous, and we cannot do justice to its every detail. At issue now is the extent to which Heidegger’s polemos, and the politics that derive from it, differ from Derrida’s *différance* and the politics of deconstruction that flow from it. We have seen that for Derrida, deconstruction cannot simply step out from what it deconstructs and that *différance* is always already a movement within a system of traces that cannot be transcended; deconstructive “practice” thus requires a constant struggle that will never simply overcome metaphysics. But Heidegger’s *Ab-bau* and Heidegger’s polemos, as we have examined them, also involve a confrontation with a history that cannot simply be done away with and demands rather a ceaseless engagement.

“Heidegger’s Ear” forms part of a series of essays in which Derrida explores what might be called the bodily metaphors of Heidegger’s analytic of *Dasein*.<sup>33</sup> The notion of the ear must be connected with Derrida’s concern with writing and phonocentrism: the ear is the locus for the reception of the spoken logos. In “Heidegger’s Ear,” Derrida begins with a seemingly passing remark in *Being and Time*: “als Hören der Stimme des Freundes, den jedes Dasein bei sich trägt” (*SZ*, 163). The full sentence in which this phrase occurs can be translated: “Hearing, indeed, constitutes the primary and authentic openness of *Dasein* for its ownmost Being-able-to-be, as the hearing of the voice of the friend whom every *Dasein* bears with it.” Derrida wants to explore the sense of the “bei sich” of this invisible, enigmatic friend that *Dasein* always carries along with itself, the friend to whom *Dasein* must “lend an ear” if *Dasein* is properly to hear, and so to understand its own Being. Heidegger makes clear in the pas-

sage in *Being and Time* that such hearing opens up the full discourse within which intelligibility and the understanding of Being in general first become possible: Dasein's "ownmost Being-able-to-be" is at stake. "Lending an ear to [*Das Hören auf*. . .] is the existential Being-open of Dasein as Being-with for the Other." This hearkening, this listening to, this lending an ear to, somehow transpires along with Dasein and as a function of Dasein bearing the Other along with it. Derrida wants to question *how* this lending an ear to the Other-as-friend works.

I have argued that for Heidegger, appropriating one's own possibilities for Being demands an Auseinandersetzung both with one's own Self and with the Other and, moreover, that neither the Self nor the Other is simply a metaphysical substance-thing, but rather is constituted *through* a necessarily ongoing polemos. Derrida is right to call attention to the fact that this little phrase concerning the voice of the friend arises in the context of the opening up of the world *through* Dasein's Being-with other Dasein (HE, 171) and that this connection in turn relates to the working out of *Mitsein* through communication and struggle (*Mitteilung* and *Kampf*, SZ, 384). Hearing, and hearing the friend, as Derrida points out, are constitutive of the community in discourse: *hören* makes us *zugehörig* (HE, 174); hearing (being able to hear one another) constitutes our belonging-together. But the voice of the friend is not necessarily *friendly* (nor is it the eye and ear of a scrutinizing, internal conscience); this Heideggerian "friend" is rather the condition for the possibility of discourse, of communal intelligibility, within which the various negative modes (misunderstanding, enmity, etc.) of hearing and Being-with are also possible: "The voice of the friend does not exclude opposition, because it does not oppose itself to the opposition that there is no essential opposition between *philein* and *Kampf* or, as will be said later, *polemos*" (HE, 176).

Derrida recognizes the importance of Auseinandersetzung in Heidegger, as a moment not only in the constitution of Dasein's belonging to a community, but also in his thinking as a whole. But Derrida's essay is extremely *exegetical*. It is more difficult than usual to ascertain when, how, or even whether Derrida takes his critical distance from Heidegger rather than simply narrating Heidegger's argument. His interest, nevertheless, clearly lies in the question of the "harmonization" of this polemical process of *philein* within which a politics of reciprocity is possible, one that enables the encounter with the Other as friend without assimilating and homogenizing the Other's difference: "A democracy to come should give to be thought an equality that is not incompatible with a certain dissymmetry, with heterogeneity, or absolute singularity, an equality

even requiring them and engaging them from a place that remains invisible but that orients me here, from afar, no doubt beyond the Heideggerian aim" (HE, 183). Responsibility entails a radical sensitivity to singularity and a deep suspicion of categorizations and of the apparent obviousness of who "we" are. Justice, as this responsiveness to singularity, is always already indeterminate and incalculable (cf. RU, 123ff).

Derrida to some extent embraces Heidegger's polemos of eristic friendship, this "philopolemology" as Derrida calls it, as both the constitutive moment in a communal *Mitsein* and as a kind of engine for "philosophy" itself. But he still hopes to go "beyond" Heidegger's polemos, perhaps by interrupting the polemos by deconstructing the absolute dualism between identity and difference (which, according to my interpretation, Heidegger himself already does by equating logos with polemos). Now, in this "Philopolemology" essay, Derrida devotes some considerable attention to a careful reading of some of Heidegger's own readings of Heraclitus' Fragment 53. He rightly draws the connection between Heidegger's earlier use of *Kampf* in *Being and Time* (§74), through the talk of Kampf and *Kampfsgemeinschaft* in the rectoral address in 1933, to the focus on the polemos after 1934 (due, in part, to a correspondence with Carl Schmitt) in the *Germanien* lecture course of 1934–35 and the *Introduction to Metaphysics* lecture course of 1935, as well as other writings.

Derrida seems to agree with much of Heidegger's interpretation in the *Einführung*: the polemos cannot be a war in the human sense, nor is the fragment some kind of protoanthropology. Polemos is "at the origin"—not in the sense of a creator-God, but rather as something that "edeixe," "läßt . . . erscheinen": allows beings to appear (HE, 208). Derrida makes much of Heidegger's parenthetical assertion in the *Einführung* that "polemos and logos are the same" (EM, 47). One theme of Derrida's essay is the *philo-* of *philosophia*, the "friendship for, or love of, wisdom." As Derrida interprets Heidegger's 1955 essay, "*Was ist das—die Philosophie?*" ("What Is Philosophy?"), Heraclitus and Parmenides were great thinkers because they engaged in a *philein* that was not yet a *philia*. This *philein* precedes the *philia* of philosophy because it already stands in an "*originary* harmony [that] then is not constructed, derives from nothing, is a consequence of nothing" (HE, 183). This harmonia is the logos that gathers a world about it, a harmonia by which the logos adjusts beings to one another and adjudicates such that *philein* and logos are the same. But philosophy as *philia* comes *after*: "The gathering, the harmony, the homology, and the *philein* of the logos were threatened in their unity, the wonder was lost" (HE, 190). Once the Sophists, with their aggressive, marketplace manner of dis-



course, disrupt the residence of thinking with the logos, philosophy begins a search, an erotic *philia*, for this lost unity of *philein* and logos, an attempt to restore the *sophos* of this *originary* harmony that lays out the world in its intelligibility. “This nostalgia is the origin of philosophy. It is a reaction to the loss of the originary *philein*, of the *homologeîn*, of the correspondence with the logos” (HE, 190). But in its displacement from the logos, in its nostalgia, philosophy searches for an origin, for an ontic source of “what is” rather than simply residing in the *originary* clarity of the logos as the wondrous musical harmony, the play of the world in its meaningfulness. So, when Heidegger says in 1935 that “polemos and logos are the same,” he unites polemos with this originary *philein*, one that gathers, assembles, and adjusts beings in the harmony of the logos. Polemos, logos, and *philein* are *originary*, not in the sense of being the *original* as the creator-God(s) or the Idea-models of the world, but because they make possible the articulated field of meaning itself. But philosophy has precisely forgotten *this* originariness in favor of its nostalgia for what, in its necessarily forgetful remembrance, it takes to be its home: an origin in the sense of a logos as an ultimate key, a final word. In its displacement, philosophy misremembers what it has lost, and thereby forgets it and distorts it.

But Derrida’s “take” on all this is extremely obscure and more aporetic than his many other engagements with Heidegger. Certainly, he duly notices the “voluntarism” of the 1933 rectoral address, which stakes the self-assertion of the Self on a *will* that engenders the community not only *in* struggle (*Kampf*) but also through and *as Kampf* (HE, 199–203). Of course, Derrida objects to this voluntarism precisely as Heidegger’s capitulation to a logocentric metaphysics of the subject and the will that would lure him into a politics in which *Kampf*, as a kind of assertion of the will, was to ground a new origin for the German Volk. Furthermore, while Derrida does seem quite taken with the general force of Heidegger’s interpretation of Fragment 53 as antianthropomorphic, and so to some extent antimetaphysical, his own reading that for Heidegger logos, polemos, and *philein* are all “the same,” and that this sameness redounds onto a sense of logos as *Sammlung* or *Versammlung* (collecting, gathering, or gathering together), also at least points in the direction of a critique of Heidegger’s reading of the fragment as logocentric. “At bottom logocentrism is perhaps not so much the gesture that consists in placing the logos at the center as the interpretation of *logos as Versammlung*, that is, the gathering that precisely concentrates what it configures” (HE, 187). In other words, not only is philosophy (that is, metaphysics beginning with Plato and Aristotle) a logocentric nostalgia, but the interpretation of the Heraclitean polemos in a prephilosophical identity

with the logos, as the “originary” configuration of Being, is also a logocentric, nostalgic “gesture” (HE, 201). Indeed, what he objects to is not even logocentrism so much as *centrism* per se: the idea of any centripetal gathering of forces and authority.

So Derrida ascribes a certain “equivocation” to Heidegger on the question of the originariness of polemos, logos, philein, and philosophy. “It is partly in such an equivocation precisely that the political strategies are played out, lost, stopped or carried along” (HE, 202, translation modified). But it is also equivocal to what extent Derrida *agrees* with Heidegger’s understanding of the polemos in this essay. Furthermore, Derrida makes a “philological” error here: the parenthetical remark in the *Einführung* that “polemos and logos are the same” was *not* made in 1935, at the time of the lecture course. Derrida has been deceived by the 1953 Niemeyer edition, in which Heidegger published the course for the first time. But the editor of the *Gesamtausgabe* corrects the texts, putting the remark in square brackets, indicating that the remark was inserted, not at the time of the lectures, but some time thereafter, quite possibly at the time of the revision in 1953. The same obfuscation took place with the more infamous “inner truth and greatness” remark, which stands in round brackets in the Niemeyer edition, supposedly showing that Heidegger understood the import of the National Socialist movement in his own idiosyncratic manner even as early as 1935, whereas in fact, he added the remark in or about 1953.<sup>34</sup> But why would he want to add that “polemos and logos are the same”? Presumably in part to soften the *polemos*, to strip it of its militaristic tinge (which is in keeping with his obfuscations in “The Rectorate: Facts and Thoughts” and the *Spiegel* interview). To identify polemos with logos lends the former a constructive, rather than destructive, tenor.

But does this fact have any impact on *Derrida’s* reading? Certainly, to the extent that he wants to portray a kind of continuous discourse, from the “friend” of *Being and Time* through the polemos-logos of the *Einführung* to the philein-logos of “*Was ist das—die Philosophie?*” his mistaken dating of the parenthetical remark in the *Einführung* somewhat spoils the game. But only to a degree. Much more interesting is the question of how well Heidegger’s interpretation of the polemos meshes with Derrida’s understanding of the political significance of his own work.

The point of entry to this question is *différance* itself. Like Heidegger’s polemos, *différance* is originary without being an original, that is, without being the transcendental signifier that either creates or confirms, is author or authorizer of, meaning. In and of themselves, they are both no-thing. As the condi-

tion for the possibility of difference, *différance* differentiates and separates, even while the trace blends with and blurs into itself through the deferrals of time. In the 1935 interpretation of Fragment 53 that we have examined, Heidegger writes: “Kampf first and foremost allows what essentially unfolds to step apart from each other in opposition, first allows position and status and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence. In such a stepping apart, clefts, intervals, distances and joints open themselves up” (*EM*, 47). Derrida reads Heidegger’s interpretation as follows: “Dissociation, disjunction, scission, dissension, or secession: in this schiz, this split, of the *Auseinandertreten* or of the *Auseinandersetzung* are no doubt opened the faults, the intervals, the gaps, the distances, but also are formed the joints or the couplings (*Fugen*). For the schiz produced by the polemos must also gather, join up, join together, ally, combine, hold together what it separates or spaces” (*HE*, 209). Recall the very structure of the fragment itself, the *men . . . de* clauses: polemos “reveals the gods on the one hand (*men*) and humans on the other (*de*), makes slaves on the one hand, the free on the other.” The *men . . . de* structure signals the intelligible jointure of beings in their separation and difference through the polemos.

This differential showing forth is also the “activity” of *différance*. Not only does *différance* differentiate the spacing of the distinct traces, the intervals between them, it gathers them temporally. Not only does the *a* of *différance* mark the disjunction of space “between” unitary “signs,” but it marks the temporization of *différance* as a deferral, as a nexus of traces whose significance is woven together temporally. Derrida rejects Saussure’s notion of a systemic whole of signs in their difference. But without the temporality of *différance* as the trace that gathers the con-text, however frayed this fabric may be, the individual trace must collapse into solipsistic, autistic, in-significance. Perhaps this accounts for Derrida’s tentativeness in the “Philopolemology” essay: *différance*, too, requires a logos—only now, as we have seen, Derrida must hedge by saying that “logocentrism is perhaps not so much the gesture that consists in placing the logos at the center as the interpretation of logos as *Versammlung*, that is, the gathering that precisely concentrates what it configures.” Again: why? Because *différance*, too, is a kind of polemos that gathers (logos) the strands of the trace into meaning; in *différance*, too, are “polemos and logos the same.” What Derrida still wants to avoid is a logos that sets itself at the *center* of such meaning and dominates it as a systemic whole. In his exegesis, Derrida drops all mention of difference in *rank*. To locate the origin of meaning at the center of things allows for the institution of the great chain of being and the imposition of rank order among beings and human beings.

This notion helps us to understand why Derrida would consider Heidegger's polemos akin to *différance* as a kind of originary non-origin. But Derrida cannot allow this *différance*-as-polemos to serve (as it does for Heidegger) as a source for a rank order. Another point of disagreement involves the question of the history of Being. For Heidegger, this history has a definite inception and a definite, destinal trajectory, a *Seinsgeschick*, into nihilism. To the extent that Derrida forcefully rejects anything in Heidegger, he rejects Heidegger's hagiography of the Greeks, and particularly of the pre-Socratics, as the lost origin of the West's history of Being. Derrida rejects Heidegger's famous valorization of the Greek and German languages as the two Western languages most suited to thinking (*EM*, 43), for this valorization is connected with the notion of the Greeks and Germans as somehow standing in a privileged relation to Being, one that we could recover. This valorization smacks of logocentrism and nostalgia (if not of ethnocentric racism), for it elevates both these peoples and these languages, even implying that they, exclusively, hold the key to Being. Moreover, the idea of a finite history of Being, with a determinate origin and point of crisis, also implies a logocentric dispensation. The trace must refuse such points of origin to history as a whole; indeed, history has no whole, no decisive, synoptic metanarrative, and so there is no salvation to be achieved in the grand polemos of such a history with itself, between its first and its other inception.

But Heidegger seeks not a mere repetition of the "beginning" of Western history, but rather a radically polemical appropriation of it as an *inception*, that is, as a source for unexplored possibilities of meaning and Being. The polemos of history is helicoid, not circular and fixed. While Derrida rejects the idea that Western history had an absolute beginning with the Greeks and that a polemos corresponding to that beginning might engender another beginning, he does indeed accept the Heideggerian account of the *subsequent* history of Western philosophy as a history of metaphysics. Derrida's own notion of logocentrism, and the history of such logocentrism that he traces through historical figures such as Plato or Rousseau, would be unthinkable without a Heideggerian historical treatment of metaphysics. Again, Derrida denies only that this history of metaphysics has a determinate beginning and a determinate heading, and so he can lift the decapitated body of this history and make use of it for his own deconstructive purposes.

On a more local level, as it were, of historical engagement, Derrida's *différance* involves a confrontation with the text, and this confrontation may be called *deconstruction*. We have seen that deconstruction involves several fea-

tures: 1) deconstruction opposes any totalitarian construal of the text (understood in Derrida's broad sense); 2) deconstruction inhabits the text; there is no "outside" the text, and so deconstruction must always begin with, in, and *as* what it deconstructs, including logocentrism itself: there is no escaping the ghost; 3) deconstruction thus demands constant vigilance, since logocentrism constantly threatens to reabsorb its products and its practices.

We have also come across a puzzle. Deconstruction *happens*, and it does so as a function of the movement of *différance*, of the trace, in the text. And yet "deconstruction," as an activity, seems also to be something "we" are capable of taking up and wielding, almost *against* the text. So again: Does deconstruction *happen* in spite of us, because of us, or perhaps through us?

This question recalls what I have argued about the Kehre as a turning within the polemos between Dasein and Sein. Just as deconstruction seems at once to be something that happens in and of itself and something that we engage in, Heidegger's polemos both transpires *as* the way that Being opens in its *alētheia* and describes the manner in which Da-sein ex-(s)ists in its temporality and its Being-in-the-world. In polemos, Being reveals itself in unconcealment *to* Dasein *through* Dasein's engaging in an interpretative confrontation with its own Being. In other words, polemos is neither objective (something that first "creates" the world we then inhabit) nor subjective (something by which we project a world upon a kind of chaos), but both (since Dasein and Being are simultaneously given to one another in the Kehre of polemos) and neither (since this appropriation of Dasein and Being to one another is neither objective nor subjective in the ordinary sense).

Clearly, something like this is going on with Derridean deconstruction, too. The answer to the question—Does deconstruction happen in and of itself, or is it we who deconstruct?—is: *both*. Both at the same time and in the same event. Just as Heidegger would not go so far in the rejection of the "subject" as to say that there need be no vehicle for Dasein, whether human or otherwise, Derrida is not so silly as to conceive of "text" without writers and readers. We *participate* in textuality.

As Stephen K. White has pointed out, this results in what may be called a politics and an ethics of responsibility in Derrida.<sup>35</sup> In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes, "No justice—let us not say no law and once again we are not speaking here of laws—seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalistic,

racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism" (*SM*, xix). To be responsible beings, to *respond* to the polemical voice of the friend, we must always be ready to treat each political and ethical event in its *singularity*, to respect the Other in its radical differentiation. To act as if some logos has already provided us with a law for ready application to any given political and ethical phenomenon is precisely to annihilate it as this phenomenon. Deconstruction *as justice* serves to expose a responsibility that must always exceed what is preordained and pro-scribed by (mere) law. Justice as responsibility, as this polemos of deconstruction, is not *calculable* by some formula, legal or otherwise; it must always begin with the singularity of the instance, even while taking the history of this instance into account. For this reason, "responsible" deconstruction cannot subscribe to a party or a political "platform" as a guide and foundation to action. Deconstruction may therefore seem monstrous and anarchic, perhaps even naïvely or quixotically apolitical, to the eye of a public still wedded to logocentrism. As a politics, deconstruction is neither active nor passive, but rather both—as *responsive* to the singularity of *différance*. Justice and deconstruction as responsibility have the temporal character of a *response* to an Other not simply *present*, but also past and future: the ghosts of both the by-gone and the to come. Deconstructive responsibility is never merely ahistorical anarchy: it neither forgets nor simply overcomes and expunges the ghosts of the past. But much like the temporality of Heidegger's *Dasein*, this responsibility is *primarily* directed to the future, to the "whither" of time and to the opening up of possibilities—an opening up to be promulgated by, through, and even *as* deconstruction.

#### IN THE "SPIRIT" OF POLEMOS

The problem of whether deconstruction has an active moment goes to the heart of the question of the distinction between Derrida and Heidegger. Derrida charges Heidegger, in the period of his engagement with Nazism, with a lapse into voluntarism, that is, with a politics of the self-assertion of the will that Heidegger's own destruction of the history of metaphysics should have warned him against. The question is, To what extent does the *activity* of deconstruction, as something "we" engage in, itself escape the problem of voluntarism? In an interview, "Heidegger, the Philosophers' Hell," Derrida recapitulates the themes of his book, *Of Spirit*: "At the moment when his discourse situates itself in a spectacular fashion in the camp of Nazism [Derrida is refer-

ring to Heidegger's rectoral address, "The Self-Assertion of the German University"] (and what demanding reader ever believed that the rectorship was an isolated and easily delimitable episode?), Heidegger takes up again the word 'spirit,' whose avoidance he had prescribed; he raises the quotation marks with which he surrounded it. He limits the deconstructive movement that he had begun earlier. He maintains a voluntarist and metaphysical discourse upon which he will later cast suspicion" (PH, 185). Derrida is right that Heidegger's desire to valorize the German Volk and its role in the history of Being leads him to turn to "spirit" in the rectoral address, as well as in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, as a vehicle to distinguish his understanding of the unique German task from that of the Nazi biological racists. His other speeches on behalf of the regime support the view that he develops his engagement with National Socialism as a lapse into metaphysical voluntarism.

But is this the only way to read Heidegger's engagement? Might it not be multiply determined? My own reading in terms of the polemos does not rely on a "fall" back into metaphysics to make sense of the Nazi episode. Indeed, this account interprets the engagement as much more fluidly continuous with Heidegger's project for the destruction of the Western philosophical and political tradition, that is, that Dasein and Being must confront each other in the turning of the polemos, and that this confrontation may serve to prepare an other inception in both thinking and politics. At stake here is not which account offers us a more comprehensive understanding of Heidegger, but rather how we are to make sense of the enduring problem of a Nazi politics. The voluntarism thesis poses the danger of quarantining the problem by attributing it to a certain kind of lapse on Heidegger's part, one that we can avoid. To his credit, Derrida does not argue it in this way: precisely by *not* avoiding the ghost of metaphysics, rather than by assuming we have dispensed or can dispense with it, we can combat the entanglements of fascism. But I have tried to argue that it is a certain understanding of confrontation—Kampf, polemos, and Auseinandersetzung—that underlies Heidegger's political engagement.

We must ask: Does Heidegger's Nazism remain, even when we remove the voluntarism from the equation? Let us bracket for a moment Derrida's excellent point that the spiritualized voluntarism is in part a strategy to oppose the prevalent biological racism of the party. In my reading of the rectoral address, I have tried to show that another important strand in Heidegger's thinking is at work here: polemos. Polemos need not, indeed cannot, any more than deconstruction, be entered into as if the subject's will could be imposed on Being (or, to use our new idiom, on the textile of meaning). Self-assertion, then, can be

understood as precisely this antivoluntaristic engagement in the polemos. Heidegger himself never renounced this text in toto as a relapse into metaphysics; indeed, he defended it, even after the war. Furthermore, when the seventh German edition of *Being and Time* was published in 1953, already many years after the end of the war and well into his supposed “turn,” Heidegger in his author’s preface referred the reader to his *Introduction to Metaphysics* “for elucidation of this question” of Being. The *Introduction* is considered one of the prime loci, along with the rectoral address, of Heidegger’s voluntarist metaphysics, yet here, explicitly drawing attention to it as the place to take the next step with him on his path of thinking, he noted that it was “being published at the same time as this reprinting”; surely this simultaneous publication was no accident.

In *Of Spirit*, Derrida doggedly pursues Heidegger’s treatment of the term *Geist* from *Being and Time* (1927) through the period of the rectoral address (1933) and on to Heidegger’s 1953 reading of Trakl in *On the Way to Language*. But he neglects an important text: the 1939 interpretation of Hölderlin’s poem “Wie wenn am Feiertage.” We have seen a passage from this work before, but let us repeat it here: “Nature in-spires [*be-geistert*: en-spirits] everything as the omnipresent, the all-creating. Nature itself is ‘the inspiration.’ Nature may only in-spire because it is ‘the spirit’ [*der Geist*]. Spirit holds sway as the sober, though bold, *Aus-einandersetzung*, that sets all that presences into the well-demarcated boundaries and jointures of its presencing. Such *Auseinandersetzen* is essential thinking. The ownmost ‘of spirit’ are ‘thoughts’ through which everything, because set out and divided [*auseinandergesetzt*], precisely belongs together. Spirit is the unifying unity that allows the togetherness of everything real to appear in its collectedness” (EHD, 60). In this essay, Heidegger addresses the phenomenon of poetic inspiration and the relation of this inspiration to grounding and the founding of an other inception of an other history. In German, as in English, inspiration (*Begeisterung*) has a clear etymological connection to spirit itself, as Heidegger’s hyphenations in the passage cited indicate. At issue here are these lines (19–27) of Hölderlin’s poem (EHD, 49, following Heidegger’s presentation of Hölderlin’s German):

Jetzt aber tagts! Ich harrt und sah es kommen,  
 Und was ich sah, das Heilige sei mein Wort.  
 Denn sie, sie selbst, die älter denn die Zeiten  
 Und über die Götter des Abends und Orients ist,  
 Die Natur ist jetzt mit Waffenklang erwacht,  
 Und hoch vom Äther bis zum Abgrund nieder  
 Nach vestem Geseze, wie einst, aus heiligem Chaos gezeugt,



Fühlt neu die Begeisterung sich,  
Die Allerschaffende wieder.

[But now the day breaks! I tarried expectantly and saw it coming, / And for what I saw, the Holy shall be my name. / For she who is older than the ages / And above the gods of occident and orient, / Nature herself is awoken now with the ringing of weapons, / And high from aether unto abyss below / According to steady law, as before, begotten from holy Chaos, / Inspiration fills itself anew, / The all-creative once more.]

Heidegger's interpretation of this stanza reads "inspiration" as pertaining to a spirit, indeed, to spirit *per se*, as *Auseinandersetzung*, as *polemos*. In *Of Spirit*, Derrida writes, "To my knowledge, Heidegger never asked himself 'What is spirit?' At least, he never did so in the mode, or in the form, or with the developments that he grants to questions such as: 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' 'What is Being?' 'What is technology?' 'What is called thinking?' etc. . . . No more did he oppose spirit to nature, even dialectically, according to the most forceful and permanent of metaphysical demands" (*OS*, 14). But in this essay, even if Heidegger does not put this questioning in the customary form, he does answer the question of spirit: spirit is *polemos*. Most properly understood, spirit is the inspiration of the poet-thinker who enters into the turning, the *polemos*, between *Dasein* and Being. In this in-spiration, the poet-thinker grounds the founding of an other history and so of an other inception. Furthermore, not only is spirit not opposed to nature, spirit as in-spiration is the expression *of* nature (in both the subjective and objective sense of the genitive). Nature here is not objective reality, or a transcendent realm of eternal standards, but rather "holy Chaos" itself. Recall another passage from this essay previously examined: "But *khaos* means above all the yawning, the gaping cleft, the primally self-opening Open, wherein all is swallowed. . . . Thought in accord with 'nature' (*phusis*); chaos remains that gaping apart out of which the Open opens itself and by which this Open grants truth to each differentiated thing in a bounded presencing. Hence Hölderlin names 'chaos' and 'disorder' as 'holy'" (*EHD*, 62–63).

Rather than being the *opposite* of nature, understood as *phusis*, *khaos* is nature's counterpart, as Earth is to World in Heidegger, and concealment to truth as unconcealment, and *lēthē* to *a-lētheia*. Nature and Chaos belong together as "the holy," as the inspiration for the *polemos* of *Dasein* and Being in the *Kehre*. Nature as *phusis* constitutes Being as the opening up of a world of sense and meaning for *Dasein*, but this world always emerges from an earth that is a

khaos, an abyss, an *Ab-grund*, a not-ground. I have argued that for Heidegger, the founding and grounding of a world always takes places *upon* such an *ab-grundiger*, *un-grundiger Grund*: the khaos as a foundation that is at the same time an abyss. This grounding is not an act of the will, but rather an opening up to Chaos, a founding as arkhē-khaos, an “arkhaology.” The polemos transpires as this abysmal founding that remains open to its own dissolution and reconstruction, even as it establishes a world. Spirit in-spires this polemos as the *Auseinandersetzen* of a world in all the differentiations of the seams of its interweaving significance.

Clearly, here in 1939, Heidegger presents a nonmetaphysical interpretation of spirit: spirit holds sway as polemos-*Auseinandersetzung*. “Spirit is the unifying unity that allows the togetherness of everything real to appear in its collect- edness.” This reminds us of the polemos that is also a logos, a confrontation that assembles the world into the intelligible jointure of its signification and differentiation. But if we dare speak for Derrida, he might well object that even this spirit, understood as the engendering of the polemos, still endeavors to in- spire a *founding*. Does it not then still seek a metaphysical ground, a founda- tion, a principle on which to erect a stable interpretation? Does not the notion of such a founding feed into the valorization of the triad of poet, thinker, and statesman, who are exalted above the rabble, who exert their wills to found and create a new beginning of history and a new regime within such an epochal de- parture? Does this not contribute to Heidegger’s insistence on the foundational role of the German Volk in the grounding and salvation of history and so im- plicate his line of thinking in National Socialism?

But even in Derrida’s iterability, the structures of meaning must endure to some degree if intelligibility is to be possible at all; even for Derrida, polemos must also be logos. In this sense, iterability grounds the openness of the world for us. Even Derrida must admit that the trace must be posited, even if this positedness, this position, is never ultimately stable. Heidegger’s grounded abyss, his arkhē-khaos, in this sense *also* thinks what Derrida thinks with iter- ability. What is grounded in khaos, then, is not a *metaphysical* foundation. The abyssal ground subsists only as long as it retains its in-spiration as polemos. To adopt Derrida’s language here: the *founding* must endure as a deconstruction; it becomes a metaphysical *foundation* when it ceases to be both abyss and ground at one and the same time, when it ceases to engage in the polemos of its own *différance*. Furthermore, such an abysally grounded founding does not simply begin history anew, as if from some foundation created subjectively ex nihilo. Heidegger speaks of the *other inception* of history, never a *new begin-*

ning, and this other inception transpires in an Auseinandersetzung with the first inception; it does not transcend or overcome its own past. In this sense, Heidegger is close to Derrida and Vattimo and other postmodernists who insist that the notion of a radical break with metaphysics, an *overcoming* and so a new departure, is itself still a metaphysical aspiration. He and they have this in common: both call for *something* “new” to happen, some departure in our relation to the metaphysical tradition we inhabit, even while accepting that we cannot and should not try to purify ourselves of this past. Indeed, the polemos obtains only *as* an ongoing confrontation with the burden of the past; if it ceases, abyssal grounding lurches into metaphysical foundation-building. If deconstruction is justice, then so is polemos. After all, Heidegger agrees with Heraclitus that *dikē* is eris, that justice is strife.

Heidegger’s polemos may be said to differ from Derrida’s deconstruction in the rhythm and pace of its happening. For Heidegger, the West’s history is decisively punctuated by a first inception in the thinking of the Greeks. This history reaches a climax of nihilism, with the possibility of salvation in an other inception. But while Derrida accepts the history of the West as a history of metaphysics, he breaks the grand hermeneutic circle of the polemos between a first and an other inception: the Greeks simply do not serve as the pure origin of a historical trajectory. Western history itself is a trace, but a trace without Heidegger’s decisive heading. Here I agree with Derrida to a degree: Heidegger’s “nostalgia” for an absent origin of thinking among the Greeks leads him to think of the tradition as in some sense recuperable and open to a saving appropriation. But on this account, Heidegger’s Nazism is due less to voluntarism than to a kind of chauvinistic romanticism, one with deep roots leading back to Fichte and Winckelmann, if not beyond, and that confers upon the German Volk and the German language a special status in the unfolding of the “spirit” in history, in particular as a kind of response to the Greeks. It is this romance of history, as an affair “between” the Greeks and the Germans, far more than any lapse into voluntarism, that seduces Heidegger into the Nazi fold. Perhaps more than any other contemporary “phenomenologist,” Derrida has shown, by his writing, and writing in French, the absurdity of Heidegger’s claims for the unique “originariness” of the German language.

But let us not ignore to what extent Derrida *agrees* with Heidegger’s broad characterization of the history of Western thinking as ontotheology and metaphysics. While he cuts the head off this history by refusing Heidegger’s nostalgia for the Greeks, he goes along, as do Caputo and other postmodernists, with a key feature of this history’s trajectory: that it culminates in an epochal “clo-

sure.” The relation is similar to that of Marx on Hegel: Marx accepts a general notion of the sweep of history in a dialectic, but he differs from Hegel on the meaning and outcome of that dialectic. But we must always ask: Why accept this particular romance of history? It is simply far too homogenizing and tendentious, even if one takes into account the efforts of Derrida, Marlène Zarader, and Emmanuel Levinas to inject the “unthought” strand of the Jewish tradition into the story.<sup>36</sup> As Stanley Rosen has argued, it may well be a gross misreading of Plato to treat him as a metaphysician: all those who take Heidegger’s word for it miss the basic point that one need not see Socrates simply as Plato’s mouthpiece, and that the “metaphysics” at issue in Plato’s texts may plausibly be interpreted in a far more nuanced manner than Heidegger’s readings might suggest.<sup>37</sup> Of course, this is merely an assertion. I do not propose to engage in a detailed reinterpretation of Plato here. But Heidegger’s reading of Western history as a history of metaphysics may itself be long overdue for a “deconstruction,” as much as his “nostalgia” for the Greeks, and the romance of the history of the West as a history of ontotheology or metaphysics may itself be profoundly misleading.

#### NATIONALISM: IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

A crucial component to the romanticism of Heidegger’s political engagement is his valorization of the German Volk and its role in his account of the history of Being.<sup>38</sup> That this view amounts to a kind of metaphysical racism becomes all the clearer when one takes into account a 1929 letter on behalf of a student, Eduard Baumgarten,<sup>39</sup> which reads in part:

What I could say only indirectly in my report [on Baumgarten], I can say more clearly here: it has to do with nothing less than the reflection, which cannot be put off, that we stand before a choice, either again to provide genuine, indigenous [*bodenständige*] forces and educators for our *German* spiritual life or finally to surrender [that spiritual life] to the growing Jewification [*Verjudung*] in the broader and narrower sense. We will find the way back only if we are prepared, without excitation and fruitless confrontation, to help unfold fresh forces. . . . We are now experiencing the most beautiful fall days in our new house and I rejoice every day to have become more entwined with the homeland in my work.<sup>40</sup>

By the “broader and narrower” sense of *Verjudung*, Heidegger evidently means both that Jewish *persons* are infiltrating German spiritual life and that the Jewish *spirit* is polluting it. By the latter he presumably means a spirit of

Liberalism, modernism, and cosmopolitanism—vile things, evidently (and features of the Weimar Republic), to be contrasted with the beauty of the fall days at his home and the joys of a life's work “entwined” with the *Heimat*. *Verjudung* (Jewification) is an ugly word with a long and ugly history in German antisemitism.<sup>41</sup> In his treatment of “Volk and Race” in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler laments “how far the inner *Verjudung* of our Volk has already progressed.”<sup>42</sup> Even if Heidegger had not read *Mein Kampf*, he had clearly caught the drift of this brand of antisemitism, and here (even in Hitler's remark) we are again in the realm of *spiritual* and cultural influence, rather than *biological* racial doctrine. Heidegger employs a familiar *Blut und Boden* palette of organic imagery in this letter: Germany must choose between “indigenous” forces and a “growing” Jewification of German spiritual “life,” while he himself rejoices at growing intimately entwined [*verwachsen*], through his work, with the *Heimat*. But this physical, organic imagery depicts a *spiritual* crisis *and* promise. Germany's spirit is threatened by Jewification, a contamination that in turn must threaten what will become the core of Heidegger's own polemos, his “work” for the “homeland”: the preparation of a genuine (rather than a “fruitless”) *Auseinandersetzung* with the history of Being in both thinking and politics, a confrontation that itself prepares the way for a genuine renewal.

Here, then, I agree with Tom Rockmore that we cannot allow the absence of a biological racism in Heidegger to blind us to this strand of metaphysical racism in his nationalist thinking.<sup>43</sup> Derrida has something to teach us here, too: this kind of nostalgia for a pure origin (in this case, of history and thinking with the Greeks), and the longing for the *purification* of a Volk for the purpose of an authentic relation with this originary history, have profoundly dangerous implications, for a cleansing based on spiritual grounds may be no less terrible than one based on biologicistic racism.

But there is another aspect to Heidegger's nationalism, one not necessarily connected with his apocalyptic interpretation of the grand cycle of history. For Heidegger, we have seen, polemos may take place in and through various sites, or *topoi*. One of these, for example, is the *Auseinandersetzung* between two thinkers, such as, most famously, the one Heidegger engages in with Nietzsche. Through such a “specific” confrontation, the more “general” polemos between *Dasein* and Being takes place—and not in a metaphorical sense: it *takes*, it *has*, its place in the site of such an interpretative confrontation. This is why I put “specific” and “general” in quotation marks; the polemos is not simply the more abstract concept of a particular controversy but the very *possibility* of and the very *activity* of any interpretative confrontation. In this sense, again, it re-

semples Derrida's *différance*. Now, as I have interpreted the political writings of 1933–34, Heidegger argues that another site for the happening of the polemos is the confrontation between peoples. Apart from the question of the German Volk's role in the crisis of the history of Being, Heidegger's political impetus also seems to derive from a sense that a Volk, a historical people, can have an identity only in confrontation with other peoples. The confrontation need not be military; indeed, as we recall, he has no taste for imperialism, even as he calls for Germany's resignation from the League of Nations: "The will to a true community of the Volk holds itself as much aloof from an untenable, bondless reduction to world brotherhood as from a blind lust for domination" (*NH*, 149). Heidegger fears a *Durcheinandersetzung*, a promiscuous amalgamation and homogenization of peoples in which belonging to a particular place and tradition, and so also an *Auseinandersetzung* with one's own history, become impossible.

Heidegger abhors the universalism of Liberalism, for he thinks that a people's polemos with its own history requires a concomitant confrontation with another people as the Other, the foreign. Identity demands difference (logos and polemos are interdependent); otherwise, identity reduces to mere *indifference*. To risk speaking for Heidegger, the postmodernist refusal to take seriously the possibility of rank order makes genuine confrontation impossible, for it precludes the examination of rival ways of Being (including one's own) as better or worse. *Rank* need not apply only to the social hierarchies and elites that postmodernists deplore. It also pertains to the possibility of judging ways of life (including one's own!) as somehow deficient. Is not dismissing the supposedly Western narrative of logocentrism, racism, and totalitarianism in favor of, say, a non-Western or otherwise alternative narrative also a form of *ranking* with social and political consequences? A version of this problem arises in Caputo, who wants to affirm the equality of all narratives while at the same time holding that some stories (the open, tolerant, egalitarian ones) have more merit than others (the fascist, elitist, metaphysical ones). This seems to be a perennial tug of war for postmodernism: the desire to be finished with all absolutist criteria on the one hand against, on the other, the mission to oppose racism, tyranny, totalitarianism, and so forth. Because postmodernism cannot resolve the contradiction of its relativism and its missionary zeal, this paradox condemns the postmodernists to a kind of subterranean Liberalism: a universalism that cannot openly proclaim its criteria of rank as such, and that thereby obviates the possibility for genuine confrontation.

Granted, Heidegger's interpretation of a crisis in which such polemos may disappear in universalism derives from his grand narrative of the history of the

West as culminating in nihilism. But this call for identification through polemical differentiation may plausibly be uncoupled from Heidegger's history of Being and its tendentious trajectory. Also, as I have argued, Heidegger's understanding of the Self and identity does not depend on a notion of the Self as an essence or a substance. Instead, he quite clearly argues that the Self, as well as the Volk, can find their identity only by constantly risking (and ranking) that identity in polemos with the Other. Only in ongoing confrontation with the Other can the Self confront itself. At the level of an individual thinker, rather than of a people, we can see this in Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche.

Derrida quite clearly rejects nationalism and the appeal to the Self of a "people" as a Volk. The subtitle to his book on the *Specters of Marx* is *The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. In this work, Derrida responds to and takes responsibility for what he very positively "will still dare call the *spirit of Marx*" (*SM*, 53). Lest this embrace of "spirit" surprise us, recall that already in *Of Spirit*, Derrida refuses to engage in the exorcism and eradication of ghosts: as what returns, the ghost, the specter, *spirit* itself, must be acknowledged, mourned, and also embraced as both past *and* future. Aspects of this spirit of Marx that Derrida embraces include an insistence on the democratic (and unrealized), emancipatory promise of the Enlightenment (*SM*, 59, 75), a searing critique of capitalism and the triumphalism of existing liberal democracy (*SM*, 81–84), of the sort championed by Francis Fukuyama (in *The End of History and the Last Man*), and a commitment to struggle, but not through the agency of the party. Derrida also embraces a certain spirit of internationalism: not a Comintern, but rather what he calls the New International (partly in defiance of the triumphal "New World Order" trumpeted by the Bush administration after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War victory).

Derrida rejects Liberalism insofar as it establishes the domain of right as contained within the borders of national laws and national institutions, and yet he cleaves (as does Marx) to what can be identified as Liberalism's egalitarian, universalist, and "humanitarian" idealism. Derrida may well be right to impugn the historically liberal-democratic states for failing to live up to the "perfectibility" of institutions demanded by the idea of international right. The question must remain, however, whether Derrida's imprudent deconstructionist underminings of the foundations of justice in existing liberal regimes can serve the ends he so valiantly espouses here. Must the individual state and its institutions be deconstructed to make way for the New International? Shall we again abandon civil society, treating it as an aborted parody of genuine human social in-

tercourse? One hardly knows how Derrida's "spirit of Marx" will serve democracy in practice, but the mores and institutions, however imperfect, of the liberal-democratic regimes with which we are indeed acquainted, and that do exist and function to some extent, have served as our best defense heretofore against tyranny and fascism. Shall we give them up for a politics one of whose leading tenets is that we ought not to represent the future with any specificity?

The question of nationalism in Heidegger and Derrida turns on iterability, a "concept" which we have already discussed with respect to both the possibility of enduring meaning and the pathology of political founding. As Derrida makes clear in his afterword to *Limited Inc*, there can be no idealization, no formation of concepts, or sets, or groups, without iterability (the capacity of a "sign," a trace, to be registered as a mark that can be associated with either itself or others like it (*LI*, 119, 127)). A "people"—a Volk, a nation—is like any other marker or set: the phenomenological datum that we do indeed take cognition of persons, groups of persons, their history, and their culture as somehow *belonging* to a "nationality" (however aggressively we may then proceed to deconstruct such groupings), points to an iterability that makes such recognition possible. Iterability, then, is a kind of *Versammlung*, or logos. It enables the collectedness, within a single register, of separate entities in such a way that we may recognize them as sharing an identity. But Derrida insists on an important subtlety relating to his argument: "Let us not forget that 'iterability' does not signify simply . . . repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event. . . . There is no idealization without (identificatory) iterability; but for the same reason, for reasons of (altering) iterability, there is no idealization that keeps itself pure, safe from all contamination" (*LI*, 119).

Derrida warns his reader that the word "iterability" may deceive us: it governs not only the repeatability of the trace, but also the fact that in each instance ("the singularity of the event") in which the "identity" of the trace is recognizable, this trace generates itself anew, weaving new connotations in the con-text of intelligibility. Derrida's *iterability* resembles Heidegger's *inception*, which also does not simply repeat "the same" in the circular turning of the polemos. Iterability describes a trace that both identifies *and* alters in the movement of *différance*. Take a single word; for example, "run." Iterability allows us to understand the meaning of "run" from instance to instance over time, and so we can take cognizance of various things as falling within the set (the concept) of "running"—the dog runs, but there is also a run on the market, or a run in your stockings, or a run-on sentence. Are these others all just metaphors based



on the original concept of running as a form of locomotion? No: iterability means also that the *meaning* of the trace alters, even as it is registered in each new instance; it “is” these alterations as much as its “original” identity. Indeed, Derrida goes further: “There is no idealization that keeps itself pure, safe from all contamination”; no concept can trace itself back to a pure origin and so preserve itself from mutation. Language evolves; we cannot halt the polemos inherent in logos. Différance governs the iteration of the trace: there are no metaphors, only transformed usages, as meanings differ in temporal deferral.

The same could be said of peoples, or nations, as conceptual groupings. “The German” or “the French” or “the Chinese” describes no essential quality, no pure ideality free from contamination. And yet, the phenomenological datum remains that we understand *something* with these “signs,” even if this something is on the move in the différance of language. Iterability (if we expand on Derrida) does involve this moment of identity, as well as alteration, and in this he may come closer to Heidegger than we at first supposed. As I have argued, Heidegger understands the Volk, as he does the Self, not as a substance or an essence, but rather as something whose Being is at issue, as something that exists only insofar as it engages in a polemos concerning its own meaning. But this process cannot even begin without iterability’s self-identifying moment of recognition, for otherwise there would be no grouping to bring into question. Heidegger’s reading of Hölderlin’s poetry served as an attempt to engender this kind of confrontation with Germany’s own Being. For Heidegger, if the Self or the nation lapses into the longing for self-certainty, it has given up on this polemos with its own Being and so renounced its most proper calling. As such, this polemos of the historical Volk entails both the identificative *and* the transformative strands of Derrida’s iterability; again: “polemos and logos are the same.” Heidegger’s fear of Verjudung does, in my view, show that he was liable to the seduction of the pure, or—even more ominously—the purified, Volk. But Heidegger’s understanding of a “people” existing as and through the polemos with its own Being is not necessarily metaphysical, and since we *can* understand his political involvement in this way, I contend that we *should*, if only to recognize that the problem of fascism remains a problem.

The stakes may become clearer if we listen to John Caputo’s response to earlier reflections of mine on polemos.<sup>44</sup> In *Demythologizing Heidegger*, a work deeply indebted to Derrida, Caputo writes,

Fried is chiding postmodernists who advocate ‘difference’ by pointing out that Heidegger’s nationalism is such a philosophy of difference, i.e., of the right to the Ger-

man difference (or the French, American, etc.). But of course postmodernism wants to make the very idea of 'the German' (or 'the French,' etc.) tremble and to see in that nationalist right to be different a right to excommunicate and purify whatever is not the same (i.e., German or French, etc.). Postmodern difference is not nationalist difference but a multicultural, multilingual, multivaluing, miscegenated polymorphism; it makes the idea of a self-affirming identity tremble. Heidegger's Volk is anything but a postmodern philosophy of difference. Furthermore, and this is important, in its Levinasian version, postmodernism does not conceive the relationship with the other in terms of strife, but in terms of obligation, of the claim laid by the other on the same. [*DH*, 219, n. 14]

Caputo captures succinctly the concern that any form of nationalism may (perhaps *must*) involve an impulse to purification, to some equivalent of the antisemite's fear of Verjudung and so to the pathology of Entjudung—that is, the yearning to eliminate all that is “not the same.” But the question must arise, even for such a gentle vision of postmodern tolerance, How does the obligation “by the other on the same” get laid down as a claim without the distinguishing of the other and the same, without the identificatory moment of iterability? For postmodern difference to be “multicultural,” there must *be* multiple cultures, no matter how fleeting their iterations in the flux of *différance*.

This is a particularly pressing problem wherever particular groups have been singled out for oppression and cultural or physical obliteration. Must deconstruction condemn as metaphysical nationalism, for example, the efforts of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon to preserve their ways of life in the face of enormous contemporary pressures? Or consider the 1967 speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, “Where Do We Go from Here?” In it, he said, “First, we must massively *assert* our dignity and worth. We must stand up amidst a system that still oppresses us and develop an unassailable and majestic sense of values. . . . The tendency to ignore the Negro's contribution to American life and to strip him of his personhood is as old as the earliest history books and as contemporary as the morning's newspaper. To upset this cultural homicide, the Negro must rise up with an *affirmation* of his own Olympian manhood. Any movement for the Negro's freedom that overlooks this necessity is only waiting to be buried.”<sup>45</sup>

The point here is obviously not to lump Martin Luther King, Jr. (a true hero of liberalism in the grand style), in with the worst nationalists of our century, but rather to underline how complex the problem of identity can become. To exercise a claim, to obligate us to them, different cultures, different languages, different values must exist, and, furthermore, must be *asserted* in some way so

that they command our attention, and so lay claim to our responsibility to them. Even a “miscegenated polymorphism” implies a multiplicity of forms, and, as such, these forms must be distinct—*aus-einander-gesetzt*, to use the language of Heidegger’s polemos—even if they then miscegenate and so transform themselves in the play of *différance*. Caputo’s “miscegenated polymorphism” is in fact a contradiction: complete miscegenation would obliterate the multiplicity of forms. A degeneration into homogeneity, what Heidegger calls a *Durcheinandersetzung*, in contrast to *Auseinandersetzung*, is the death of multiplicity and difference. At best, it is liberal universalism covered over by the veneer of difference, demanding all the benefits of the liberal state’s protections without offering its institutions a principled defense.

This is not simply a question of championing the marginalized as a class in the way that Heidegger championed the Greco-Germans as the agents of the *Übergang* beyond metaphysics. The problem goes deeper than that. Every *re-mythologization* (to use Caputo’s language), every recovery of a repressed story and its attendant culture, constitutes an *in-ception*, however fleeting in the anarchic play and flux of a miscegenated polymorphism, and so constitutes an assertion of Self. Caputo’s discussion of the “jewgreek” (in which he draws on Derrida) provides an example of this problem; Caputo says that a jewgreek is, among other things, “everyone who is Abrahamic, driven from a native land”; but Caputo enlarges on this point, for the jewgreek is not just Abrahamic, but also, “over and beyond Abraham, everyone who is Ishmaelic, for Ishmael was disowned by Abraham and Sarah in the name of protecting the purity of their legitimate line. Jewgreek means Auschwitz, and every other name of ignominy and suffering, all the Auschwitizes, the victims of all Nazisms, wherever they are found, in South Africa or the South Bronx, in El Salvador or Northern Ireland or on the West Bank” (*DH*, 7).

The question must be raised, At what point does the defending of an Ishmael become the production, and the championing, of a new, another Abraham? Interpretation is polemical. To defend something *as* something, as someone or as some people, entails a form of self-assertion (or Other-assertion, for those who take up the cause of the oppressed beyond the borders of their own identity). It entails a claim to “a native land” (such as Ireland or Palestine in the passage above), whether actual or metaphorical, that constitutes an identity. Do the sufferings of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza lose legitimizing power proportionally as the Palestinians come closer to their dream of a national state? Are the oppressed condemned to take on the structural role of “all Nazisms” as soon as their oppression begins to lift, once they have sighted that

“native land,” or their “promised land” of Canaan, that will give them the power of inclusion and exclusion, of protecting “the purity of their native line”? If so, then to defend the oppressed, to offer the dream of a promised land, to assert the identity of any group, is to doom that people to a fascism all its own. In that case, a postmodern politics of the marginal would amount to a kind of (unwitting) sadism, legitimizing and delegitimizing the oppressed at one and the same time. Caputo writes: “It is not too much to say that the whole point . . . of deconstruction is to argue against the possibility of making clean distinctions, of establishing rigid borders and neat margins” (*DH*, 209). Very well; but to defend the marginalized, they must first be *identified*, and so *asserted*, as different entities, however briefly this defense will last in the face of further deconstructive contaminations of such identity.

The core of Caputo’s ethical and political argument against Heidegger is that by the time he had involved himself with the Nazis and inebriated himself with the myth of Being, Heidegger had failed to carry through on the promise of his thinking about a-lêtheia. He therefore failed to grasp the obligation that the Other lays upon us, and so he capitulated all too easily to the brutality and ruthlessness of a bigoted, self-obsessed fascism, and even after the war, he failed to own up to the atrocity of the Nazi exterminations (*DH*, 72–73). But Caputo’s (and postmodernists’ in general) deconstructive remythologization of Heidegger simply recapitulates Heidegger’s own insistence that Dasein must constantly engage in a vigilant polemos of inceptions, not only as a function of the ontological structure of its own temporal existence, but also as the avenue for a *Verwindung* of metaphysics. Caputo does not abjure the hope for such a *Verwindung* or the hope for a new inception for justice, however “contaminated” this “other” inception might be by the first. But even for Heidegger, the obligation to engage in the enduring polemos can be understood as responding to what postmodernists call the contamination of all origins. The polemos is always already called for because no inception, whether “first” or “other,” is ever pure or complete enough to serve as the final, secure ground for politics, thereby disburdening us of the polemos. Such a *terminal* inception would remain a *modern* goal. Heidegger’s polemos of inceptions is neither a closed circle nor a pseudo-Hegelian dialectic: it neither blindly repeats the Origin nor arrives at a final logos or teleological synthesis. We recall: “polemos and logos are the same.”

Heidegger seeks a manner of thinking about Being, a way of thinking a-lêtheia, that the Greek “inception” intimates but never actually engaged in. Postmodernism tries to conceive the end of modernity and its horrors, yet in a

way that does not renew this horror in new guises. Both modes of thought may be understood as a polemos between a first and an other inception, where neither inception is pristine or fully present, but both rather are always already polemically at issue in the attempt to unlock possibilities covered over in, and *as*, the past. Postmodernism blinds itself to a kinship with Heidegger here because of what Gregory Smith has so aptly described as the “contest of non-metaphysical one-upmanship with Heidegger.”<sup>46</sup> The postmodernist search for an “other” Heidegger through a deconstruction of the “old” Heidegger mirrors the “other inception” that Heidegger sought through a polemos with the “first”; in both cases, thought endeavors to forge a future through confrontation with a past that was never fully instantiated in the merely factual bygones of history. So, for example, Caputo asks: “How to demythologize Heidegger? Would that not involve starting all over again, going back to where he himself started, to the prephilosophical sources from which he hoped to give philosophy a new start, to try it again—this time with heart?” (*DH*, 214). But there is no great difference between, on the one hand, this language of “starting all over again,” of “going back” to the “sources” in order to make “a new start” and, on the other, Heidegger’s talk of engaging in a confrontation with the “first” inception. Of course, the first inception deals with the “source” of Western history, and Caputo’s proposes to recommence from the “source,” the compassionate heart, of philosophy in Dasein’s genuinely situated, fleshly facticity. But each of these attempts points to the structural feature of Dasein’s *Ex-(s)istenz*, that is, to the polemos with inception. The postmodernist efforts to achieve a *Verwindung* of both Heidegger and metaphysics only demonstrate the ontological point that the polemical decon- and reconstruction of inceptions is itself a structural feature of Dasein’s temporality in the *Kehre* of its confrontation with Being.

Heidegger does hypervalorize the Greeks and the Germans. He ignores the compassion inherent in human existence. But Heideggerian postmodernists miss the matter for thought in his political engagement by focusing on the Grand Myth of the Great Beginning and Heidegger’s sentimental obsession with the Greco-Germans. *Of course* Heidegger framed his option for Nazism in terms of an exclusively German mission to “save” Being in accord with its Greek origins. And yet postmodernist readings repeat Heidegger’s monomythologizing in this crucial respect: they presume a unitary source for *his* politics. I have tried to show that this politics has multiple roots and is far more “contaminated” than the attempt to construct a postmetaphysical politics by

quarantining the “bad” from the “good” than Heidegger might lead us to believe.

While Heidegger hypervalorizes the Greco-Germans as the historical sites of inception and renewal, postmodernists put enormous faith in the wretched of the earth for the revolutionary *Verwindung* of Western metaphysics and totalizing politics. But what happens when the jewgreek begins to emerge from wretchedness, begins to succeed in a new inception? Surely we cannot deny the oppressed their aspiration to come into their own, but if coming into one’s own means forfeiting all claims to the sympathy of a postmodernist politics, we must wonder whether such politics has much to offer the wretched. Do the postmodernists abandon their wards as soon as they have no further need of sanctuary? Does a postmodernist politics depend on the enduring presence of the wretched as the engine for an endless uprising against the powers that be? That would account for the prevalence of the *deconstructive* moment in postmodernist political critique. But surely *remythologization* requires a heart, a *kardia* as Caputo would put it, a responsibility to justice, as Derrida would have it, for the jewgreek: the envisioning of an inception in which the wretched would be emancipated from their oppression, their isolation, their humiliation. Postmodernism seems oddly unwilling to engage in this *constructive* moment of the polemos. I suspect it is because postmodernists fear the burden and the responsibility of the constructive moment of founding; they fear becoming the *princeps* themselves, of lusting after metaphysical authority and the *arkhē*. But then deconstruction descends into mere adolescent rebelliousness, and the great danger here is that the jewgreek wards whom the postmodernist now defends will learn only the destructive moment of postmodernist politics, and that when they do begin to come into their own, they will become exactly what the postmodernist hates most: oppressors in love with their own identity. But not all founding must be metaphysical or unjust. As to the argument that deconstruction is necessarily an ongoing process, a permanent revolution, one can respond: so too is *reconstruction*. A responsible founding requires continual refounding as part of the polemos. The American struggles against the slavery, racism, and sexism present in its own history might serve as a model for such polemically reconstructive refounding. A mature polemical politics must be able to descry and preserve those institutions and governments which can best defend against oppression and cultivate freedom, while leading the oppressed to a liberty that does not itself require as the price of liberation that they either join or replace their oppressors. A reconstructive founding might then

constitute the fulfillment of a justice that we should never assume has been made perfectly actual.

In my view, at issue in Heidegger's politics is much more the moment of self-assertion than Heidegger's grand myth—which Derrida, Caputo, and other postmodernists seek to demythologize—of the Greco-German axis as the heroic locus of thinking in the stand against nihilism. The matter for thought in Heidegger's fascism is not the peculiarities of German National Socialism or even Heidegger's own romantic mythologizations, but rather the question of inceptive self-assertion that, I submit, remains a problem for postmodernist *remythologizings*. The difference between Heidegger and postmodernism then becomes the difference between one grand and self-important self-assertion and multiple, supposedly modest and tolerant self-assertions.<sup>47</sup> In the midst of ontological relativism, this difference between Heidegger and postmodernism may be much narrower than one might hope, and it may well dissolve entirely in the victory of a “real” postmodern politics.

#### WE GOOD POSTMODERNISTS

What distinguishes the postmodernists, at their best, from Heidegger's repugnant politics is their compassion and egalitarianism. But such democratic sensibilities are themselves all too modern and “liberal” (in the sense of the emancipatory, rights-based tradition of liberal democracy). Despite the distance such postmodernists might wish to put between themselves and Richard Rorty, they also ultimately cleave to what he embraces as “postmodernist bourgeois liberalism.”<sup>48</sup> Will these ghosts and shadows of liberal scruples have any place in a postmodernity made actual? Despite the ontological tolerance emphasized by contemporary postmodernists, we have good reason to doubt that such tolerance will endure in an era of postmodernity made actual, when liberalism and its restraints have been cast off as so much metaphysical dross. The matter for thought in fascism remains at issue. For the moment, under the aegis of liberal institutions, championing “difference” looks like pluralistic tolerance and openness to the Other; but once liberalism has been thoroughly discredited (as it was in Weimar Germany), what will prevent this multiplicity from degenerating into the valorization of identity and the oppressive fear of difference that our good postmodernists so rightly abhor? Surely it is naïve in the extreme to believe that once “metaphysics” has been dealt with, bigoted tribalism will be a thing of the past, as if racism and the like were simply functions of Western logocentrism. Of course, some will again argue that we shall never “get over”

metaphysics, and that therefore what is called for is a version of permanent revolution against Western liberal thinking, institutions, and history. I shall be old-fashioned: it is only human nature to succumb to the allure of exclusionary belonging, and prudence requires that we attempt to prevent the dissolution of liberalism, our best defense against such atavism.

Some postmodernists might well respond that postmodernity, like the specter of Marx's revolutionary communism, is already overtaking us, no matter what misgivings anyone might have about it; it is simply an error of metaphysical subjectivism to believe that it is up to us either to bring on or to prevent the postmodern era. But although the postmodernists repudiate teleology, the objection itself is based on their tacit acceptance of the monoteleology of Heidegger's reading of the history of Being; their assumption remains that, whatever its "origins," history took a decisive turn into metaphysics with Plato and must now reap the crisis of this turn in a *Verwindung* of its destiny. To acknowledge that obligation to Heidegger's *Seinsgeschichte* is to pay too high a price, for a postmodern politics, once realized, will not deliver us from our trespasses; it will in fact only exacerbate them. Polemos and logos will become "the same" only in the sense of a perpetual war of Us against Them, for in a world devoid of even the possibility of an appeal to a transcendent universalism, the logos that impels each sense of identity and belonging must entail a concomitant polemos of radical differentiation. Far from merely freeing up the Other to be Other, the closure of Liberalism, in Heidegger's broad sense, will spell the end of all mediation between Self and Other and dash the hopes of both Heidegger and the postmodernists.

Furthermore, the assertion that postmodern difference "makes the idea of a self-affirming identity tremble" (*DH*, 219, n. 14) does not ultimately differ from Heidegger's call for a polemos with the trajectory of one's own history, both individual and communal, a confrontation both with the Self and with the Other. For Heidegger, self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*) does not (or at least should not) involve the aggressive insistence upon a Self as an ontic essence or absolute substance. Rather, self-assertion means both recognizing the moment of iterability that grants identity and engaging in an ongoing polemos with that identity and its interminable alterations. This polemos, finally, is not petulant, contentious strife with the Other but rather, quite decisively, *the* call of responsibility: Being, in the turning with Dasein, calls for the polemos with one's Self and with the Other as coextensive moments in the same event. In "Psyche: Invention of the Other," Derrida says, "One does not make the Other come, one lets it come by preparing for its coming."<sup>49</sup> The same can be said of



Heidegger's Self as something futural and at issue, as well as for his Other, and also for his "other inception" to history: the polemos frees us for the coming of the Other (both as the Self and as the Guest or Stranger), but it cannot produce this arrival.

Finally, Heidegger's attraction to Nazism clearly has something to do with his romanticization of the creative activity of a rare few, the poet, the thinker, and the statesman, who engender the polemos with Being and so serve as conduits for the in-spiration of a given historical world. Let us first recall that these few conduct, not only in that they may well be leaders who found a world in an abyssal grounding, but also in that they conduct, in the sense of being the medium for a galvanizing, electrical charge: they are *used* by Being as the site of the polemos and more than likely used *up* and destroyed. Furthermore, this conductive Führung, as depicted in the rectoral address, explicitly involves a polemos (in this case, Kampf) with those who follow, not blind obedience. Derrida and other postmodernist thinkers place great emphasis on the irruption of the will described in the address, in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and in other writings of the rectoral period. My claim is that Heidegger's fascism can be understood without this voluntarism. I do not claim that his involvement *must* be read this way, but rather that this interpretation makes Heidegger's involvement all the more a *question* because it does not simply reduce it to a kind of metaphysical backsliding. Too much is made of Heidegger's infatuation with Nietzsche at the moment of his political engagement, an engagement that began earlier and lasted longer than his *Rektorat* or a temporary adoption of a Nietzschean, voluntarist language.<sup>50</sup> Behind this language lies a question about the activity of those who engage in the polemos. As I have tried to argue, this must remain a question for Derrida with regard to deconstruction, too: Do we engage it, or does it engage us? As with the polemos, the answer is, both: it is a turning (*Kehrung*) that takes us both beyond subjectivism as willed activity and beyond passivity as the mere reception of an objective Being. To this extent, the "activity" of engaging in the polemos is as "willful" as (or, conversely, no more willful than) engaging in deconstruction.

As for the elitism implicit in Heidegger's tragic heroes in the creative polemos, Derrida also finds himself facing a difficulty: Who precisely can engage in deconstruction? Who is capable of wielding Nietzsche's hammer? If deconstruction is a kind of overcoming of metaphysics that nevertheless is not an overcoming (that is, it should be a *Verwindung*) and thus demands understanding of ontotheology and the history of metaphysics in some detail (if the critique is not simply to repeat all the unexamined presuppositions of that his-

tory), then we must admit that the procedure is hardly accessible to large numbers of people. Derrida seems acutely aware of this problem. When asked in an interview if his books are perhaps too difficult to read, Derrida points out that the question of this effort at understanding is something that “all scientific researchers have to confront. . . . So why is the question asked only of philosophers?” (PH, 187). But given that Derrida portrays deconstruction as a friend of democracy, it would not seem misplaced to question the *public* accessibility and effect of deconstruction. Unless, that is, one agrees with Heidegger that “the public” is always necessarily the domain of distortion, shallowness, and inauthenticity; but then deconstruction too becomes the prerogative of the heroic few, and the genuine domain of freedom will lie forever beyond the access of a democratic society.

Since Derrida styles himself a Nietzschean, at least with respect to the conflict of forces at work in interpretation and the dissemination of meaning, let us consider a passage from section 39 of Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil*: “Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree. Indeed, it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the ‘truth’ one could still barely endure—or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would *require* it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified.” For Nietzsche, the “truth” that the world as a whole is a chaos, that it provides us with no ground, is terrifying. Precisely this terror establishes the rank order among human beings: most cannot endure this vision; they cling to the noble (or ignoble) lies of structured permanence. But the free spirits and the philosophers of the future win their freedom precisely *through* and *in* this terror. So it is with Heidegger’s “few,” those who dare the violent leap into chaos and the terror of *to deinon* in the polemos with Being. For Heidegger, as for Nietzsche, democracy and egalitarianism are the most advanced expression of metaphysics and nihilism.

Derrida seems to assume that deconstruction is capable of emancipating us all for the leap without fear into the abyss, and this assumption is what reveals his unwilling, lingering liberalism, and that of most postmodernists. But these are liberals who are bent on cutting their own legs out from under themselves, since their methods and thinking undermine the principles on which liberalism has stood heretofore. “God is dead; but given the way of men,” writes Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* (§108), “there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.”<sup>51</sup> The pallid liberalism of postmodernists is born of such a shadow. But the confident postmodernist condemns

Nietzsche and Heidegger—who persisted in treating the absence of foundation as a terrible loss *as well as* a rapturous liberation, rather than as liberation *tout court*—as guilty of a nostalgia, unable to live with the most radical consequences of their own thinking. According to this account, the apocalyptic embrace of the terrible, the sense of tragic loss, as well as the hysterically reactive politics that these attitudes precipitate, derive simply from the lingering shadows of the dead ontotheology that Heidegger and Nietzsche fail to avoid, despite their own revolutionary work. Postmodernists can read reactionary politics in general as a desperate (and for that reason, all the more dangerous) “last stand” against the *Verwindung* of metaphysics.

But if Derrida is wrong, and most people will indeed always crave the lie of foundation (if it is indeed a lie, and let us not be too quick to concede this), then the ill-considered dissemination of deconstructionist ideas will only precipitate the reactionary political response it fears most. Derrida cannot treat the careless and even willful misunderstanding of his work in the academy and the popular media as simply accidental, or even as an informal conspiracy of the powers that be to silence him. The resistance may instead tell us something about the limits to deconstruction’s potential popularization. Derrida himself insists that the conflict in the field of forces over interpretation is never really *personal*—it is not about authors or readers or about rules to constrain the interpretative behavior of either, but rather about the “nature” of the field itself: the text and its frayings, rewavings, and tearings. And maybe it is not simply a matter of interpretation and good judgment. Did fascism arise in Germany and the rest of the world as the final, logical expression of the West’s true history (as capitalism, metaphysics, phallogocentrism arose), or did fascism win its temporary (albeit entirely repeatable) victory because liberals forgot how to defend the historical meaning of their Liberalism? If they are at all persuaded of the latter, then postmodernists ought to recognize their own hidden liberalism and work to defend liberal institutions and principles, even as they work on their “deconstructions” of our flaws in order to *build toward* (to *pre-construct*, perhaps) what even Derrida calls *perfectibility*.

What kind of political guidance does Derrida offer us, then? Perhaps no guidance at all, and that is part of the point, if by guidance we mean some kind of foundation for the calculation of correct, or even prudent, action. “I would say that deconstruction loses nothing by admitting that it [that is, deconstruction itself] is impossible. . . . For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches.”<sup>52</sup> No institution with its proce-

dures, therefore, can properly instantiate justice. For Derrida, deconstruction's affirmative activity opens us up to what is to come, but not by presenting us with rules for producing the future as a particular outcome of a determinate teleology. This is what he means by the "messianic without messianism" in *Specters of Marx* (*SM*, 65); it is deconstruction holding open the structural promise of a future that is simply "unpresentable": "Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today" (*SM*, 59). Slavoj Žižek cites this same passage and asks: "Notwithstanding all denials, does not Derrida follow here the Kantian logic of the regulative Idea?"<sup>53</sup>

Žižek is right: Derrida's infinite polemos still struggles in the light of an ideal, even if this ideal does not have the totalizing, systematic content of a Kantian Idea or the Marxist historical telos. Derrida's Kantianism is particularly evident in an interview for a 1995 anthology, in which he discusses the distortions to which his work is subjected by academics and journalists who refuse to read him conscientiously:

I insist on these two motifs, *the public space* and the *principle of reason*, as I have often done. The media and academia have the duty to respect, as their condition, and the right on which they are founded, the principle of reason and the spirit of Enlightenment . . . their *public* destination, as Kant used to say, their belonging to the public sphere where one is required to give one's reasons, to justify one's discourse, to present an argument, and so on. [WIP, 427]

Such behavior [refusal to read, distortion, simplification, and so forth] breaks the implicit social contract that founds the press and publishing, the freedom of the press, the right to information, but also the possibility of a *democratic* education, teaching and academic research. . . . Of course, we know that what we are talking about here is something like an infinite task or a regulating idea. [WIP, 430]

To witness Derrida appealing to the *foundation* of a social contract, tacit or otherwise, is extraordinary. Even when it is a question of deconstruction, we find that there are rules for the progress of a responsible and accurate discourse. Furthermore, these rules are explicit and determinate enough to serve as the content of a Kantian regulating idea! So much for logocentrism.

Derrida's defensiveness here betrays a crypto-liberalism, or at least a *reliance* on the protection of liberal principles and institutions, as well as on liberal civil society's tolerance of radical dissent, which allows the postmodernist to carry on. But in the absence of the transcendental signified, we must wonder whether Derrida's preference for the Enlightenment, emancipation, and democracy is any less arbitrary and dogmatic than, say, Nietzsche's preference for rank order and the joy of conquest. And Nietzsche accounts for his hostility to democracy precisely by positing the death of God, or to use postmodern language, the death of the transcendental signified. Heidegger and Nietzsche are simply more relentlessly consistent than the postmodernists. Derrida clearly demonstrates his idealism, his egalitarianism, and his refusal to be "merely" negative or destructive in his affirmative advocacy of a "democracy-to-come." But because this "democracy" must be understood in reference to the temporal character of *différance*, it can never be *present*, or *actual*, but must always be *deferred* to "l'à-venir"; *present* civil society and institutions cannot be the locus for such democracy. Despite Derrida's recent, rather ironical statement that "I am a very conservative person,"<sup>54</sup> this eternal deferral of justice to l'à-venir means that deconstructionists must view existing institutions with unyielding suspicion as a betrayal of the unrepresentable future (cf. FL, 46). Even if a postmodernist appeals to these institutions for protection, he or she can do nothing in return to protect them against assault (except to throw them the bone of strategic alliance), because their "foundations" lie in metaphysics and logocentrism. Like Heidegger before him, Derrida (and here we can safely generalize to postmodernism in general) ends up thoroughly undermining liberal institutions and civil society as the proper sphere of politics, whether his denigration is aimed at the inauthenticity of "the public" or the smug self-satisfaction of logocentric institutions.

This is a serious flaw in what I have called the postmodernist problematizing approach to Heidegger's politics. In treating his political episode as the effect of a kind of backsliding into metaphysical subjectivism and assertion of the will, while at the same time seeking to retain broad features of his history of the West, postmodernists are forced in a very particular political direction, more precisely, into a decidedly *apolitical* politics. For in order to avoid a similar contamination by subjectivism and the will, they eschew what we ordinarily think of as political action in the public sphere, within political institutions, appealing instead to an unrepresentable future. Here I do not include as truly political the various acts of protest against injustice, for postmodernists tend deliberately to participate in such protest outside and on the margins of existing

institutions. Such acts of protest are more in the tradition of prophetic indictment than of genuine politics; the prophet confronts the king in the name of justice, but avoids the defilement risked when one actually works within existing institutions to institute justice. In all this the postmodernists follow a certain interpretation of the later, properly chastened Heidegger's talk of "letting-be." This quasi-religious, "messianic" politics effectively gives up on politics, which has the effect of weakening institutions and civil society while ceding the truly political sphere to those who will most abuse it.

The deconstructionist is always hammering away at existing institutions, even those which sustain, to the extent that they can, intellectual and political freedom. Without a doubt, liberal governments have failed, and continue to fail, to uphold their principles. Moreover, they will surely fail in the future. Can any sensible observer of human affairs expect more—that is to say, expect that citizens and societies will be free of hypocrisy, weakness, and failure? But acknowledging in principle that contradictions will persist does not mean accepting them in practice. For this very reason, liberal governments will stand in need of principled critique and *reconstruction*. But are the postmodernists so sure of the stability of our institutions that they believe that they can relentlessly chip away at them without contributing to an eventual collapse that could sweep all of us up in the worst of tyrannical catastrophes? Before it is too late, perhaps we should consider putting Nietzsche's hammer down.

## Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

I' son un che discendo . . .

—Dante, *Inferno*, canto 29

We have come a long way with Heidegger, traversing, as the title of one of Derrida's interviews has it, "The Philosophers' Hell." But if our confrontation with Heidegger, our polemos with his thinking, has been at all successful, it remains incomplete. If my argument about the hermeneutics of polemos is correct—that to escape merely nihilistic destructiveness, interpretation must embrace *reconstruction* as well as deconstruction—then we have arrived only at the half-way point. At stake, in the end, is the Being of our politics. But so far, this project has been mainly critical. The moment of reconstruction would come in wedding the positive to the negative in the polemos with Heidegger. I shall confine myself here to suggesting what direction such a project might take.

This study began with a plea for a certain generosity from the reader: if the reader does not grant, even provisionally, that some value is to be derived from the pursuit of ontology as Heidegger under-

stands it (that is, from an inquiry into what it means to be), then the study of his political thinking can serve at best only as an exercise in intellectual history. Such an exercise may satisfy some, but to engage in the continuing polemos we would have to take seriously how the question of Being affects us as political animals. We have seen that the manner in which Heidegger responded to the question of Being led him into the Nazi fold. But the question of Being is not Heidegger's private intellectual property, and he would have been the last to claim that it was. I have argued that Heidegger was by no means accidentally a Nazi, but it does not necessarily follow that all inquiry into Being must necessarily lead us down his path. Our confrontation with the postmodernist readings of Heidegger serves to illustrate, however, just how difficult it can be for even the best-intentioned travelers to shake the dust of Heidegger's politics from their shoes when following in his footsteps. Nevertheless, the experience of the twentieth century teaches that we cannot avoid the darker paths of thought and history simply by wishing to do so or by hoping that what afflicts others will not affect us. Like Dante, if we are to transcend what we have been, we must descend, traversing a past that might well be our future.

Postmodernists in general deserve credit for taking seriously the darkest episodes of this century's history and politics. Postmodernist critics are willing to descend into the Hell of our history, but they do not find, and they do not seek, a Virgil to guide them through and beyond it, because they regard the enterprise of overcoming or transcending history as just another metaphysical trap. For this reason, they turn to the Heideggerian model of a *Verwindung* rather than an *Überwindung*: a recovery that does not overcome its affliction. The postmodernists' Heideggerian *Verwindung* of the metaphysical and institutional foundations of modern politics resembles the Marxist withering away of the state: in both cases, it is not clear what will follow. A kind of communal anarchy, to be sure, but we are not allowed any glimpse of what the new institutions will look like (if there are to be any at all). And this lack of foresight is condoned and even prescribed! Only in a politics grounded in metaphysics is it expected that life will be regulated by institutions, by principles, and by rules that are laid out in advance and that predetermine the response to the radical indeterminacy of the future.

But postmodernist contempt for institutions and planning offers little defense against the forms of politics it fears most. Must we then appeal to that old-fashioned notion of human nature to make a simple point about political prudence?—most human beings crave some kind of foundation, and when deprived of such grounding, they will turn to any authority making some plausi-



ble promise of stability. The postmodernists' rejoinder that anarchy is not the same as chaotic anarchy offers little to go on, since antifoundationalism "in principle" not only undermines all posited institutions but also refuses to lay plans for new ones. Civil society, too, then, as a mediator between the individual and the institutions of the state, must submit to deconstruction, for all its forms of sociality (family, religious organizations, trade associations, and so forth) are saturated with logocentric presumptions.

Richard Rorty's Americanization of postmodernism offers no way out. His "postmodern bourgeois liberalism" boils down to a kind of postmodernist Burkeanism: we are nice, tolerant liberals, not because there are principles that instruct us to be, but because such political liberalism is our tradition. For the most part, we Americans (or, perhaps, we Westerners) cannot be other than this (barring severe historical upheavals), and we *expect* this liberalism of our government, just as Burke's compatriots expected the rights of Englishmen to be honored by the crown—but as the rights of *Englishmen*, not as the universal rights of human beings. For Rorty, to seek a foundation for our liberalism is misguided, for the foundation, as such, must fail, and its failure will serve only to discredit the conventions that we hold dear. We ought not to dissect the goose that lays the golden eggs just to learn why she can do it, for her ability is just as inexplicable, just as "magical," as our adherence to one tradition rather than to another. Both are simply given. So we should relax and enjoy what we have while striving to improve it.

But we cannot just relax. To the extent that Enlightenment ideals of freedom and right have found expression in liberal institutions and civil society, it seems clear that these both, as well as the principles that underlie them, are now under stress.<sup>1</sup> Nor can institutions and civil society be shored up simply by *insistence* on the foundations (whether in the mode of Rorty's ironic traditionalism or of an absolutist faith in the "original intent" of the "Founding Fathers"), as if the principles of liberal, democratic societies and governments were given by divine revelation and therefore not subject to question. In a very broad sense, postmodernists are right: we must remain free to inquire into (to "deconstruct") our founding principles; the principles will not simply stay put. If polemos means both an ongoing need for and a persistent openness to interpretation and questioning, then freedom demands polemos—and the polemos demands freedom. But of course, the decisive issue here is whether a vigorous, democratic openness to questioning can be reconciled with "deconstruction," or whether deconstruction necessarily and catastrophically undermines the principles, civil society, and institutions of the liberal state without offering

anything in their place that would uphold justice. Any society with a history has its share of sins and contradictions. It is easy and, with the allure of a kind of adolescent freedom, also seductive to undermine authority because of such evident hypocrisies; far more difficult is the responsibility for a constructive criticism that would discern, beyond the faults of a tradition, whatever enduring historical truth it might both draw upon and attain. If a tradition is unable to sustain such a productive and progressive reconstruction, then perhaps a genuine revolution is called for, but even a revolution must construct a future by using the materials of the past it has torn down. Postmodernism shows no taste for this because it loathes the responsibility of constructive authority.

In politics, as in interpretation, *reconstruction* must accompany *deconstruction*. Postmodernists pay virtually no heed to the need for an Aristotelian practical wisdom with respect to the domain of everyday politics: the life of civil society and governmental institutions. To avoid the descent into tyranny that follows upon anarchy, the necessary questioning of principles and institutions must always be conjoined with a refounding and rebuilding. In the ongoing confrontation with Heidegger we must ask to what extent *polemos* can serve, rather than undermine, liberalism. Surely Heidegger and the postmodernists intimate a real danger: that at “the end of history,” as Francis Fukuyama has dubbed our epoch following the collapse of Soviet Communism, global capitalism will exercise a quiet despotism of markets and marketing that will effectively obliterate the public sphere as the genuine domain of the political. And it may do so more completely than any blatantly totalitarian dictatorship, for we seem so ready to accede to the anesthetization of consumerism and entertainment. But if liberalism presents the best hope for freedom (and here one must depart substantially from the assessment of Heidegger and many postmodernists), perhaps it can best secure its faltering legitimacy through an appropriation of *polemos*. Or perhaps we may discover that *polemos* is already the hidden strength of liberalism. The trick, of course, is to unite freedom with security, questioning with confidence, and revolution with foundation. One would have to show that the broad principles underlying liberalism (such as the balance of power, representative democracy, constitutionalism, “natural” rights, an independent civil society, and so on) can support and even spur a polemical freedom. This turns on a question raised before: Must any inquiry into Being result in a politics inimical to liberalism?

The answer to such a question must encompass a response to the accusation that liberalism necessarily constitutes just one more “totalitarian” metaphysical system. This is an enormous topic, but the key to this condemnation seems to

be that liberalism, despite its pretensions to open-mindedness and freedom, in fact rests on metaphysical principles that seek to bring the world to heel. Surely Heidegger is right to warn us that the ready reduction of a “We the people” to a mass society is a transformation natural to modernity born of metaphysics; mass society, with its propagandistic manipulations by polls and marketing, does indeed threaten the claim of liberalism to uphold civil society as a vital locus for politics. But the political practice of those I would style the liberal heroes of the twentieth century, people such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi, points the way to another vision of liberalism, one that can confront the meaning of its principles and challenge the adequacy of its institutions without descending into nihilistic relativism, rank consumerism, or tyrant-breeding anarchy. Their political practice, for example, in challenging racist laws (with respect to governmental institutions) and social mores (with respect to civil society) succeeded to the extent that this practice simultaneously both deconstructed *and reconstructed* principles, institutions, and civil society. I do not mean to argue that the work they sustained has been completed, for it has not, but the *possibility* of progress and of a genuinely *political* politics is what is here at issue. They could do this only on the strength of an explicit and specific “preconstruction” of a possible future as a projection of the truth of principles instantiated in new laws and new mores.

The American experience is particularly telling on this point. The moral strength of the regime stands on treating its founding as an *inception* in Heidegger’s sense: that is, not as a sacrosanct “foundation” revealed by the “original intent” of its framers (who, after all, owned slaves while proclaiming that “all Men are created equal” with the right to “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”), but rather as an occasion for an ongoing polemos over the meaning of this government and society. As opposed to a *foundation* to which we must cling in desperate opposition to all questioning and destabilization, the *found-ing* “is” not a past “back there,” but rather decisively *present* as the avenue through which we must confront the future. King could prevail to the extent that he *confronted* the people and the institutions of the United States with an interpretation of the principles of the regime itself, the ideal truth of its underlying historical trajectory, not the actual, historic intentions of its particular, human founders (however well their thought may serve us for thinking through what is *at issue* in the founding). As important as the founders may be, the regime itself has an “intent,” a historical meaning, and trajectory that demand our ongoing, polemical interpretation. The origin retains strength only as *originary* in Reiner Schürmann’s sense, that is, as a source for an ongoing,

productive polemos with the meaning and implementation of founding principles—not as a tyrannical touchstone for communion with the presumably authoritative authors of the past. The founding dies when it becomes fiat or writ; the trajectory loses its momentum and falls flat. But these considerations only hint at the discussion we must begin concerning a liberal politics of reconstructive deconstruction.

In the introduction to this study, I indicated that for Heidegger polemos might be understood as an ethic for the interpretation of authors and texts: “Auseinandersetzung does not express itself in polemic but rather in the manner of *interpretative construction*, of the setting in place of the antagonist in his highest power and dangerousness” (*GA 43*, 279). The social and political practice of Gandhi and King suggests how this *constructive* moment of polemical interpretation might apply more broadly. Both understood that decisive moral and political crises demand for their resolution a profound, or even revolutionary, hermeneutic undertaking that does not simply dismiss the position and arguments of the antagonist but rather endeavors to reconstitute a community’s principles and institutions by allowing the opponent to participate in this reconstruction. This shared reconstruction is possible only on the basis of a polemos, a confrontation, that takes the antagonist’s own interpretation of the tradition with the utmost seriousness, while at the same time calling upon this opponent to participate in the same reinterpreted venture. I am offering only a sketch here of an alternative hermeneutic politics, but the fact is that both Gandhi and King developed forms of political practice, satyagraha and nonviolent action, that sought to bring this interpretative confrontation to bear on civil society and governmental institutions in a more than merely rhetorical manner.

Where did Heidegger go wrong, then? As emphasized at the outset of this study, we should not expect any one decisive answer, as much as we might desire it in order to place Heidegger’s own fascism, and fascism itself, within neatly circumscribed bounds. Far more important is to keep in view the live issues in Heidegger’s thinking and in fascism. Still, we may identify certain broad elements of Heidegger’s political option: 1) his tendentious history of Being; 2) his rejection of “Liberalism,” morality, and democracy as facets of the final crisis of Western nihilism; 3) his neglect, as John Caputo has shown, of a compassionate concern for others, as a defining aspect of authentic Dasein; 4) his disdain for institutions and civil society as the domain of genuine politics; 5) his belief that only a select few can engender the artistic, philosophical, and political polemos with Being in preparation for the apocalyptic regeneration of his-

tory; 6) his view that for history to matter, distinct peoples differentiate and assert themselves in an *Aus-einander-setzung*, with the German Volk taking the lead.

In focusing on Heidegger's history of Being, some postmodernists (Caputo, for example) almost have it right. Heidegger does indeed forge a misleading myth of history. But postmodernists err in ascribing Heidegger's failure to his fixation on a great Greek origin for history. Much more serious is the distortion that Heidegger forces onto this history as a whole, whatever one may think of his locating its "inception" with the Greeks. The trajectory of this history as a history of metaphysics demands a thorough investigation, but postmodernists for the most part agree with Heidegger's reading of this trajectory as the rise of metaphysics and nihilism, whatever their reservations about Heidegger's views of the beginnings and ends of that history.

Another aspect of Heidegger's political engagement is his fixation on the power of the creative few and the unrestrained violence of these founders as sacrificial agents of the history of Being. Postmodernists, of course, cannot abide such elitism, and, again, they may well have a point. Thinking beyond Heidegger, questioning what is at issue in his work, we must ask to what extent *all* Dasein can engage in the polemos with Being. Heidegger categorically agrees with Nietzsche that "democracy is just a derivative of nihilism" (*GA* 43, 193).<sup>2</sup> This belief, coupled with his view that the death of God means only that the *moral* God of Christianity is dead (*GA* 43, 190–93), leaves Heidegger open to a politics utterly hostile to ethical and institutional restraint. Heidegger's Nietzscheanism, that is, his withering scorn for democracy, morality, and equality, draws him into an ontological politics where only the rare and great can lead a people into a confrontation with history. The specifics of Heidegger's interpretation of nihilism as the culmination of the history of Being in the West clearly steer him into a fascist politics that rejects liberalism in favor of violent upheaval, valorization of one's own communal identity, and an embrace of leadership by the extraordinary few. And while postmodernists reject Heidegger's elitism, they share his contempt for liberal institutions and civil society as the proper locus of politics, for such "public" life is always already corrupted by inauthenticity or "constructed" forces in need of deconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

As a defense against the arbitrary, overarching authority of the few, postmodernists implicitly approve of Vattimo's trimmed-down subject as a bearer of rights. But at the same time, postmodernists simply disseminate to the many the authority, which Nietzsche and Heidegger reserve for the few, to engage in the deconstruction of established principles and institutions. Postmodernist

egalitarianism and concern for the rights of the oppressed betray a liberalism that must remain unacknowledged because it rests on a *moral* grounding that the postmodernist assault on metaphysical foundations has supposedly obliterated with the help of Nietzsche's hammer and Heidegger's history of metaphysics. But the actual practice of a postmodern politics, if ever fully realized, may well undermine such lingering liberal decency. In a world cast adrift from the authority of "metaphysical" principles and institutions, we must demand a much more convincing account than postmodernists seem willing to provide for why such anarchy will not fall prey to tyranny for two human, all-too-human, reasons: that some, those ambitious for power and unconstrained by lingering liberal scruples, will endeavor to impose their own domination in the absence of institutional restraints, and that most others, craving some order, will surrender almost willingly to these despots. We need only consider Hitler's rise from the ruins of Weimar, or Milosevic's in Yugoslavia, or the precarious situation in present-day Russia, with its weak constitutional institutions and paper-thin civil society. Serious inquiry into the possibility for democratizing polemos must consider that the search for grounds should not *necessarily* be collapsed into the metaphysical craving for absolute control. Otherwise, we will again cede the field to a despotism wielding the club of the masses.

As emphasized before, the genuine question is not what constitutes Heidegger's Nazism but rather what still concerns us, in thinking through his work, about fascism and in the question of Being. Even if we agree with Heidegger about the superiority of thinking about Being over the metaphysical representation of beings, and even if we agree that history is meaningful, and not just one damn thing after another, it does not follow that Heidegger's reading of history, and especially his reading of thinkers within (or as) that history, is correct. Stanley Rosen's *Question of Being: A Reversal of Heidegger* must stand as a leading example for anyone interested in genuinely confronting Heidegger's interpretation of Plato as the thinker who betrayed thinking to metaphysics. But it is not just Plato who deserves reconsideration. The sheer scope of Heidegger's work on the history of thought can obscure the magnitude of what he ignores. While Heidegger devotes himself to the "inception" of the history of the West in Greek philosophy and tragic poetry, he utterly ignores the influence of the Hebrew Bible on the Western tradition. It points to more than an unflattering oversight that the thinker of the question of Being passes over in silence the book where God names himself "I am that I am" (or "I will be what I will be"—*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, Exodus 3:14). For Heidegger, who pretends to address the history of Being as the history of Western thought—indeed, of the West

itself—to ignore utterly this important strand of that history is simply grotesque.

Furthermore, Heidegger seems to build on Nietzsche's avowed contempt for the English: "Schelling spoke so *well* of Locke when he said: *je méprise Locke*" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §252). Heidegger virtually ignores the entire British tradition of philosophy, but his disdain extends beyond the British to the tradition of liberal *political* philosophy broadly understood, from Spinoza to Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, and even Kant's historical and political works. The connection is not accidental: whatever the piety of individual liberal thinkers, surely the biblical themes of freedom (Exodus) and equality (before God) flow directly into liberalism's most cherished concerns. Heidegger's willful oversights feed the suspicion that *his* question of Being simply cannot come to grips in any sensible way with the concrete concerns of politics. For the *reconstructive* confrontation with Heidegger to succeed, it must endeavor to appropriate the history of liberal political philosophy through the question of Being, yet without Heidegger's dismissive prejudices. The Verwindung of liberalism as a *recovery* of liberalism demands a polemos, not only with Heidegger, but also with liberalism itself. This confrontation must examine both liberal institutions and their foundation in philosophical principles. In particular, the liberal notion of *nature* as the ground and standard for individual rights and the legitimacy of governments calls for an ontological confrontation. One must also consider whether civil society serves as more than an inauthentic "public" ruled by "das Man," and here the work of Arendt and Habermas may begin to show the way.<sup>4</sup>

We know what became of Heidegger's political adventure and the movement that he championed. This study has focused mainly on Heidegger's middle period (approximately from *Being and Time* to the end of the Second World War), the period that encompasses his political engagement. In his late period (supposedly following the decisive "turn" in his thinking), Heidegger seemingly retreated entirely from politics, retiring to his mountain cottage where he might serve as the humble "shepherd of Being." It is not our purpose here to prove the continuity between Heidegger's work during his middle period and his thinking in later life. Suffice it to say that any notion that the turning constitutes a renunciation of the political engagement is, at best, a clumsy obfuscation. (*Gelassenheit*, as I have argued, by no means gives up on polemos.) Despite all the apologetic talk of the significance of Heidegger's "silence" as somehow constituting the utmost condemnation of the Nazis and the only ap-

appropriate acknowledgment of the singular horror of the Holocaust,<sup>5</sup> it remains the case that Heidegger never specifically rejected (although he did much to obscure) what he took to be the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism.<sup>6</sup> That “inner truth” involved taking up the polemos of Dasein and Being and securing the Volk as the locus of this confrontation under the leadership of the apolis triad of poet, thinker, and statesman, in order to prepare for the other inception of the history of the West—one that would supposedly sidestep the temptations of metaphysics and nihilism. Heidegger’s polemos valorizes the moment of destruction for the sake of grounding a particular people in the singularity of its own history. Moreover, serving as the vehicle for this deconstructive founding is a role that Heidegger reserves for a select few. Since “authentic” politics must always happen beyond the walls of the polis, beyond the work of everyday institutions and society, if the heroes and demigods fail us, what is there left to do but lapse into a sullen quietism? Heidegger’s famous pronouncement in 1966 that “Only a god can save us now” is based on the assumption that we can simply wash our hands of politics, a position whose irresponsible and untenable extremism in fact perfectly mirrors his messianic expectations of politics in 1933. We must continue to ask ourselves whether the very question of Being, *as he* poses it, blocks him from any responsible thinking about politics.

If we seek to avoid an apocalyptic politics like Heidegger’s, while at the same time recognizing the threat to the spirit inherent in a globalized homogeneity, we must consider whether humanity’s proper Being, its belonging to place and to history, should be grounded in the ontology of polemos or whether, indeed, there is an alternative. A reconstructive liberalism must confront the Kantian ideal of perpetual peace and cosmopolitanism with the dislocation of Heidegger’s polemology in order to rouse the Enlightenment from its inertia and restore its mission of liberation and justice as a vital force in contemporary politics and culture. In continuing the confrontation with *and beyond* Heidegger, we must ask whether any and all attempts to understand our emerging global politics in the light of reason must necessarily collapse into a nihilistic rationalism in which Being is forgotten. Among the tasks of such political thinking would be to question whether there can be ontology without obscurantism; engaged and creative freedom without the need for either apolis leadership or unfettered anarchy; particularity and belonging without either irrationalism or xenophobic brutality; rights without irresponsible self-absorption, and morality without obsessive fundamentalism; community without utter engulfment



of individuality; rationality without the suppression of plurality; and science without the lust for total domination over both physical and human nature. A continuing dialogue with Heidegger's question of Being may lead to a reappropriation of the promise of the Enlightenment, a promise that offers all of us a role in the unfolding of the logos of history, while at the same time making us aware of the hubristic temptations of both modernity and the reaction against it.

## Appendix: On the Editing of Heidegger's Nietzsche Lectures

Following are translations of passages from Heidegger's lecture course "Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art," which was published as volume 43 of the *Gesamtausgabe* under the title *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*. These passages are of interest because they were excised from the version of the lectures that Heidegger had published in 1961 and because they have an unmistakable political content. The original lecture course was held in 1936–37. This appendix cannot provide a comprehensive comparison between the original Nietzsche lectures as published in the *Gesamtausgabe* and the 1961 Nietzsche volumes.<sup>1</sup> But these selections from just the first volume of the Nietzsche lectures as published in the *Gesamtausgabe* should serve as sufficient preliminary evidence that Heidegger deliberately sought to eliminate those passages in the lectures which might not reflect well on his political stance. I am grateful to Otto Pöggeler for the suggestion to examine these texts for such discrepancies.

Example 1. A paragraph in volume 43 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, pages 30–31, ends, "A very profound knowing and an even more profound seriousness are needed for us to grasp what Nietzsche means by nihilism. For Nietzsche, Christianity is just as nihilistic as Bolshevism, and consequently just as nihilistic as mere socialism."

Heidegger leaves out the second sentence in 1961 (*NI*, 36).<sup>2</sup> After the war, this sentence must have struck Heidegger as too closely linked with the specific political situation of the 1930s. The reference to "mere socialism" (*der bloße Sozialis-*

*mus*)—such as practiced in the Soviet Union, presumably—suggests that perhaps a properly instituted *national* socialism would be acceptable.

Example 2. In the 1961 edition (*NI*, 183), Heidegger has eliminated the following lengthy passage from the original lecture (*GA* 43, 190–93):

a) NIETZSCHE'S WORD ON THE DEATH OF GOD

One of the essential formulations characterizing the event of nihilism is that “God is dead.” [The remainder of the passage was omitted from *NI*, 183, including the following parenthetical citation from Nietzsche:] (Cf. 13.75: “The *refutation* of God: really only the moral God is refuted.”)

Wherever it is cited, this saying of Nietzsche's is almost always very crudely misunderstood. Widespread stupidity and ignorance are mostly responsible for this, but frequently a naked will to provocation and calumny is also at fault and, often enough, even anxiety in the face of a meditation that hides nothing more from itself.

The customary interpretation of the saying “God is dead” goes as follows: Nietzsche is stating here, completely unambiguously, that the only possible remaining standpoint today is atheism. But exactly the opposite, and something more, is Nietzsche's true meaning. In his fundamental outlook toward beings, Nietzsche took as his starting point the knowledge that historical Dasein is not possible without God and without the gods. But God is God only if he comes [*kommt*], and indeed, if he must come; and his coming is possible only if the creative preparedness and the daring wager based on the ultimate limits are held up to him. But this is no received or yet again traditional God, one to whom we are not driven and by whom we are not compelled. The phrase “God is dead” is not a denial, but rather the innermost Yes to the one who is coming [*zum Kommenden*]. In this knowing and questioning, Nietzsche ripped open his Dasein. Meanwhile, during the founding years,<sup>3</sup> people pestered the good Lord for all manner of things whenever they merrily hoisted their beer steins in the name of “God, Freedom, and Fatherland!” But this emptiness and mendacity first attained full expression when, between the years 1914 and 1918, the “Christian” West, friend and foe alike, claimed the same good Lord for its causes. Let it be understood: at issue in the contemplation of this event is always its totality. At issue is not the activity of individuals, which may still be possible and genuine in its own way, but rather whether this God still is and can be a principle who gives shape to the world and to Being. Nietzsche was frank enough to call himself a nihilist. This does not mean someone who says only “no” and wants to deliver everything over into nothingness, but rather someone who stands in the event of the dying God and hides nothing from himself, who above all says “no” to the universal mendacity, who says “no” because he has already said “yes” earlier and more vigorously and more seriously than his “Christian” contemporaries, who, with a

tremor in their voices, appealed to the true, the good, and the beautiful in their holiday speeches.

In this creeping mendacity that always says yes and no at the same time, Nietzsche saw the most dangerous form of nihilism: the form that even managed to come out *against* nihilism and, in the name of Christianity, do battle with the vulgarity of the so-called freethinkers. At one point, Nietzsche writes (12.416): “*The greatest event*: God is dead. Only mankind as yet does not notice that it simply lives off inherited values. Universal squandering and neglect.” This mere “living off” instead of building and grounding, this neglect instead of a breaking out onto the path to God, this was just what drove Nietzsche into his complete solitude. And this is “atheism”?! With the exception of Hölderlin, Nietzsche was the only believing man who lived in the nineteenth century. And Stefan George, who had none other than Nietzsche to thank for the metaphysical foundation of his entire poetic existence, thinks and speaks too quickly, and does not see the metaphysical need, when he says, in “Seventh Ring,” his poem on Nietzsche:

he came too late who said to you imploring:  
yonder there is no further path over icy cliffs  
and the nests of awful birds—the need is now  
to banish oneself into the circle that love seals . . .

No, this challenge is not yet valid for the thinker, for the utmost need has not yet been experienced, the need of Being as a whole, out of which the cry to God will become a creative call to the Earth. What is greatest is done only by him who cannot do otherwise.

#### b) NIHILISM AND GREAT POLITICS

Europe still wants to cling to “democracy” and does not want to learn to see that this would be its historical death. For as Nietzsche saw clearly, democracy is just a derivative of nihilism, that is, the devaluation of the highest values in such a way that they are henceforward just that and only that—“values”—and no longer form-giving powers. “The ascendancy of the rabble,” “*the social mish-mash*,” “equal men,” “means once again the ascendancy of the *old values*” (WzM n. 864; 16.262/3). Therefore “God is dead” is not an atheistic dogma, but rather the formulation for the grounding experience of an event of Western history. I took up this phrase in full awareness in my 1933 rectoral address.<sup>4</sup> [At this point, the 1961 text resumes.]

In 1961, Heidegger eliminated this passage with its vituperative tone and the harsh attack on democracy as an aspect of nihilism and the death of God. Furthermore, he connects this attack here with the rectoral address, a document he also sought to depoliticize as much as possible after the war. But in this lecture course delivered more than three years after the 1933 rectoral address, Heidegger explicitly connects an attack on democracy with the political significance of that address. It seems hard to avoid the conclusion that Heidegger decided to

eliminate the passage in the 1961 publication of his Nietzsche lectures as part of a deliberate strategy to cover up the extent of his commitment to the regime of 1933.

Why Heidegger chose to excise his reflections on the death of the moral God and his discussion of German and European nationalism up through the First World War is less clear. In this passage, we see that for Heidegger's Nietzsche, there is only the *pietà* and no resurrection. God dies on the cross, and the world of love, unity, selfless compassion, and justice—the *moral* world, to put it bluntly—dies with him, and dies with finality. Heidegger seems never to have set aside this particular teaching of Nietzsche's. Heidegger cites a saying from Nietzsche's *Antichrist* as the epigraph for this lecture course (*GA* 43, 1): "Nearly two thousand years and not a single new god!" This new god, a god-to-come, cannot simply be a repeated, resurrected, Christian God. In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger understands the present task of thinking to be a preparation for the approach of this "last God" who is "passing by" (*die Vorbeigang des letzten Gottes*). If one asked, "Did God *just* die on the cross and that's the end of it? Is God dead?" a thoroughgoing atheist might well answer, "There was never a *god* on the cross in the first place." But for Heidegger's Nietzsche, God is still *geschichtlich* because his death *is* still *present*, still a matter of *polemos* and *Auseinandersetzung* for the sake of a god or God *to come* (*der Kommende*). Thus Heidegger calls Nietzsche one of the *two* believing men of the nineteenth century (the other being Hölderlin). To Nietzsche and Hölderlin's Isaiah, Heidegger plays John the Baptist. But the coming God, whether resurrected or astoundingly new, is not one whose face any of them claims to have seen. Nor is it a God to save us from tragedy, even from catastrophe, for perhaps only apocalypse can ground *Dasein* anew. After all, Nietzsche championed a rebirth of tragedy, a rebirth of Dionysus—and the flayed Dionysus as a mirror and alternative to the crucified Jesus (*The Will to Power*, §1052). Perhaps Heidegger thought that it would be imprudent to publish this condemnation of conventional religiosity, bourgeois nationalism, and democracy in 1961, in a West Germany ruled by Konrad Adenauer's Christian Democratic Union. But his editing for the sake of prudence hardly instills confidence in his texts or in his motives for reworking them.

Example 3. The following passage closes the entire lecture course of the winter semester of 1936–37 (*GA* 43, 273–74). The 1961 edition has been significantly rewritten and edited (*NI*, 254), and indeed the entire part after the sentence "The 'Overman' is nothing for sentimental dreamers" does not appear at all. The passage concludes Heidegger's analysis of one of Nietzsche's sayings, "To see science from the perspective of the artist—but art from the perspective of life":

Taken at an even deeper level, this saying demands the knowing of the event of nihilism, and for Nietzsche, knowing means at the same time the will to overcome this event, and this from originary grounds and questions. To evaluate science according to its creative strength, and neither according to an immediate usefulness nor according to an empty eternal meaning; to evaluate this very creativity according to the originality with which it reaches down into Being itself, neither as the mere accomplishment of the individual nor as diversion for the many. To be able to value—and this means being able to act according to the essence of Being—is itself the highest creating, for it is the preparing of the preparedness for the gods, the Yes to Being.

“The Overman” is the human being who grounds Being anew in the severity of knowing and in the harshness of creating. The “Overman” is not for sentimental dreamers who fancy themselves significant but who in fact can be understood only through a knowledge of the “last man.”

Only a knowing that comes from originary grounds and questions grants a firm vision and decisiveness against the most dangerous nihilistic powers—those, that is, which hide themselves behind bourgeois cultural “activity” and artistic and religious reform movements. Those who appeal to what has been great up to now can do nothing for this greatness because they deny its innermost ground: the necessity of creating. For they cannot bear what is essential to creating: the necessity of destruction [*Zerstören-Müssen*]. And the greatest destruction lays hold of the creator himself. He must first cease to be his own contemporary, because he belongs least of all to himself, but rather to the becoming of Being. It was the knowledge of the fate of creators, in union with the knowledge of the death of God, that granted to Nietzsche, to the Dasein of the thinker, his great assurance in the midst of every upheaval and collapse.

The saying that Nietzsche wrote at the time of the publication of his first work in his own copy of the book applies also to his struggle with his last, *The Will to Power*:

Basel, New Year’s Day, 1872

Create—the daily work of my hands,  
Great spirit, that I may finish it!

Heidegger was not prepared in 1961 to publish the original version of his 1936–37 lecture course that ends with such a paean to heroic nihilism. In the Germany of 1961, Heidegger’s withering scorn for the “bourgeois” and his embrace of the “necessity of destruction” might well have appeared embarrassingly reckless, especially given that virtually every German family, and every German city and town (not to mention non-German families and cities!) had felt the material reality of the utter catastrophe that Heidegger welcomes here. Thus Heidegger found a way to take the edge off his lectures, to make them seem more abstract and distant from the details of the political world of the time they were delivered: he excised the offending passages.



## Notes

### INTRODUCTION

1. And here the exception proves the rule: Guido Schneeberger put together his *Nachlese zu Heidegger*, comprising Heidegger's speeches during his tenure as rector of the University of Freiburg, but could get only a limited press run for his book from a publisher in Bern in 1962. Quickly dismissed by the Heideggerian orthodox, the book received scant attention at the time. Hugo Ott's research (upon which Victor Farías largely relies in his *Heidegger and Nazism*) was first published in relatively obscure journals.
2. Here I am very much in agreement with the *spirit* of reading Heidegger proposed by Miguel de Beistegui in the preface to his *Heidegger and the Political*: "The proper response to this question [of Heidegger and politics] is not scandal-mongering, but philosophical" (x).
3. Although perhaps we should insist that were we simply to judge Heidegger by his actions as a human being, leaving aside the importance of his thought, he would not escape the charge of villainy. But passing this judgment is simply not the task at hand.
4. Mine is not the first analysis to remark on the importance of *polemos* in Heidegger's thought (see Derrida, "Heidegger's Ear," Caputo, chapter 2 of *Demythologizing Heidegger*, and de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*); my claim is to have worked through the broad filiations and implications of *polemos* in Heidegger.



5. The phrase is Paul Valéry's, and Heidegger quotes it in a letter of March 11, 1966, to Erhart Kästner, in Heidegger and Kästner, *Briefwechsel*, 83.
6. Surely no less facile, however, than Heidegger's characterization of the political episode as his "greatest stupidity" (*die größte Dummheit*), which treats it as an aberrant spasm of bad judgment. This does nothing to explain the meaning of that engagement itself or even the precise nature of his regret. Was it stupid to have the ambitions he had for thinking and for politics, or was it just stupid to believe he could realize them in the company of the kind of people who filled the Nazi Party? In other words, his aspirations for "the movement" and vision of what it might have achieved could remain valid for him, however misplaced his faith in the *actual* potential of the party (*ibid.*, 10).
7. Habermas, "Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," in *The New Conservatism*, 142.
8. See, for example, Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, 248.
9. Bernasconi, "Habermas, Arendt, and Levinas on the Philosopher's 'Error': Tracking the Diabolical in Heidegger," in *Heidegger in Question*, 73. As Bernasconi puts it, tradition has, from the time of the Greeks, often held that there is "an essential tie between excellence in thought and in morals. To believe anything else than that to know what is good is to do what is good would be a disgrace" (57). Heidegger's conduct has been shown to be a disgrace from which philosophy cannot hide.
10. Here I agree with Berel Lang, who argues that while in general the question of the necessary relation between a philosopher's life and thought may remain open, in the case of Heidegger "the connection between them is demonstrable." See Lang, *Heidegger's Silence*, 4–5.
11. Richard Rorty, "Another Possible World," in *Martin Heidegger*, ed. Harries and Jamme, 36.
12. Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, 296–97. For a discussion, see Sheehan, "A Normal Nazi," 32. For an earlier expression of his views, see Nolte, "Philosophisches im politischen Irrtum?" especially 44ff. See also Nolte, "Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus." For another general discussion, see *Die Heidegger Kontroverse*, ed. Altwegg.
13. Nolte, "Philosophisches im politischen Irrtum?" 33ff; also, Sheehan, "A Normal Nazi," 32. For documents in the *Historikerstreit*, see *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?* trans. Knowlton and Cates. For an English review of the literature and history of the *Historikerstreit* see Halverson, *Historiography and Fiction*, 69–87. For further discussion, see Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*.
14. Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, 151; Nolte, "Philosophisches im politischen Irrtum?" 45–48.
15. See Sheehan, "A Normal Nazi," 32; Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, 150.
16. "It is inadmissible, indeed foolish, to connect Heidegger with Auschwitz in any manner except that in which practically *anything* can be connected with Auschwitz, not to mention the [Communist] attempt at a solution [for the European crisis]" (Nolte, *Martin Heidegger*, 297). This argument depends on the assumption that only with the outbreak of the war did it become manifest that Hitler's brand of National Socialism encompassed a "concept of biological extermination." For Nolte, Hitler's extermination concept was "far less comprehensive" than the one already put into practice by Leninist class warfare (151).

17. Nolte, “Philosophisches im politischen Irrtum?” 48. For a discussion of Heidegger’s supposedly obvious acts of distancing himself from the regime, for which Nolte wants us to reward him, see Henningsen, “The Politics of Symbolic Evasion,” 403–4.
18. For Heidegger’s commitment to an “ideal” form of Nazism, as opposed to its real historical manifestation, see Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism and Philosophy*.
19. “The demonization of the Third Reich is unacceptable. We may speak of demonization when the Third Reich is denied all humanity, a word that simply means that all that is human is finite *and thus can neither be all good nor all bad*, neither all light nor all dark” (Nolte, “Between Historical Legend and Revisionism?” 15, emphasis added). See also Nolte, “Philosophisches im politischen Irrtum?” 45, 50.
20. Sheehan, “A Normal Nazi,” 32.
21. Adorno, in *Diskus* (January 1963), cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 118; Strauss, “A Giving of Accounts,” 3.
22. Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism and Philosophy*, 5.
23. Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, 5.
24. For a broad introduction to Heidegger’s thought, see Steiner, *Martin Heidegger*; Figal, *Heidegger: Zur Einführung*; or Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*. Also helpful are commentaries on Heidegger’s single most influential book, *Being and Time*: see Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* and Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*.
25. *Volk* ordinarily means “community” or “people,” but given the complex role of this word both in the political vocabulary of the time and in Heidegger’s thought, it is important to maintain the contextual nuance of the German word. No one English rendering would capture this nuance, and so I shall leave *Volk* untranslated except in discussions where the term properly requires these more ambiguous English renderings.
26. The capitalization of this term will indicate Heidegger’s expansive interpretation of Liberalism as a phenomenon much wider than a social and political program. I shall leave the adjectival form in lower case.

## CHAPTER 1: POLEMOS AND HERACLITUS

1. Bollack and Wismann, *Héraclite; ou, La séparation*, 186. Here we must take “natural right” in the Hobbesian sense: as the right, in the state of nature, to any and all means for self-preservation.
2. Another such “dethroning” of Zeus can be found in Herodotus’ tale of Darius’ experiment concerning the burial rights of Greeks and of Indians, whose conclusion is that “custom is king of all” (*The History*, 3.38). The question is, On what authority, whether natural or divine, are our (supposedly) ethical practices based? To respond, “Custom,” rather than “Zeus,” is to assert that tradition, habit, and even accident are responsible for our practices, not divine guidance and command. The answer “War” makes the sway of tradition appear all the more arbitrary, a matter of sheer force. Herodotus himself is citing Pindar’s Fragment 169, which begins, “Nomos ho pantōn basileus.” Already with Pindar, then, we find this movement away from a divine ruling principle with a personal interest in human affairs, toward an *abstraction* as the “law” of the cosmos, a law with little compassion for mortal concerns. William Race translates the first four lines of Pin-

dar's fragment as follows: "Law, the king of all, / of mortals and immortals, / guides them as it justifies the utmost violence / with a sovereign hand." Whether one renders *nomos* as "custom" or "law," Heraclitus certainly seems closer in spirit to Pindar than to Herodotus.

3. For what follows, see Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 66–67, 204.
4. For this and the following, see Marcovich, *Heraclitus*, 146.
5. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 326.
6. Here Marcovich follows an argument made by Gigon, *Untersuchungen zu Heraklit*, 119.
7. Marcovich opposes this way of subdividing the sense of the fragment: *ibid.*, 146.
8. Letter of Aug. 22, 1933, Heidegger to Schmitt, trans. G. L. Ulmen, in *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987), 132.
9. Otto Pöggeler has informed me that the winter semester lecture course of 1933–34, *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*, also contains an important interpretation of Fragment 53. Pöggeler has seen this course in manuscript, but it has not yet been made available in the *Gesamtausgabe*, a particularly regrettable omission because the lecture took place during such a critical time in Heidegger's engagement with National Socialism, the period when he was still rector but was contemplating his resignation. Pöggeler's recollection is supported by Heidegger's note to the following passage from the *Beiträge*: "Indeed, in the polemos fragment of Heraclitus there lies one of the greatest insights of Western philosophy, and yet it could neither be unfolded for the question concerning truth nor for the question concerning Being (WS 1933–34)" (*BP*, 265; see also *BP*, 360). (The parenthetical cite within the quotation indicates the lecture course in question.) For Heidegger, the failure to unfold the fragment's insight does not detract from the fragment's greatness but rather reflects on the inadequacy of thinking in the first inception to bear up to the historical trajectory of its own meaning. This bearing up Heidegger takes as his own task in his thinking about the other inception of the history of Being.
10. Dostal, "The Public and the People," 547.
11. Cf. Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, 190. For a critical interpretation of the politics of Heidegger's Hölderlin reading, see Kathleen Wright, "Heidegger and the Authorization of Hölderlin's Poetry," in *Martin Heidegger*, ed. Harries and Jamme.
12. For a discussion of the relation of this fragment to the question of language in the argument the 1935 lecture course, see Fried, "On Heidegger's Grammar and Etymology," in *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Fried and Polt.
13. It is very important to note, however, that while this may be the first (published) instance where Heidegger employs the word *Auseinandersetzung* explicitly to translate *polemos*, he has already employed the word in a manner that invests it with considerable philosophical importance. See, for example, his 1929–30 lecture course, *GA 29/30*, 29, 33, 43–44, 46, 51, 145, 434. See also his 1931–32 lecture course, *GA 34*, 145.
14. See, for example: *GA 39*, 66; *EM*, 87, 110.
15. *EM*, 47; the sentences in brackets were added to the manuscript after it was delivered as a lecture course in 1935. See *GA 40*, xi and 231–34.
16. Cf. *EM*, 102: "*Sarma* is the counter-concept to *logos*—that which is merely cast down in contrast to that which stands in itself, an aggregate in contrast to collectedness, un-Being [*Unsein*] in contrast to Being."

17. Again, the material in square brackets here is Heidegger's own later addition.
18. See *EM*, 87, 101, 107, 110.
19. There is the passage from "The Origin of the Work of Art" that we cited above (UK, 28–29). In the *Beiträge zur Philosophie* of 1936–38, Heidegger includes *polemos* in a list of essential words of the first inception: "In the first inception, because human beings first came to stand *before* beings, the project itself, as well its manner and its necessity and its need, is still dark and veiled—and nevertheless powerful: *phusis—alēthei—ben—pan—logos—nous—polemos—mē on—dikē—adikia*" (*BP*, 45). See also *BP*, 265 and 360.
20. See *GA* 54, 26 and Chapter Five of this study.
21. See *GA* 55. My assumption in making this assertion is that this edition offers a reliable version of the lectures as they were delivered, an assumption that is perhaps not justified given the tampering that has been performed by Heidegger himself on other of his texts (see the Appendix to this study, for example). Until the executors make the archive of Heidegger's work accessible to all scholars, or until a definitive, critical edition of his works is produced, it is not possible to have full confidence in the texts published in the Gesamtausgabe. For a discussion of the serious flaws in the Gesamtausgabe, see Dahlstrom, "Heidegger's Last Word"; see also Kisiel, "Edition und Übersetzung."
22. See *GA* 15, 44–45. Fink brings up the fragment in order to make sense of the notion of *panta* in Heraclitus. Heidegger compares the *polemos* here understood as father and ruler with *arkhē*, the determinative and reigning principle.
23. See especially the discussion of *setzen* as an aspect of *arkhē* in Chapter Five.
24. Harries, introduction to *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, xxxvi.
25. Interview in *Der Spiegel*, 209.
26. In an unpublished manuscript of 1939–40, Heidegger writes: "But perhaps the annihilation into which humans are being pushed without realizing it by 'neutral' technology is even a salvation [*Heil*], insofar as it brings the nullity of beings into the light of day." Quoted in Vietta, *Heideggers Kritik*, 93. Vietta has had access to the Heidegger archives and so is able to cite this passage from "Der Anklang," an otherwise unavailable text.
27. See *PIA*, 20–21. I am indebted to Michael Baur's translation of this difficult passage, which I have modified.

## CHAPTER 2: POLEMOS AS DA-SEIN

1. For Heidegger's understanding of Dasein's existence as "ecstatic," as a standing out or forth, see, for example, "Letter on Humanism," *Wg*, 324; also *SZ*, 12, 328–29.
2. For various facets of this debate over etymology, see Adkins, "Heidegger and Language," Friedländer, *Plato*, 221–29, and Heidegger, *SD*, 75ff.
3. I am indebted to Richard Polt for this translation of Heidegger's use of forms of *wesen*.
4. See, for example, Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, and Pöggeler, *Heidegger und die Hermeneutische Philosophie*.
5. Wisser, *Martin Heidegger in Conversation*, 40.
6. It is interesting to note that while here Heidegger speaks of a *Durchstreichung* of beings, twenty-five years later, in a letter to Ernst Jünger, he will speak of the *Durchstreichung* of

- Being. See ZS, 405ff. In the age of complete nihilism, Being itself becomes as much a nullity for humans as other beings are for animals. And so humans become like animals, but worse, because they have mutilated themselves, destroying the Dasein they were. Animals, even in being world-poor, retain the dignity of what they are.
7. See Heidegger's discussion of Heraclitus' Fragment 123 (conventionally translated as "nature loves to hide") in "Aletheia (Heraklit, Fragment 16)," in *VA*, 262ff.
  8. See, for example, *GA 29/30*, 93, 265, 420, 423–24, 455, 508, 511.
  9. This interpretation is confirmed by the extensive discussions of the strife of Earth and World in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. See, for example, *BP*, 482.
  10. See, for example, *SZ*, 152, 314ff.; *GA 29/30*, 266–67, 276, 446.
  11. See, for example, Aubenque, "Encore Heidegger et le nazisme," 123.
  12. Here I agree with many others that the Kehre has been surrounded by far too much mystification, in an attempt to excuse Heidegger from his political entanglements. See Ward, *Heidegger's Political Thinking*, 6; Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism*, 202–3; Rosen, *The Question of Being*, xix.
  13. For a more thorough study, see Grondin, *Le tournant dans la pensée de Martin Heidegger*. See also Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, 173–79; Thomä, *Die Zeit des Selbst und die Zeit danach*, 459–65; van Buren, *The Young Heidegger*, 240–45.
  14. See Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, 102–3.
  15. As we shall see below, Heidegger is already writing extensively about the Kehre in the period of the *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936–38). For an important exchange on this topic, see Parvis Emad, "'Heidegger I,' 'Heidegger II,' and *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Vom Ereignis)," in Babette E. Babich, ed., *From Phenomenaology to Thought, Erreny, and Desire* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 129–46, and William J. Richardson, "From Phenomenology Through Thought to a *Festschrift*: A Response," in *Heidegger Studies* 13 (1997): 17–28..
  16. For an illuminating discussion of the use of "Letter on Humanism" in the struggle to restore Heidegger's reputation and prestige after the war, see Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, chapters 5 and 6. Compare Vietta, *Heideggers Kritik*, 90 and passim. Fred Dallmayr makes a more credible attempt at constructively appropriating Heidegger's notion of the Kehre. But while Dallmayr does not engage in the exculpatory contortions of Vietta, his conclusions succeed only in making manifest what is troubling about such attempts to appropriate Heidegger. "In Heidegger's work, the turning involves first of all a move away from anthropocentrism and an anthropocentric will to power, as those are reflected in global politics and planetary technology. It involves a stand against the domestication of the earth, *done in order to save some native or national culture*" (emphasis added). We may well agree with Dallmayr that the prospects of global tyranny or environmental destruction pose real threats occasioned by technology. But the self-assertion (or what amounts to the same thing, the paternalistically defensive protection) of one's own or some Other's way of life lies at the root of Heidegger's having thrown in his lot with the National Socialists. See Dallmayr, "Heidegger and Politics: Some Lessons," in *The Heidegger Case*, ed. Rockmore and Margolis, 307.
  17. For a discussion of this reading, see Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 12–13 and 19.

18. See *GA* 39, 93, 121, 213–14, 288–89.
19. See Jean Grondin, *Le tournant*, Chapter 7.
20. See, for example, *GA* 45, 47, and *BP* 30, 95, 247, 261, 311, 380, 408, 452, and *passim*.
21. See also *GA* 45, 36–37, 109. Cf. *NH*, 73–75.
22. Heidegger's use of this language of the oblivion of Being begins well before the so-called late period. See, for example, *GA* 45, 185.
23. Again, for a relatively early use of this term, see *GA* 45, 185–86. *Seinsvergessenheit* and *Seinsverlassenheit* should not be misconstrued as features only of Heidegger's postwar thought.
24. See *BP* 30, 44, 102, 119, 122, 170, 195, 238, 241, 317, 392, 400, 406 ff.
25. For a provocative discussion of Heidegger's use of *Ge-Stell*, see Fritzsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger," especially 130–35. Fritzsche does a remarkable job of locating Heidegger's vocabulary in the context of the time, developing a compelling reading of Heidegger's "rhetorical strategy" to use such language as part of "a campaign to rub out the memory of Auschwitz" (155).
26. "But here the enigmatic shows itself: man is in thrownness. This means that man is more the ex-(s)isting counter-throw [*Gegenwurf*] to Being rather than the rational animal precisely to the extent that he is less in relation to man as conceiving himself on the basis of subjectivity. Man is not the master of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being" (LH, 338). Notice that even here, however, "man" as Dasein must *confront* Being in the counter-throw; Being has thrown Dasein into its world, but Dasein, to "shepherd" [*hüten*] Being, must still "tend" [*hüten*] Being by casting the projection of its own future possibilities against Being (LH, 328), which recalls the strife of Earth and World. Heidegger never abandons polemos as the character of Dasein's authentic existing, even if he himself gave up his ambitions for philosophy as the savior of Germany. As early as 1922, Heidegger had talked about the necessary "counter-movement" of destruction to engage Dasein's thrown fallenness into Being (PIA, 14).
27. See, for example, section 374 of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche asks "ob . . . nicht alles Dasein essentiell ein auslegendes Dasein ist." By "alles Dasein" here he means "all existence," not merely the human. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Kaufmann, 336.
28. See also *WHD*, 109–10.
29. The latter is perhaps the most striking: "What could seem easier than simply letting the being be the being that it is? Or with this task do we come up against what is most difficult, especially when such a prior take on Being [*Vorhaben*]—to let the being, as it is, be—presents the opposite of that indifference that turns its back on beings in favor of an untested conception of Being? We should turn ourselves [*uns zukehren*] toward beings, to think about beings themselves in their Being, but at the same time let beings rest upon themselves in their own essential unfolding [*Wesen*]." Again, *Wesen* for Heidegger is not a metaphysical essence but rather a temporal process governed by Being. It is this eventuating of Being in beings that Dasein is to attend to in the strife, or polemos, of Earth and World in the work of art. By doing so, even at its most creative, Dasein is still letting beings be, letting the world as the worlding World of meaning shine forth on the infinitely contestable and *contesting* ground of Earth.

## CHAPTER 3: POLEMOS AND THE REVOLUTION OF HISTORY

1. For a powerful interpretation of the cultural and political rhetoric of Heidegger's *Vorlaufen* in the context of Germany after the First World War, see Fritsche, "On Brinks and Bridges in Heidegger."
2. See Stambaugh's introduction to her translation of Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 14, n. 1.
3. On the implications of this passage, I am largely in agreement with the reading of de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 23–25, although he does not elaborate on the connection with the polemos.
4. See the entry for *magh-*, in *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, ed. Watkins, 38.
5. Heidegger, *Zollikoner Seminare*, 206.
6. For a helpful discussion of reduction, construction and destruction, see Schürmann, *HBA*, 79ff.
7. For a particularly illuminating passage on phenomenological appropriation, see *GA 6I*, 166–67.
8. See also Heidegger's "Remarks on Karl Jaspers," written between 1919 and 1921, where he speaks of the philosophical task as having nothing to do "with the 'discovery' of a 'new' philosophical program" but having rather to do with a "historical-spiritual destruction of what has been handed down" (*Wg*, 3–4).
9. The question of the crisis of the university and the pusillanimity of "reform" movements captured Heidegger's attention at least as early as 1918; see his June 18, 1918, letter to Blochmann (*HB*, 7). A remarkable passage from a lecture course in 1919 shows just how early his disaffection with the university found its voice:

The much discussed university reform is entirely misled and a total misapprehension of all genuine revolutionizing of spirit, with this reform now broadening itself out in proclamations, collections of protest, programs, orders, and leagues—means that are hostile to spirit, and in the service of ephemeral goals.

We are not ripe for *genuine* reform in the realm of the university today. And becoming ripe for it is a matter of an *entire generation*. Renewal of the university means the rebirth of genuine, scientific consciousness and life context. But life connections renew themselves only in a return to the genuine origins of spirit, and they require as historical phenomena the restfulness and surety of generative self-consolidation—in other words: the inner truthfulness of a valuable, self-constructing life. Only life, not the noise of overeager cultural programs, makes "epochs." [*GA 56/57*, 4–5]

By 1933, it seems that Heidegger thought that the generation he had been teaching since 1919 was indeed "ripe" for "revolutionizing" the spirit of the university. And this revolution would go far beyond mere petition drives in its scope. As we shall see, Heidegger's destruction of the history of Being was his own "going back into the origins" that enabled such hopes—for the university, for Germany, and indeed for Being itself. In a letter of November 7, 1918, to Blochmann (from his post in the "field," as Germany is losing the

- war), Heidegger describes the aim of this very lecture course he envisions on the condition of the university: to take up the challenge and “precisely not to become weak now but rather to take a resolute leadership in hand and to raise the people to truthfulness and genuine valuing of the genuine goods of existence” (*HB*, 12).
10. See Gadamer, “Heideggers ‘theologische’ Jugendschrift”; see also Baur’s preface to Heidegger, “Phenomenological Interpretations with Respect to Aristotle,” 355–57.
  11. In German, Heidegger also employs the transitive verb *anfangen*, but since there is no English correlate connected to “inception” for this usage (“to incept” is too ugly a neologism), I translate *anfangen* as “to begin inceptively.”
  12. Schürmann rightly identifies Heidegger’s debt to Aristotle in his treatment of *arkhē* as the source for “inception and domination”—the two roles of the paternal *polemos*. But Schürmann seeks to turn from what he sees as a metaphysical *arkhē* to a *phusis* that provides an an-archic origin that does not begin with human subjectivity and fabrication (*HBA*, 97–101).
  13. For an extended discussion of work in Heidegger’s philosophy, especially of politics as such work, see Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers*. One thing that Schwan overlooks, in his otherwise very thorough exegesis, is the connection, through *polemos*, between *Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen* and *Aus-einander-setzung*. This connection, through all its related themes, demonstrates even more decisively how Heidegger thought that a critical moment had arrived in history and how he could hope that the act of political engagement might save *Dasein* and reverse the oblivion of Being.
  14. See “The Essence and Concept of *Phusis*” for an discussion of *energeia* and *entelekheia* (*Wg*, 354ff).
  15. See *GA* 33, 211–12, and *GA* 34, 108, and cf. *GA* 34, 99, 104, 106, 114–15.
  16. See, for example, *GA* 39, 61, 63, 73, 146; *BP*, 114; *GA* 29/30, 259. That the creators should be the sacrificial victims of Being at work is part of Heidegger’s opposition to what he sees as the modern notion of the subject, which he considers nihilistic. This subject creates through the sheer force of its own will, installing a world to the specification of its own representations. Heidegger wants to move away from this “humanism,” toward a vision of the human that is dependent on Being for its most meaningful creating, thinking, and acting. This reorientation is part of what Heidegger hopes to approach with the idea of *Gelassenheit*: letting be.
  17. Compare this to the discussion of poets—and peoples—needing to be struck by “the fire of heaven,” *GA* 53, 167–70. See also the discussion of Hölderlin’s thunderbolt in *GA* 39, 242. Human beings cannot undertake alone to ground the abyss and save a world. For Heidegger, they need to be met in this place by the sudden illumination of the bolt from a divinity. They risk immolation in enlightenment and become a sacrifice in lending constancy and endurance to the world that is thereby momentarily lit up and opened.
  18. *GA* 39, 59 and also 120, 144, 175, 185.
  19. Cf. *GA* 49, 57: “This is the sense of ‘destruction,’ which is the pathway into the inceptive and has nothing in itself of shattering and annihilation.”
  20. The image of a *Rettung*, a saving or salvation, is a major theme of the *Contributions to Philosophy*; for example, Heidegger speaks of the “transformation and salvation of the



history determined by the West” (*BP*, 186). This salvation should be considered in respect to the *Opfer*, the sacrifice, that Dasein makes and *is* in the turning as the conduit of Being’s redemption. See *BP*, 54, 57, 58, 60, 63, 70, 100, 140, 154, 155, 186, 212, 241–42, 412, 428, 433, 440, 450, 464, 496.

21. But compare *BP*, 58: “*Inceptive thinking* is . . . the lifting up [*anheben*] of the other inception as the confrontation with the first as its more originary repetitive retrieval.” Heidegger does not want the other inception to be an *Aufhebung* of the first in the sense of a Hegelian *resolution* that ends the polemos over the sense of the inception.
22. A striking contrast to the idea of Heidegger’s inceptive return to history would be the contemporary American phenomenon of reenactment. In a reenactment of the Civil War, for example, large groups of men wearing historically accurate uniforms and using extremely precise replicas of equipment and weapons might engage in mock battles, encampments, and marches, duplicating as closely as possible the “experience” of that former era as they see it. For Nietzsche, as for Heidegger, this would have seemed to be taking to an absurd extreme antiquarianism as history. See Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*.

#### CHAPTER 4: POLEMOS AND THE REVOLUTION OF POLITICS

1. See for example, Pöggeler, *Philosophie und Politik bei Heidegger*, 15–16: “The first glance at Heidegger’s work already shows that Heidegger did not work out a political philosophy, but that nevertheless, within the individual stages of his thinking, he was in various ways a politically engaged philosopher.” Cf. Dallmayr, *The Other Heidegger*, 21; Dallmayr echoes Pöggeler’s judgment on this matter. See also Nicholson, “The Commune of *Being and Time*,” 708. Mark Blitz, in *Heidegger’s Being and Time and the Possibility of Political Philosophy*, argues that if we took the radical historicism of Heidegger’s project seriously, it would destroy the very possibility of political philosophy as a field of knowledge grounded in nature. Of course, postmodernists would welcome such a destruction of political philosophy defined on these terms, as we shall see.
2. Löwith, “My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936,” in Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy*, 142.
3. For example, see conclusion, Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, 243–56.
4. See, for example, Adorno’s attack on the politics of Heidegger’s “German *petit-bourgeois kitsch*” in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, 55.
5. I am indebted in my rendering of this text to the excellent translation of Heidegger’s *Parmenides* by Schuwer and Rojcewicz. For alternative readings of Heidegger’s politics in these lectures, see Clare Pearson Geiman, “Heidegger’s Antigones” and Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 128–45. Geiman is more inclined than I am to discern a break in Heidegger’s interpretation of the polis between 1935 and 1942, a break that supposedly retreats from the violently willful heroism of Dasein portrayed in *Introduction to Metaphysics*.
6. Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Wyckoff, 171; emphasis added. The phrase in italics is Wyckoff’s rendering of the one to which Heidegger devotes so much attention: *hupsipolis apolis*.
7. The utter displacement of this transgressive transformation is captured by Heidegger’s

- scattered remarks on *Ver-rückung*, a de-rangement inflicted on those who seek to instigate the polemos with Being. For some instances, see *GA 29/30*, 95; *GA 34*, 140–41; *GA 45*, 212, 214–15; *BP*, 25, 26, 122, 309, 313, 224, 338, 355–56, 372, 381, 384, 389; *Hw*, 262.
8. In his lecture course of 1929–30, Heidegger cites Novalis: “Philosophy is really homesickness, a yearning to be everywhere at home” (*GA 29/30*, 7). This “homesickness” characterizes Dasein’s finitude for Heidegger, its always Being-on-the-way in its own understanding of its Being-in-the-world.
  9. Heidegger renders this: “Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch / über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt” (*EM*, 114). A translation of Heidegger’s translation might be: “Manifold is the uncanny, but nothing / Uncannier surpasses man.”
  10. See, for example, the discussion of Heidegger’s “Promethean stance” in Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, 213–26; see also the discussion of Heidegger’s “transition to the massive voluntarism of the early 1930s” in Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 6.
  11. For the relation of *thesis* and *Satz*, see *SG*, 35. For a discussion of naming (*Nennen*) in the logos as a mode of *Setzen*, see *GA 29/30*, 465–66. In the 1968 seminar at Le Thor, Heidegger defines *thesis* as *Setzen* as follows: “to let a matter [*Sache*] stand from out of itself, as it is, that is, as it comes to presence” (*VS*, 58). The theme of *Setzung* covers the breadth of Heidegger’s career in thinking: see his discussion of *Voraussetzung*, from the lectures of 1921–22, *GA 61*, 132, 158–60; also, see the discussion of *Setzung* (‘positing’) throughout the 1961 “Kant’s Thesis About Being,” in *Wegmarken*.
  12. The Greek *thesis* (a setting, placing, arranging, establishment) is derived from *tithenai* (to place, set, put, fix, settle, determine, ordain, institute).
  13. *BP*, 380. See also *SG*, 184–85.
  14. For *khaos* as gap, see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 36–41.
  15. See *SG*, 186–88, and “Wozu Dichter?” (*Hw*, 276).
  16. Dostal, “The Public and the People.” See also de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 19–23.
  17. For a chronology of Hitler’s speeches and the acts of the NSDAP during this period, see Domarus, *Hitler*, 205–9, 297–303.
  18. Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 152.
  19. *Ibid.*, 152–55.
  20. For some of the most important treatments of the question, *Wer sind wir?* see *BP*, 48–54, 100, 125, 245, 265, 300, 303, 318, 322; *GA 29/30*, 6–10, 103–4, 407–8, 413–14; *GA 39*, 49–50, 70–71, 77, 165, 174–75; *GA 34*, 6, 45, 76, 119–22; *GA 38*, 10–16; *GA 45*, 109, 188–90, 226; *RR*, 9.
  21. For a discussion of Heidegger’s yearning for harshness (or hardness) and weight (or severity) in the lecture course of 1929–30, see Franzen, “Die Sehnsucht nach Härte und Schwere.”
  22. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.
  23. “Aber wissen wir denn, was wir selbst sind? Was ist der Mensch?” *GA 29/30*, 6.
  24. See *GA 29/30*, 9–10, 87–91, 100–102, 118–20, 134, 248–49, 256, 408–10, 509–10.
  25. This could also serve as a description of discourse (*Rede*) in *Being and Time*, section 34.
  26. See *UK*, 49–50, 69.

27. This phrase is in brackets, indicating that Heidegger added it in later years. On Heidegger's interpolations in this text, see the editor's afterword to *GA 40*, 231–32.
28. In the interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger acknowledges a debt to Friedrich Naumann, author of *Mitteleuropa*. See Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us,” 95; “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,” 196.
29. For discussion of Derrida's *Of Spirit*, see Wood (ed.), *Of Derrida, Heidegger, and Spirit*.
30. When Heidegger was elected to his post as rector of the university on April 21, 1933, he was not yet officially a National Socialist. It was not until the symbolically loaded date of May 1, that is, May Day, the Day of Labor, that he officially entered the party. See Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 241. Safranski's narrative of this period vividly shows how enthusiastic Heidegger's initial commitment was; see especially chapter 13.
31. For this citation, and what follows, see Rorty, “Taking Philosophy Seriously,” 31.
32. Consider, for example, Heidegger's 1945 defensive account of his entrance into the party in “Facts and Thoughts”: “Only in the interest of the university, which has no weight in the political play of power, did I, who had never before belonged to a political party, accept the invitation [to join the Party], but I did this only under the expressly recognized condition that I personally, not to speak of in my role as rector, would never assume a party office or perform any party functions” (*RR*, 33). Similarly, in the interview of 1966 with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger defends his “self-assertion” of the university in the following exchange:

DER SPIEGEL: Professor, are we to understand that you thought at the time that it was possible for the university to regain its health in alliance with the National Socialists?

HEIDEGGER: That is not exactly correct. I did not say in alliance with the National Socialists. Rather, the university should renew itself by means of its own reflection and in this way secure a firm position against the politicization of science—in the aforementioned sense [that the Nazis espoused]. [*The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Wolin, 96]

The research of Ott and others has rendered such apologetics implausible; for the most recent account, see Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, chapter 13. Heidegger both campaigned for his position as rector, having met and strategized secretly with other National Socialist pedagogues in earlier months of 1933, and avidly served as an advocate for the regime's policies in political speeches. He may indeed have opposed the prevailing National Socialist notion of a politicized science, but that did not preclude his own understanding of a genuine National Socialist *Wissensdienst*.

33. Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 138–45; Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 239–41.
34. Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 152.
35. Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 153; Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 235–38. Baeumler was a noted scholar of Kant's aesthetics. He lent his name to the publication of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, which had been posthumously edited by Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, and Peter Gast. In his lectures on Nietzsche, which began in 1936, Heidegger sought, among other things, to counter what he saw as Baeumler's (and others') vulgar appropriation of Nietzsche in support of the ascendant Nazi ideology of biological racism and the unrestrained will to power.

36. According to Farías, the question of science had already troubled Heidegger in his work with Krieck and the other educators of the KADH in March and April of 1933. Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 154–55; also Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 236. In “Facts and Thoughts,” Heidegger confirms his repudiation of the crude Nietzschean understanding of science advanced by his adversaries in the party (*RR*, 28).
37. For other speeches of the period advocating this “socialism,” see *NH*, 180–81, 199–202.
38. Schufreider, “Heidegger on Community,” 45–46. Although Schufreider correctly points out that Heidegger’s understanding of the university embraces, as one aspect, the necessity of polemical struggle, he fails to locate this particular polemos in the broader polemos of the history of Being, a location that implicates Heidegger more deeply in National Socialism than Schufreider is ready to acknowledge.
39. See “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,” 198; “Only a God Can Save Us,” 96.
40. See Heidegger, “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University, November 4, 1945,” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Wolin, 63.
41. For Hitler’s *Friedensrede*, see Domarus, *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations, 1932–1945*, 323–34. See Pöggeler, “Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis,” 19; see also Pöggeler, “Kunst und Politik im Zeitalter der Technik,” 102.
42. Pöggeler, “Heideggers politisches Selbstverständnis,” 31.
43. *NH*, 150; Heidegger’s emphasis. The quotations that follow are from the same speech, 148–50.
44. Tom Rockmore makes a similar point about the use of “fate” in the *Rektoratsrede*; see *On Heidegger’s Fascism and Philosophy*, 59.
45. I capitalize this word here in order to distinguish its meaning in Heidegger’s sense, as a name for an overarching, modern understanding of Being, from its conventional meaning as a social and political “worldview.”
46. Gillespie, *Hegel, Heidegger, and the Ground of History*, 125.
47. The combat between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in German culture and intellectual circles between the wars is a central theme in Fritzsche’s *Historical Destiny and National Socialism*. Fritzsche argues that Heidegger’s *political* understanding of authenticity demands the utter destruction of liberal civil society, which has accrued like a paralyzing crust, preventing the Volk from reappropriating the heritage (*Erbe*) of its communal destiny. On this point, I am very much in agreement with Fritzsche’s reading. I am less persuaded, for reasons that may be clear from my own argument, by Fritzsche’s thesis that repetitive retrieval for Heidegger means appropriating “a strong single past to which we have to subjugate ourselves” (19). Unfortunately, we do not have the space here to confront with the attention it deserves Fritzsche’s intensely meticulous analysis of the language of *Vorlaufen*, *Wiederholung*, and *Erwidern* in *Being and Time*. Briefly, though, even if Fritzsche is right that Dasein’s proper “rejoinder” to the past is one of submission, it does not follow that submitting to the past means adopting a singular fate or destiny as the tyrannical inheritance of that past. Rather, such submitting is a recognition of the *finitude* imposed by the past and of the need to forge an authentic future from this past’s inceptive trajectory.
48. Heidegger’s talk in the *Beiträge* of “this biological Liberalism” prefigures Lacoue-Labarthe’s startling assertion that “Nazism is a humanism” (*Heidegger, Art, and Politics*,

- 95). For Heidegger (and Lacoue-Labarthe seems to agree with him here), the *actual* form that historical Nazism assumed (after he, Heidegger, had failed in his *Rektorat*) was one that merely partook in the nihilism of the modern, liberal project of subjecting nature (and humanity as part of this nature) to man's universal dominion. I shall examine this audacious juxtaposition of liberalism and fascism in the second part of this chapter.
49. Silvio Vietta makes a vigorous but desperate attempt to save Heidegger from his entanglement with National Socialism by trying to show that almost everything Heidegger says and writes after the rectorate constitutes a concerted attack on Nazi totalitarianism. Vietta even argues that Heidegger's seeming praise of the "inner truth and greatness of the movement" in *Introduction to Metaphysics* is a subtle *critique* of National Socialism, and he does this by claiming that the "greatness" refers not to grandeur, but precisely to the totalizing essence of a regime mired in the metaphysics of the domination of beings. See Vietta, *Heideggers Kritik*, especially 91–92. Vietta's apology fails, not because of the absurdity of the argument, but because he attacks a straw man. At issue is not whether Heidegger opposed much of what historical Nazism became (for that he did), but rather what he believed and *continued* to believe it *should* have been in order to constitute a genuine revolution in the history of Being.

#### CHAPTER 5: POLEMONS, POSTMODERNISM, AND DERRIDA

1. For a review of the many strands of postmodernism, see *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Docherty. The term "postmodernism" will be employed here to designate a broad intellectual idiom; the adjective "postmodernist" corresponds to the noun. "Postmodernity," or the "postmodern," on the other hand, refers to a historical epoch whose status lies in question. Although the authors cited may differ in their use of terminology, we shall see that a central point in the debate among postmodernists is whether postmodernity already has arrived, or whether its full promise has yet to be fulfilled.
2. This is Caputo's gloss of Rorty's argument. See Caputo, *Demythologizing Heidegger*, 37–38, and Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously," 31–34.
3. Lucy, *Debating Derrida*, 88–89.
4. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.
5. Fried, "Inhalt Unzulässig."
6. It is worth noting for clarity's sake that the "marginalized" who are championed by postmodernists are generally those excluded or disempowered by the *traditional* authorities of state and society and thus include women, people of color and others subjected to the forces of colonialism, homosexuals, the working classes, the insane, the incarcerated, religious outcasts, and so on. A group such as the Ku Klux Klan would not merit the postmodernists' championing, for such a group, though now quite peripheral, yet draws its ideological strength from a (supposedly inherently) Western discourse of race, power, and domination that has held and still does hold sway over most of the world. So even a group such as the Klan, though enfeebled, cannot be considered marginal, at least by postmodernist lights. For while all "groups" represent the latent threat of oppression (to marginalize others, once in power, as they have been marginalized before), the Klan and other such "pseudo-marginals" (neo-Nazis, Holocaust deniers, and the like) represent an

extreme expression of the oppressive strains in the Western tradition—strains, moreover, that still threaten to break out in new political forms.

7. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics*, 31, 37.
8. *Ibid.*, 18.
9. See Milchman and Rosenberg (eds.), *Martin Heidegger and the Holocaust*, for a range of readings, both “for” and “against” Heidegger, on the Holocaust.
10. Here I rely on both Kaufmann’s and Hollingdale’s translations. For the German, see Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 3, ed. Schlechta, 387. See Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 466, and Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. Hollingdale, 22.
11. Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 464. See also Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 112.
12. See Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo*, the first section of the chapter on *Twilight of the Idols*: “What is called idol on the title page [of *Twilight of the Idols*] is quite simply that which has been named Truth until now.”
13. For a discussion of Nietzsche’s “projected magnum opus,” *Revaluation of All Values*, and its place in his thinking, see Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 96–118. Kaufmann argues that Nietzsche’s revaluation is an identification of, and attack on, the corrupt, hypocritical, and nihilistic values of his age—but that it does not constitute the tyrannical imposition of new values. Kaufmann labors (valiantly and rightly) to disentangle Nietzsche from his appropriation by hack Nazi ideologues. Nietzsche, according to Kaufmann, is doing no more in the Germany of Bismarck than did Socrates in Athens by attacking the arrogant assumptions of his day. But Kaufmann goes too far in taming Nietzsche. While it is true that Nietzsche himself does not exactly offer a new set of values inscribed as a table of laws, it is hard to deny that the revaluation attempts to open up the pathway, to serve as the *Übergang*, for that great spirit who *could* rework the world: the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche uses the hammer to sound out hypocrisy and to destroy—but he also hopes to pass on his hammer to those who will build and establish, since life is possible only thanks to the creations of the great artists.
14. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 194–226.
15. Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 3, 409.
16. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 197.
17. See *EoM*, 26; also Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, “The Nazi Myth.”
18. Nietzsche, *Werke*, vol. 3, 479. Here I closely follow Hollingdale’s translation, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, 112.
19. See Ferry and Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, chapter 4. On Derrida’s sympathy for the politics of ‘68, see Ends, 113–14. Despite this evident sympathy, Derrida denies that he was ever a dedicated “soixante-huitard” in a 1991 interview, “A ‘Madness’ Must Watch Over Thinking,” in *Points . . .*, 347–48.
20. McClintock and Nixon, “No Names Apart,” 140.
21. Jacques Derrida, “But, Beyond,” 169.
22. For an attack on postmodernism in general (and on Derrida, too, although mostly by implication) from the more conventional Marxist Left, see Eagleton’s *Illusions of Post-modernism*.
23. Derrida, “But, Beyond . . .,” 167–68 (Derrida’s emphasis).
24. For example, see Lehman, *Signs of the Times*.

25. See also Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, 209–10 and de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 115–16.
26. This line of argument does not prevent Derrida, in “Racism’s Last Word,” for example, from making strategic common cause with typically liberal, Western human rights groups such as Amnesty International (298). But while Amnesty International regards apartheid as a great challenge to its ideal of the universal application of some standard of human rights, Derrida reads the situation as a confirmation of the (“as yet unthought”) limits of this talk of rights because it derives from a humanist metaphysics that itself forms the basis for “racism as a Western thing.” For Derrida’s willingness to make a (temporary) alliance with the discourse of human rights against fascism and racism, see also *Of Spirit*, 39–40, 56.
27. Derrida, “Declarations of Independence,” 11–12.
28. Zuckert, “The Politics of Derridean Deconstruction,” 342–43.
29. This theme of animality is an important one for Derrida. He reads Heidegger’s 1929–30 interpretation of the Being and the world of stone, plant, animal, and human being (*GA* 29/30) with suspicion and suggests that the distinction of Dasein (or human life in general, in Western metaphysics) as the *zōon logon ekhōn* (the rational animal) from all other animals is in keeping with the sweep of a humanist metaphysics that also permits us to make “natural” distinctions among human beings. See *Of Spirit*, 47–57.
30. Fuller, *The Law in Quest of Itself*, 140.
31. So, for example, I say: “Bring your net tomorrow, and we can hunt butterflies.” If the meaning of words like “net” did not retain some identity through time, communication would become impossible; we would not be able to hunt butterflies or do much of anything. This is so even if such words evolve nearly beyond recognition: the “net” that millions now use each day to send electronic mail bears only the trace of a resemblance to a fishing or butterfly net, but precisely this “trace” is what bears the meaning. The etymology of many words displays this kind of errant filiation. Consider Heidegger’s example of the word “thing” deriving from an ancient word meaning a tribal council, hearing, or trial; see “*Das Ding*,” *VA*, 166–67. Cf. Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 150–54.
32. Spinoza, “Derrida and Heidegger,” in *Heidegger*, ed. Dreyfus and Hall, 282–83.
33. See Derrida, “*Geschlecht*: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” and “*Geschlecht* 2: Heidegger’s Hand,” in *Deconstruction and Philosophy*, ed. John Sallis.
34. Heidegger has intervened on numerous occasions in the texts of his lecture courses and public addresses, without alerting the reader, where the passages in question might prove politically embarrassing when he chose to publish these texts later. I have documented some examples from his first *Nietzsche* course in the Appendix to this study. Another example occurs in Heidegger’s 1936 lecture course on Schelling, where he describes Hitler and Mussolini as leaders of movements against nihilism. The passage was removed from the initial publication of the lectures after the war but is restored in the *Gesamtausgabe* (*GA* 42, 40–41).
35. White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, 115–17.
36. Zarader, *La dette impensée*; Levinas’s best known “Heideggerian” book, which is also a decisive departure from Heidegger, is *Totality and Infinity*, but for the matter at hand, see *Nine Talmudic Readings* and *Difficile liberté*.

37. See Rosen's careful but critical reading of Derrida on Plato in *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 50–86. See also *The Question of Being* for his treatment of Heidegger and Plato.
38. I am indebted, both here and in what follows, to Joshua Parens for discussion of Heidegger's romanticism.
39. Heidegger broke with Baumgarten and denounced him in 1933 to the Nazis in an effort to deprive him of an appointment, using the smear that he associated with "the Jew Fraenkel." Berel Lang discusses the meaning of Heidegger's treatment of Baumgarten in the course of a convincing analysis of Heidegger's antisemitism. Lang offers new evidence concerning Baumgarten, beyond what has been provided by Ott and Farías, in the form of David Luban's memoir of a conversation with Baumgarten. See Lang, *Heidegger's Silence*, 36–37, 70–71, 101–11.
40. Sieg, "Die Verjudung des deutschen Geistes," 50.
41. Paul Lawrence Rose traces the concept of a Verjudung that contaminates its surrounding world at least as far back as to Luther's concern with the effects of "Judaizing" on his Christian renewal for Germany. According to Rose, it was Wagner who coined the word *Verjudung*, and this coinage envisioned a concomitant *Entjudung*, a de-Jewification necessary to rid the German nation of this parasite. But as Rose explains, the parasite image does not explain enough: the *Verjudung-Entjudung* pairing does not merely express resentment against a perceived exploitation perpetrated by the Jews as a foreign body infesting the German "host," it also conveys a fear that Germanness itself may be consumed and absorbed by this process of Jewification—unless measures of de-Jewification can be applied in time to save the German soul. This phobic sense of the malign influence of the Jewish spirit is evident in the tenor of Heidegger's letter. See Rose, *Revolutionary Antisemitism*, 4–5, 40–43.
42. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 348–49.
43. Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy*, 296.
44. Fried, "Heidegger's *Polemos*."
45. King, *A Testament of Hope*, 245–46 (emphasis added).
46. Smith, *Nietzsche, Heidegger and the Transition to Postmodernity*, 283, fn. 4.
47. Even for Heidegger, the German self-assertion was to take place as accompanied by a corresponding self-assertion of other peoples; granted, the German self-assertion was to be the vanguard for the *Verwindung* of metaphysics, but the result, in Heidegger's eyes, was to have been a world in which many historical peoples confronted each other in a fruitful *polemos*—a condition not unlike the multicultural miscegenation Caputo and other postmodernists seek.
48. Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism." See also Hendley, "Putting Ourselves Up for the Question"; Hendley offers a postmodernist critique of Rorty in which he argues that while Rorty merely assumes the perspective of a particular "we," or community, the postmodernist, democratic vision is to put all conceptions of the "we" into question. It strikes me as naïvely optimistic to believe that a postmodernist could both maintain the radicality of such a program *in practice* and also preserve "democratic" ideals.
49. In *Acts of Literature*, 341–42 (translation modified).
50. See, for example, de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, 85. Treating Heidegger's political choice as a lapse into Nietzschean voluntarism generally has the effect of depoliticizing



ing politics, for once one envisions all politics as the expression of a metaphysical will, then the only alternative is a passive waiting in the face of Being's "destining" (*Schickung*). As I attempt to argue, this line of interpretation really only restricts the scope of what remains at issue in Heidegger's politics.

51. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 167.
52. From *Psyche*, in *Acts of Literature*, 327–28 (Derrida's emphasis; translation modified).
53. Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, 197.
54. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 8.

## CONCLUSION

1. On this point, communitarians such as Michael Sandel have something to teach us; see his *Democracy's Discontent*. Moreover, to realize that the liberal regime has much to answer for, we need only reflect on the deteriorating race relations in the United States and the rise of identity politics, the decline of faith in the institutions of government and the proliferation of antigovernment "militias" and "patriot" groups, as well as the failure to articulate a sound foreign policy capable of responding to the horrors of genocide and the seductive threat of tyranny masked by economic success (the "Asian" model of development touted by regimes such as China and Singapore—but not Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, or, until recently, Hong Kong).
2. For the full text, see the appendix to this study.
3. Robert Dostal makes this point particularly well, especially with regard to Heidegger's total neglect of Kant's political writings, in "The Public and the People: Heidegger's Illiberal Politics."
4. Once again, Robert Dostal is instructive when he points out that the Heideggerian denigration of "the public" makes it impossible for him, and those who follow him, to give any respect to what Aristotle identified as the kind of friendship necessary for politics: shared interests and a shared common space for the discussion and adjudication of those interests according to the principles and procedures of a settled regime. The Heideggerian will consider the everyday practices of such a space, with its unexamined presuppositions, as more or less by definition inauthentic. See Dostal, *ibid.* I contend that we should consider the possibility of a *reconstructive* liberalism that is capable, at least in decisive and critical moments, of using the public sphere to confront its own mores and institutions productively, without casting them into the abyss. Such, in any case, would be the Aristotelian substance of a prudent political friendship, and Arendt, in particular, has made this a theme, in *The Human Condition*.
5. See, for example, Kovacs, "On Heidegger's Silence." For a response to this line of argument, see Lang, *Heidegger's Silence*, and Bernstein, "Heidegger's Silence? *Ēthos* and Technology," in *The New Constellation*.
6. As late as 1968, Heidegger maintained, in a letter to a correspondent in Jerusalem, that the *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1935 was "published precisely word for word in 1953," and that a remark about the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism was exactly the kind of "crumb" one would have to throw to the spies of the regime. See Petra Jaeger's afterword, *GA 40*, 233. We now know that "precisely" this sentence about "the in-

ner truth and greatness” was *not* published “word for word” in 1953 as it stood in 1935. See Fried and Polt, translators’ introduction to Heidegger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

#### APPENDIX

1. The *Gesamtausgabe* itself, however, has been shown to be quite unreliable. See Kisiel, “Edition und Übersetzung” and Dahlstrom, “Heidegger’s Last Word.”
2. For an English translation of the 1961 edition of this lecture course, see Heidegger, *The Will to Power as Art*, trans. Krell. For the location where the excised passages stood, see 27, 156, and 220. It should be noted that the *Gesamtausgabe* version of this first lecture course on Nietzsche did not appear until 1985, six years after Krell’s translation of this course, and that the others have come out even later or have not as yet appeared at all in the collected works. But it is regrettable that the only version available to the English reader derives from the expurgated edition.
3. Here Heidegger is referring to the *Gründerjahren*, the founding years of the German Empire under Bismarck; cf. *GA* 50, 120.
4. See *RR*, 13.



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