

# After Heidegger: Toward a Post-Fascist Politics of Spirit



JAMES BERNAUER  
BOSTON COLLEGE  
U.S.A.

The case of Heidegger's support for fascism is examined as a window into the appeal which Nazism exercised as a politics of spirit that spoke to a craving for community, for faith, and for a harmonious experience of self. The paper argues that, despite Hannah Arendt's general public silence about the case, her published writings directly criticize the assumptions which guided Heidegger's embrace of National Socialism. Although her thought aimed to be an antidote to the Nazi seduction of intellectual culture, it is inadequate to that movement's psychopolitics. The paper claims that Nazism created an experience of spirit which was the harmony between the story of one's soul and the saga of history.



On the eve of Hitler, Germany was both deserted and haunted. The sense of desertion was produced by the defeat in the First World War, the consequent collapse of the imperial tradition, and a too rapid industrialization—all of which frightened German academics into the anxiety that they were fated to live through a "soulless" modern age. But coexisting with this anxiety was the persistent spirited war mood which inaugurated August 1914's season of battle as well as the ghostly presence of a deceased generation still calling for some sort of redemption for its ultimate sacrifice. This atmosphere of haunted desertion ignited a passionate desire for spiritual renewal and resurrection. Just as the mutilated bodies of Germany's war victims created the hunger for a new aesthetic of the victorious body, so the chaos of German emotions

excited the yearning for a new spiritual harmony, indeed for a politics of spirit which Nazism attempted to define. If the Shoah furnishes one face to Nazism's historical distinctiveness, perhaps the strongest candidate for the other face is its proclaimed promise of a specific spiritual renewal and revolution. We know that it was the Eichman types who carried the first visage. But what can we understand or do with the knowledge that National Socialism's politics of spirit appeared so alluring to professional intellectuals, to the Universities in particular, and, there to many philosophers. One observer of the period spoke of a "*Blitzphilosophie*", to describe the rapid advance of philosophers toward the mission of deepening Nazism's spiritual foundations and appeal.<sup>1</sup> And, as we know, at the head of that advance were thinkers of the first rank.

### *Heidegger*

Fairly or unfairly, Nietzsche has yielded to Heidegger as the current focus for a discernment of the relationship between Nazism and the philosophers. This focus is not fadish for it is a consideration which stretches back almost 50 years.<sup>2</sup> While the treatment of Heidegger's politics now makes up an immense literature, I did not appreciate how lacking in consolation so much of this writing would be for me the reader. One frequently meets with denial as, for example, in this 1964 remark by William Barrett: "Fortunately for us, there is very little biography to get hung up on. Heidegger has been a Professor, his life has followed the usual professorial stages of development, and whatever drama clings to him has merely been what has transpired in his

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<sup>1</sup> See Marten Ten Hoor, "The Nazis Purge Philosophy" *The Kenyon Review* III, 3 (Summer, 1941) reprinted by same journal in Winter, 1989, p. 173; On the fear of the modern age's soullessness, see Fritz Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1993* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) pp. 1-13. On the persistence of the 1914 enthusiasm, see Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence, Kansas: Regents Press of Kansas, 1982). On the spiritual yearning of the period, see Hans Sluga, "Metadiscourse: German Philosophy and National Socialism" *Social Research* 56, 4 (Winter 1989) pp. 795-818; and Eric Voegelin, "The German University and the Order of German Society: A Reconsideration of the Nazi Era" *The Intercollegiate Review* (Spring-Summer, 1985) pp. 7-27.

thought.”<sup>3</sup> And then there are the apologists who follow Heidegger in claiming that he engaged in a “spiritual resistance” after 1934.<sup>4</sup> The historical record is the rock against which such defenses will crash.

More troubling are positions which claim that there is *no* relationship to be sought between the political realm and philosophical thought.<sup>5</sup> Most disturbing of all are those rebuttals of charges against Heidegger which become denunciations of the anti-fascist critical discourse itself. I was astonished to run across, in an article on Heidegger, the view that those who are still distressed by numerous elements of Nazism should be advised to remember that the “*perpetuation* of the mobilization of opinion against both Nazism and Germany is actually a sinister fact of our time.”<sup>6</sup> This position is most troubling because Nazism or Fascism have probably not been interred in some silent crypt but, rather, continue to be live options, especially in a post-Communist world. Of course, there is a very serious critical literature which aims to address the astonishing fraternity between Nazism and a mind as powerful as Heidegger’s. Was it merely opportunism? Was it his intellectual arrogance, his conviction that he could “*den Führer zu führen*,” that he could lead the *Führer*?<sup>7</sup> Because I am not a scholar of Heidegger’s texts, I am unable to perform the comprehensive analysis that needs to be done — to quote Derrida: “In order to think Nazism through, it is not necessary to be interested solely in Heidegger, but it is *also* neces-

<sup>2</sup> See Emil Kettering, “Heidegger and Politics: Stages of a Discussion” *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, ed. by Günther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990) pp. 128-130.

<sup>3</sup> William Barrett, *What Is Existentialism?*, p. 143. Cited in Kathryn Brown, “Language, Modernity and Fascism: Heidegger’s Doubling of Myth” *The Attractions of Fascism: Social Psychology and Aesthetics of the ‘Triumph of the Right’*, ed. by John Milfull (New York: Berg, 1990) p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> M. Heidegger, “Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University” (November 4, 1945) in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, 2nd edition ed. by Richard Wolin (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993) p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> See the criticism of this by Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Superficiality and Ignorance: On Victor Farias’ Publication” in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Graeme Nicholson, “The Politics of Heidegger’s Rectoral Address “*Man and World* 20 (1987) p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger to Karl Jaspers cited by Sluga, “Metadiscourse: German Philosophy and National Socialism,” p. 807

sary to be interested in him.”<sup>8</sup> Because so much is at stake, we are fortunate that a good number of significant thinkers have participated in the effort to analyze the so-called “Heidegger error.” Among them are Karl Löwith, Herbert Marcuse, Karl Jaspers, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, and, of course, there are so many others who are of the generation of these last two — or much younger.<sup>9</sup>

### Arendt

There is a conspicuous absence from this list: Hannah Arendt. What has disappointed so many is that the philosopher whose greatest achievement was the exploration of Fascism as an intelligible system and an analysis of how that system shaped the individual (as, for example, Eichmann) has so rarely mentioned the case of Heidegger. Indeed, she pleaded that people “ought to leave him in peace.” Since the posthumous publication of her correspondence with Jaspers, it is clear that she could be quite critical of him in private. With reference to the consequences of his conduct on Husserl, she writes in 1946 that “I can’t but regard Heidegger as a potential murderer.” She accuses him of a “lack of character” and judges that his “intricate and childish dishonesty has quietly crept into his philosophizing” and he is a liar with a “clearly

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Philosopher’s Hell: An Interview” in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* 1st edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) p. 268. This interview appears only in the first edition. For an account of the controversy regarding Derrida’s withdrawal of it, see the introduction to the 2nd edition by Wolin.

<sup>9</sup> A good sampling of these analyses are contained in the already mentioned *The Heidegger Controversy* and *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*. Other collections include *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics*, edited by Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); *Ethics and Danger*, edited by A. Dallery and C. Scott and the special issues of *Critical Inquiry* 15, 2 (Winter, 1989) and the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14, 2-15, 1 (1991), and Bernard Martin’s *Martin Heidegger und das ‘Dritte Reich’: Ein Kompendium* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989). Then there are the three major monographs: Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989); Hans Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

pathological streak.”<sup>10</sup> Despite the clarity of her private views, she wrote very little for the public record — and what there is is largely uncritical and lacking in her customary philosophic force. How are we to explain this?

Certainly she had an extraordinary attachment and loyalty to the greatest of her teachers. If her relationship to Jaspers provides a clue, it was only after his death that she risked a whisper of criticism.<sup>11</sup> This etiquette could not be repeated in the case of Heidegger because she preceded him in death by several months. Toward the end of their lives, she was convinced that Heidegger did deserve the status of a philosophical great and that his thought would not be limited to the century in which it emerged. Nevertheless, she would also admit that his thought and conduct were native to our age. I would like to claim that the principal reason why she did not seem to address directly and critically Heidegger’s involvement with National Socialism was not a matter of manners but rather the simple fact that she had performed such an analysis in her legacy to the future, her published works. If read in the light of the Heidegger case, her writings disclose a clear-minded treatment of the guiding assumptions which enabled him to embrace National Socialism. Her own thought is perhaps best interpreted as a challenge to Heidegger’s receptivity and an overcoming of the grotesque politics which it welcomed. While my interpretation would suggest a way of reading Arendt, my primary purpose is to grasp her thought as the intended antidote to the powerful Nazi seductions to which Heidegger and much of German intellectual culture succumbed and to recognize the danger that threatens us, who are so indebted to that culture. Thus, for us, Arendt’s thought, especially viewed as implicit criticism of Heidegger, opens an important window into the National Socialist appeal and represents a supreme effort to renounce that temptation. Both history and philosophy, then, lead us into a politics of spirit operating on three axes: our relationship — to others, to an ultimate horizon of significance, and to ourselves.

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<sup>10</sup> *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Correspondence 1926-1969*, edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992) p. 628 (March 2, 1966), p. 48 (July 9, 1946), p. 142 (September 29, 1949).

<sup>11</sup> See Margaret Canovan, “Socrates or Heidegger? Hannah Arendt’s Reflections on Philosophy and Politics” *Social Research* 57, 1 (Spring, 1990) pp. 148-149.



## 1. Community

1933 was an important year. In fact, Paul Tillich at the time accused one of the most prominent of his theological colleagues (Emanuel Hirsch) of associating the year so closely with 33 A.D., the traditional date of Jesus's death and resurrection, that the year of Hitler's coming to power was given the "meaning of an event in the history of salvation."<sup>12</sup> What has to be recognized is that there was an intense atmosphere of spiritual transformation that year. Philosophy felt at home.

1933 was the year the Germans went to the polls to approve Hitler's withdrawal of them from the League of Nations and to ratify their national identity as a Volk. It was the first and, some would claim, the most far reaching of the plebiscites that facilitated Hitler's seizure of power. Heidegger was loud in his support of the vote and his reasoning mirrored the Nazi party line - the integration of foreign and domestic policies under Hitler's leadership.

The German people has been summoned by the Führer to vote; the Führer, however, is asking nothing from the people. Rather, he is giving the people the possibility of making, directly, the highest free decision of all: whether it - the entire people — wants its own existence or whether it does not want it.

On November 12, the German people as a whole will choose *its* future. This future is bound to the Führer. In choosing this future, the people cannot, on the basis of so-called foreign policy considerations, vote *Yes* without also including in this *Yes* the Führer and the political movement that has pledged itself unconditionally to him. There are not separate foreign and domestic policies. There is only the one will to the full existence of the State. The Führer has awakened this will in the entire people and has welded it into a single resolve. No one can remain away from the polls on the day when this will is manifested.

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<sup>12</sup> P. Tillich, "Open Letter to Emanuel Hirsch" [Oct. 1, 1934] in *The Thought of Paul Tillich* ed. by J. L. Adams, W. Pauck, R. Shinn (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) p. 364.

In an address a day later at a rally in Leipzig, Heidegger identified the importance of this vote — “the nation is winning back the *truth* of its will to existence, for truth is the revelation of that which makes a people confident, lucid, and strong in its actions and knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

The spiritual self-assertion of the German people in the face of other states is also the renewal of its domestic institutions and, most particularly, the University. Heidegger’s speech, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” is the vision of a novel academic excellence — the binding to a national, ethnic community through a labor service, a military service and a knowledge service. A self-expression which discovers its freedom in a rational will speaking through an authoritarian leadership.<sup>14</sup>

For Hannah Arendt, the warm reception which national socialism met testified to the intense hunger for a sense of community. While Heidegger’s own response mirrored this desire, it was Arendt’s judgment, in her first published analysis of his thought in 1946, that his philosophy could do nothing more than exhibit that contemporary condition of isolation. What is most characteristic of his figure *Dasein*, Arendt maintains, is its “absolute egoism, its radical separation from all its fellows.” It is in death that the human being most becomes himself. “Death alone tears him from the context of his fellows, within which he becomes a public person and is hindered from being a Self. Death may indeed be the end of human reality; at the same time it is the guarantee that nothing matters but myself.” She concludes that his effort to introduce what she calls “such demythologizing confusions as Folk and Earth” fails to achieve the status of community because an atomised self is given a substratum essentially discordant with that status.<sup>15</sup>

Arendt’s own notion of community tries to satisfy the German hunger and correct the Heideggerian response to it. For her, the focus is on

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, “German Man and Women” in the *Freiburger Studentenzeitung* (Nov. 10, 1933) in Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, pp. 47, 48-49, and “Declaration of Support for Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State” (Nov. 11, 1933) in *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> “The Self-Assertion of the German University” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, pp. 29-39. The German text was republished as *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> H. Arendt, “What is *Existenz* Philosophy?” *Partisan Review* XIII, 1 (Winter, 1946), p. 50.

a public space of appearance which furnishes a forum for human freedom to display itself. She understands this freedom not on the horizon of inner experience but as a public virtuosity, the achievement, with one's peers, of great deeds worthy of immortal memory. The fulfillment of a human life which is authentically of-the-world is presented as coming through participation in a community whose members "passionately seek and are provided formal and informal spaces in all areas of life."<sup>16</sup> There are several important features in Arendt's view which implicitly criticize Heidegger. Plurality and equality are the very conditions for the public realm's activities and eliminate recourse to a non-political hierarchy with its anti-political "pernicious word 'obedience.'"<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the ambition for truth in Heidegger's approach, is the dignity of political diversity, to which disagreement is native and far from any sign of imperfection.

Secondly, Arendt's political phenomenology of the person emphasizes that one most adequately discovers who one is in action with others and not prior to entrance into the public realm.<sup>18</sup> She emphasizes plurality and natality — the seeking of individuality not in solitary awareness of death but in the redemption of the promise of one's beginnings. The distinctness achieved in interior conversation and even in deliberation with others does not reach the personal uniqueness and distinction achieved by way of an agonistic striving for excellence. Although both Arendt and Heidegger advance a human need for struggle, Arendt combines it with the political necessity of a capacity for forgiveness and, above all, friendship or respect — "Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politike*, is a kind of 'friendship' without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem."<sup>19</sup> This praise of friendship is more than an echo of the

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<sup>16</sup> Bhiku Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> H. Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship" *The Listener* (Aug. 6, 1964) p. 205.

<sup>18</sup> See H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) p. 180.

<sup>19</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 243.



Greek polis. And here I would like to claim a very sharp difference between Heidegger and Arendt. We know Heidegger's contempt for the United States, which he never visited, his view that, metaphysically, it was the same as Russia, possessed by the "same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man."<sup>20</sup> Running counter to this depiction is Arendt's generally high regard for the country of her refuge. In addition to the Greek polis, which is often considered the common model for both philosophers, I think that we need to recall Arendt's deep indebtedness to Roman experience — in contrast to Heidegger's appeal to Teutonic forms — especially in regard to her understanding of freedom and authority — as well as to that American experiment. From the latter she derived a durable appreciation of the intrinsic artificiality of political society, of the importance of a specific liberty defined in terms of strictly political processes and of the solidarity and friendship which develop through mutual exchange in a public realm.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there may be another unrecognized dimension of problematic in her great work *On Revolution*. Ostensibly a comparison of the French and American revolutions, one might be able to interpret it as yet another bid in her effort to see how the revolutionary impulse, with which National Socialism so successfully identified itself, might be salvaged by an examination of the American event. Is not the following statement an implicit repudiation of the National Socialist fever that swept through Germany in 1933?

The course of the American Revolution tells an unforgettable story and is apt to teach a unique lesson; for this revolution did not break out but was made by men in common deliberation and on the strength of mutual pledges. The principle which came to light during those fateful years when the foundations were laid ... was the interconnected principle of mutual promise and common deliberation.<sup>21</sup>

There is a very important resonance to her claim that the American Revolution did not "break out," for this is, of course, the word —

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<sup>20</sup> M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, cited by R. Wolin, "French Heidegger Wars" *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 294.

<sup>21</sup> *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963) p. 215.

*Aufbruch* — that the Nazis used to proclaim its eruption on the historical stage and the explosion of racial-volkisch substance into German consciousness. It is the word that fully committed Nazi philosophers such as Alfred Bäumler and Ernst Kriek embrace. It is also used by Heidegger to point both to the German revolution and to that of the Greeks, the breaking out from which the “spiritual world of the West was to be built.”<sup>22</sup>



## 2. Religion and Faith

Perhaps the most successful and sinister exploitation of spirit in which the Nazis engaged was the manipulation of specifically religious symbols, sensibilities and creeds. Theological categories were politicized and ideological perspectives sacralized. Basically a religion of nature, Nazism was very adroit in employing for its own purposes Christian notions of God, redemption, sin and revelation.<sup>23</sup> Hitler had claimed that intellectuals were not “bearers of faith” and could not measure up to the movement he led. In fact, however, his faith turned out to be contagious — even for intellectuals.

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<sup>22</sup> The line from Heidegger is in the German edition of Victor Farias, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1989) p. 194; quotation is eliminated in the English translation. Cited in Frank H.W. Edler, “Philosophy, Language, and Politics: Heidegger’s Attempt to Steal the Language of the Revolution in 1933-34” *Social Research* 57, 1 (Spring, 1990) p. 228. Also see Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> For National Socialism’s use of religion, see Saul Friedländer, “From Anti-Semitism to Extermination” in *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, edited by Francois Furet (New York: Schocken, 1989) p. 30. The work of Uriel Tal is possibly the most distinguished in this field: as examples see his “Aspects of Consecration of Politics in the Nazi Era” in *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism*, edited by Otto Dov Kulka and P.R. Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem: the Historical Society of Israel, 1987) pp. 63-95; and his “On Structures of Political Theology and Myth in Germany Prior to the Holocaust” in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience*, edited by Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983) pp. 47-75. Also see Robert Pois, *National Socialism and the Religion of Nature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

## Heidegger

We are able to appreciate more fully now the movement of Heidegger's religious path — from the Catholic context for his earliest opinions to his abandonment of the Catholic system and his temporary embrace of the Protestantism which stressed not belief in the truth of revelation but faith in God's saving acts.<sup>24</sup> It has recently been claimed that it is his "anti-Catholicism — not, as Farias would have it, his anti-semitism — that underlies Heidegger's turn to National Socialism."<sup>25</sup>

Just as he urged a transformation of the German Volk from a biological to an historical reality, so Heidegger also tried to articulate a post-Christian faith. This would be a German religion, a Volksreligion, enshrining a spirituality withdrawn from Christian signification.<sup>26</sup> He abandons his Christian origins and accepts the death of its God but still cherishes a sense of the Sacred which is focused on the Fatherland. In explanation of this abandonment and embrace, Heidegger pointed to the ever more apparent weakness of a "dying Christianity," what he called its "historical bankruptcy."<sup>27</sup> This was the background for what he said in the statement he composed right after the conclusion of the war. He writes that "I saw in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical vocation in the Western world. Certainly, it was more comfortable to stay on the sidelines, to turn up one's nose at these 'impossible people,' and to sing the praises of what had been, without a glance at the historical situation of the Western world."<sup>28</sup> Although this turn from Christianity took place on

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<sup>24</sup> On Heidegger's religious path, see Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1993) especially pp. 39-129 and the article, by Theodore Kisiel, "Heidegger's Apology: Biography as Philosophy and Ideology" in *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics*, pp. 11-51.

<sup>25</sup> Kisiel, "Heidegger's Apology" *The Heidegger Case*, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> See Jürgen Habermas "Martin Heidegger: On the Publication of the Lectures of 1935" *The Heidegger Controversy*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>27</sup> See Kathleen Wright, "The Heidegger Controversy—Updated and Appraised" *Praxis International* 13, (April, 1993) p. 93; Kisiel, "Heidegger's Apology" *The Heidegger Case*, p. 35; Otto Pöggeler, "Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Politics," *The Heidegger Case*, p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> M. Heidegger, "The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts" *Review of Metaphysics* 38, 3 (March, 1985) pp. 483-484.

personal and philosophical levels, we should take notice at least of the fact that Heidegger did try to have this conviction lead to political effect. It is a sorry tale of efforts to discredit Catholic principles, groups and individuals.<sup>29</sup> One can only wonder about Heidegger's judgment when he writes in a 1932 letter: "Among other things, Communism may, perhaps, be horrible, but the matter is clear: Jesuitism is diabolical, if you will excuse the expression."<sup>30</sup>

### Arendt

At first glance it would seem that Arendt merely continues Heidegger's critique of Christianity, albeit with a different political commitment. She indicts Christianity on three interrelated charges. It rejected those classical viewpoints which fostered worldly engagement. In a reversal of the Greek vision, the Christian pilgrim on earth is born with an immortality into a mortal universe. The second charge is that Christianity proclaimed a negative freedom to its adherents, a "freedom from politics."<sup>31</sup> The virtue of inferior freedom was tied to a liberty from secular involvements and, as a result, replaced an authentic public interest with a notion of the common good which defined the "salvation of one's soul as a concern common to all."<sup>32</sup> Thirdly, Christianity denies the historical by introducing absolute standards into the domains of politics and morality.<sup>33</sup>

Arendt has at least two noteworthy differences with Heidegger, however, differences which are important for grasping her criticism of him

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<sup>29</sup> For example see Heidegger "The University in the New Reich" (June 30, 1933) in *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 44; Karl Löwith, "My Last Meeting with Heidegger," p. 142; Max Müller, "Martin Heidegger: A Philosopher and Politics: A Conversation" *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, ed. by Günther Neske and Emil Kettering. (New York: Paragon House, 1990) pp. 175-196.

<sup>30</sup> A June 22, 1932 letter to Elisabeth Blochman in *Briefwechsel 1918-1969*, ed. by Joachim Storck (Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989) p. 52. Cited in Ott, "Biographical Bases for Heidegger's 'Mentality of Disunity' *The Heidegger Case*, p. 102.

<sup>31</sup> *On Revolution*, p. 284.

<sup>32</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> See *On Revolution*, p. 195, and her lecture "Religion and Politics," delivered at the University of Chicago Divinity School on April 29, 1966 in *The Papers of Hannah Arendt* at the Library of Congress, container 70.

and her understanding of why National Socialism's faith was more popularly persuasive than Heidegger's corrected version of it. The first difference is that Arendt was never tempted by any pagan replacement for Biblical religion. Arendt claimed to be opposed to any desire to transcend secularity and reintroduce religious passions into public-political affairs. As this century's criminality instructs, the yearning for some religious sanctuary, a Final Judgment, to be restored to political conduct is a truly vain hope. The second difference with Heidegger, and despite this conviction, is that Arendt never abandoned the theological framework of her earlier studies with Guardini, Bultmann and Tillich and her own analyses of Kierkegaard and Augustine. Arendt concluded that, among the forces most needed for a renewal of the political realm were two which were not present in the ancient world: faith and hope. Arendt attempted to rescue from religious experience certain elements which could be recognized or redefined as strictly secular and political. Arendt understood that institutional religion was in a state of crisis and that there had taken place an indisputable loss of belief in religious dogmas. This institutional decline was not at all a matter of indifference to her, however, because it held the seeds of a more profound disaster. While loss of religious belief need not entail the forfeiture of faith itself, this was precisely the danger: "But who can deny that faith too, for so many centuries securely protected by religion, its beliefs and its dogmas, has been gravely endangered through what is actually only a crisis of institutional religion."<sup>34</sup> In order to meet this crisis, her political philosophy aspired to be a discourse of ultimacy, with a faith in creation which was in direct contrast to the glorification of death in Nazi ideology.

Arendt seems to claim that the Nazi exploitation of assorted Christian symbols needed to be challenged in a more sophisticated fashion than Heidegger's neo-paganism did. Her discourse on action is perhaps the best example of that challenge. Essential to the character of the political actor and the public realm are the powers to promise and forgive.<sup>35</sup> I shall say but a few words about the latter. For Arendt, forgiving

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<sup>34</sup> H. Arendt, "What Is Authority?" *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1977) pp. 94-95.

<sup>35</sup> See *The Human Condition*, pp. 236-247.

is a necessarily interpersonal act, and she contrasts it to the moral standards for ruling which were developed by Plato from the private experience of the self. Forgiving shelters the realm of action for it is a redemption from the predicament of action's irreversibility, the fact that once an action is done, it cannot be undone. It allows the continuance of a public life, whose actions always carry the rush of unanticipated, regrettable consequences. Perhaps Arendt is at her greatest distance from Heidegger in absorbing the figure of Jesus of Nazareth into her portrayal of political life. She claims that he was the "discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs" and with his discovery manifested that his "insights into this faculty can be compared in their originality and unprecedentedness with Socrates' into the possibilities of thought."<sup>36</sup> Surely here we have one of the noblest of the philosophical responses to the National Socialist appropriation and transformation of Jesus into Aryan and Warrior. It is the concreteness of Arendt's response which distinguishes her so sharply from so many other critical philosophical meetings with National Socialism and which also puts into relief yet another of the sources of that movement's seductive appeal.



### 3. *The Story of the Soul*

At the end of the first volume of his immensely influential *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, H.S. Chamberlain wrote of the effort of the Aryan race to preserve its purity and, in its very last words, asserted that this "struggle, silent though it may be, is above all others a struggle for life and death" ("*ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod*").<sup>37</sup> In the aftermath of the First World War it was National Socialism which depicted the battle between life and death as the pivotal story of history and the perspec-

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<sup>36</sup> *The Human Condition*, pp. 238, 247. For a much more lengthy examination of Arendt's transformation of religious faith, see my essay "The Faith of Hannah Arendt: *Amor Mundi* and its Critique - Assimilation of Religious Experience" in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, edited by James Bernauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987) pp. 1-28.

<sup>37</sup> H.S. Chamberlain, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, trans by John Lees (New York: John Lane Co., 1913) p. 578.

tive without which the present could not be comprehended. Nazism put itself forward as founded on the most elementary truths of nature and biology and it was these categories of life versus death which dominated the Nazi imagination. The vitality of Nordic blood was juxtaposed to the deadly degeneration embodied in inferior races. Because the quality of blood was the greatest legacy which history's struggle for existence has bequeathed the German *Volk*, the political and moral interest became identified with the protection of that blood against its enemies. What was at stake was the advancement of life or the death of the people (*Volkstod*). To quote Himmler's notorious 1943 speech in Posen: "We had the moral right (*moralische Recht*), we had the duty (*Pflicht*) toward our people, to kill this people which wanted to kill us."<sup>38</sup> National Socialism argued for a "eugenics" for one group which entailed a "euthanasia" for others; it was this biomedical project which gave such an authoritative status to medical science in Nazi culture. Its vision exploited the sacrificial echo of the First World War experience and its marriage of vast human losses to a national regeneration. Such a vision made death a shining presence. "Life was embraced in death, death in life." Even if the Aryan victory of life could not be guaranteed in *this* age by *this* war, death itself could be celebrated by creating a contrast to the mechanized death produced for others in death camps. Heroic death would be a sign of one's personal courage and willingness to sacrifice — Himmler did say "Death has no sting for us." — or the presence of the sure national resurrection which some future would certainly bring.<sup>39</sup>

### *Heidegger and Arendt*

Heidegger walked a difficult path between his desire to respond to the decisive summons of the Nazi revolution and his determination to escape its biological categories. Thus, Heidegger speaks the revolution's language of spirit as danger, struggle, willfulness and courageous self-

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<sup>38</sup> Heinrich Himmler's Oct. 4, 1943 speech in Posen, in *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal XXIX* (Nuremberg, 1948) p. 146.

<sup>39</sup> See Jay W. Baird, *To Die For Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) p. 213.

assertion in the face of death even while he is at pains to disassociate these from any dependence on a vitalist philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

In this area Arendt is very clearly both *critic* and *disciple* of Heidegger. Among the most regular of her thought's notes was its repudiation of perspectives which were rooted in a concern with death. Her early criticism of Heidegger's "being toward death" matured into a philosophy which placed at the center of human meaning the notion of natality, of human existence as the guardian of birth and beginnings, as source of worldly initiatives. Even her proud allegiance to the Greeks yielded to this key intuition: their identification of humans as "mortals" is replaced by natality because, as she says, "men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin." Enunciated against the background of the twentieth-century necropolis, perhaps there is no special explanation to be sought in why she wished to escape death's infectiousness, even in the realm of thought. And yet, I think that if we pay attention to the mode of her philosophy's flight from death, we may possess a unique angle on what her thought was actually contesting. Initially it may seem odd that Arendt's repudiation of death did not lead her to valorize "life." Anyone who has read *The Human Condition* appreciates how the category of "life" and its associated notions of "labor" and "process" are leading adversaries for her. Life does not know natality, and beginning for life is but a process of nature, which imprisons it within the rhythm of cyclical movement. The birth and end of human beginning takes place in the artifice of the world, not in the ever recurring cycle of biological life.<sup>41</sup> In her view, it was Christianity's elevation of life to a sacred, immortal status which subverted the classical conviction of the superiority of the world's value over that of the self. She contends that the claim of life as the human person's highest good has shadowed modern consciousness and operated as a self-evident truth. And Arendt derives the source of life's modern philosophical power from introspection: "The greatest representatives of modern life philosophy are Marx, Nietzsche and Bergson, inasmuch as all three equate Life and

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<sup>40</sup> For treatments of this vast theme, see for example David Farrell Krell, *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and John Caputo, "Heidegger's *Kampf*: The Difficulty of Life" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14, 2-15, 1 (1991) pp. 61-83.

<sup>41</sup> *The Human Condition*, pp. 246, 97.



Being. For this equation, they rely on introspection, and life is indeed the only 'being' man can possibly be aware of by looking merely into himself."<sup>42</sup> Her remarks on introspection and life contains the important insight that the self is able to be politicized but she failed to pursue it because of her refusal to concede philosophical or political importance to the self's interior states, the "darkness of the human heart." The self is the reservoir of those fleeting experiences which are so unworldly that they yield to any arbitrary interpretation, and so dangerous that they are destructive of political activity.<sup>43</sup> Her refusal to explore the self strikes me as perhaps the most significant weakness in her analysis of National Socialism for, if anything, Nazism was a philosophy of inwardness, indeed a psychopolitics. Fortunately, the last researches of Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, come to our rescue here.

### *Foucault*

Heidegger's address "The Self-Assertion of the German University" roots the issue of self-governance in a more fundamental question: "*wissen wir denn, wer wir selbst sind*"? "But do we know who we ourselves are"?<sup>44</sup> Foucault's "critical ontology of ourselves" tried to deal with this question, especially its modern accent by interrogating the knowledge — power — subjectivizing relations through which we identify ourselves. If sexual identity is privileged by modernity for discovering who we really are, it is the result of our age's Faustian pact — the identification of sexuality with the natural force of life itself — within a biopolitical regime in which responsibility was assumed for controlling and modifying the very processes of life.<sup>45</sup> Human existence is characterized as biological reality, as life. But not only as life. As Foucault had claimed in *The Order of Things*, the science of biology pledged our lives

<sup>42</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 313, note 76 and see pp. 313-319.

<sup>43</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 244. For the dangers see, for example, *On Revolution*, pp. 82-86.

<sup>44</sup> "The Self-Assertion of the German University," German text is on p. 9 and English in *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and my book *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1990) p. 140.

to history and struggle, to a fraternity with death. A modern knowledge of life was captured by the energy of animality. Life is articulated as a murderous evolutionary force. The binding of personal identity and organic life immerses that identity within the flow of blood, which is a sign of life but also an index of that life's fragility. Life bleeds, and thus the confession of sexual identity avows not only life but its permanent war with death. This is, of course, no foreign epic for modern or contemporary philosophy. With Freud, this morbid law of biological life became our psychic tale. Human existence and civilization is the contest between the drives of life and death. (*Eros und Tod, Lebenstrieb und Destruktionstrieb*),<sup>46</sup> Foucault's politics of the Spirit excavates a story of the soul and our relationship to it, how our souls have been fashioned as a mirror of that modern political landscape in which massacres are vital, in which there is a right to eliminate those who are imagined as representing a biological danger, in which political choice is governed by the sole option between survival or suicide.

I believe that the last stage in Foucault's work, what he called his "aesthetics of existence," was meant to be in resistance to the "science of life." To speak of human existence as an art is to take it out of the domain of the scientifically knowable and to free our spirits from biological categories for our self-interpretations. The point I would like to make here, however, is the relevance of Foucault's insights for the understanding of Nazism. In contrast to those who have a high regard for how National Socialism effected an inward change of people, we might argue that its real strength was its ability to embrace the modern story of the soul, and support the dramatization of that story in the plot of history — to achieve a truly effective politics of the modern spirit. Freud's books were burned in the courtyards of German universities and Nazism was fierce in its denunciation of psychoanalysis as a Jewish "dismemberment of

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<sup>46</sup> M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1973) pp. 277-278. Freud's articulation of the life-death struggle is to be found most clearly in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). Both are in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, volumes 18 and 21 respectively, edited by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973). On Freud's biological register, see Frank Sulloway, *Freud: Biologist of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). On the philosophical story, see Piotr Hoffmann, *The Human Self and the Life and Death Struggle* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 1983).

the soul" (*Zergliederung der Seele*) or "poisoning of the soul" (*Seelenvergiftung*).<sup>47</sup> In effect, however, it was an unconscious tribute to how psychoanalysis had given, like itself, decisive voice to a modern biological register and how Freud had articulated the very version of the soul on which Nazi politics was capitalizing. The German historian Joachim Fest has claimed that National Socialism "succeeded more rapidly and effectively in its assault on people's minds than in its seizure of political and social power."<sup>48</sup> And could one of the principal reasons for this be the experience of spirit it granted? And I mean by this the harmony between the story of one's soul and the saga of history, which became a tale of ultimate significance exhibiting, as if for the first time, the true nature of community, the energy of faith, the essential struggle of life.



### Conclusion

The ease of the coexistence, and often complicity, between National Socialism and German philosophers has distressed many and yet there is little agreement about what lessons should be drawn from that experience. With respect to Heidegger, Gadamer tells a pointed story, about how, shortly after his resignation from the Rectorate, one of Heidegger's friends met him on the Freiburg streetcar and greeted him with: "Back from Syracuse?" Gadamer alludes, of course, to Plato's misadventure and takes pains to remind us that all sorts of human beings become philosophers and asks why we should expect them to be superior to others in their negotiation of political and social realities.<sup>49</sup> The "political incompetence of philosophy," the phrase that titles a Gadamer essay, seems to be the conclusion arrived at by Heidegger himself. Isn't this a reasonable explanation for his silent response to so many of the

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<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) pp. 87, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970) p. 249.

<sup>49</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Superficiality and Ignorance: On Victor Farias' Publication" *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism*, p. 143; Gadamer, "The Political Incompetence of Philosophy," *The Heidegger Case*, pp. 364-369.

questions generated by his support for fascism? As he said in the posthumously published interview with *Der Spiegel*: "philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition in the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavor. Only a god can save us."<sup>50</sup>

Arendt might well agree with the thrust of Gadamer's remarks but she would go on to point out that we are not necessarily limited to the politically irrelevant tradition of philosophical reflection on politics. For her, there needs to be recovered and developed the tasks of political thinking, namely, the reflection on the political realm by actors and citizens from their perspective as agents. Still I find much more needs to be said. Or better heard. This is Lyotard's formulation:

Here lies the paradox and even the scandal: how could this thought (Heidegger's), a thought so devoted to remembering that a forgetting (of Being) takes place in all thought, in all art, in all 'representation' of the world, how could it possibly have ignored the thought of the 'jews,' which, in a certain sense, thinks, tries to think, nothing but that very fact? How could this thought forget and ignore 'the jews' to the point of suppressing and foreclosing to the very end the horrifying (and inane) attempt at exterminating, at making us forget forever what, in Europe, reminds us, ever since the beginning, that 'there is' the Forgotten.<sup>51</sup>

Referring to how Heidegger was able, in one of his lectures, to compare agriculture as a motorized food industry with the "manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and the extermination camps," John Caputo suggested, to me, at least, the absolutely crucial point: "The victim never comes to presence, never makes an appearance on the scene of the history of Being. There are no victims in the first beginning, in the great early Greek epoch before metaphysics . . . Neither do the victims figure in the endtime of the history of metaphysics, when they are

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<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, "'Only a God Can Save Us': *Der Spiegel's* Interview with Martin Heidegger," *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 107.

<sup>51</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) p. 4. For Lyotard, the "jews" are not to be strictly identified with those who are Jewish but embraces the victims of European dismissals in general.

gassed to death by motorized equipment. For that is not the matter of concern (*die Sache*); they are not the task for thought."<sup>52</sup>

Although Caputo is placing this judgment within the specific context of Heidegger's thought and action, it has to be expanded to a widespread willingness in the institution of philosophy to justify and serve rather than to criticize and resist dominant power relations.<sup>53</sup> All too often it seems that the practitioners of philosophy thought that they had been born into or entered some sort of definitive post-Socratic era, that philosophy did not need to challenge power and would not have to suffer consequences for speaking truthfully. That philosophers could have an easy relationship with the State and did not have to speak out for those who were not to be considered members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, not to be regarded as adherents of the *Volksreligion*, not to be listened to as participants in German inwardness.

In recent years no philosopher has surpassed Michel Foucault's effort to relocate philosophical activity from the site of institutional and disciplinary authorities and the forms of truth which sustain them to the side of those who have been victimized by the normal ways our human sciences speak their knowledges and effect their implications. Foucault aimed to direct our attention from an analytics of truth, in which the focus is on the adequacy of the reasoning process within a taken for granted paradigm of knowledge, to a "critical" tradition which studies the emergence and operation of regimes of truth within specific cultures.<sup>54</sup> This critical tradition has a different intellectual perspective and philosophic style. Its perspective is established on an aware-

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<sup>52</sup> John Caputo, "Heidegger's Scandal: Thinking and the Essence of the Victim," *The Heidegger Case*, p. 278.

<sup>53</sup> In addition to the eagerly anticipated study of Hans Sluga, there are two already published volumes which give a sense of philosophy at that time: Monika Leske, *Philosophen im 'Dritten Reich': Studie zu Hochschul- und Philosophiebetrieb im faschistischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1990) and Leon Poliakov and Joseph Wulf, editors of *Das Dritte Reich und seine Denker* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Foucault develops this perspective in his 1983 and 1984 lectures on Parrhesia. See Thomas Flynn: "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the Collège de France" in *The Final Foucault*, edited by James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988) pp. 102-118. An intriguing claim has recently been put forward by Jennifer Ring, namely, that Arendt had an alternative to the Greek political actor, the pariah or history's outsider. See Ring's "The Pariah As Hero: Hannah Arendt's Political Actor" *Political Theory* 19, 3 (August, 1991) pp. 433-452.

ness of the existence of victims without which reality cannot be interpreted. Its task is to disclose how we have come to understand ourselves as spiritual — as sharers in an experience of community, as open to a certain transcendence, and as present to ourselves. Because the major forms of power operate through a portrayal and seduction of the soul, a philosophy which is competent in its treatment of the present will entail a politics of the spirit.

The critical tradition will also have a different style of philosophical engagement, far from any status of law giver or state official. It is a style unashamedly ethically concerned in its self-presentation, a way of living and speaking the truth which is a form of political engagement, an ethics that is a politics. In this context I see an important distinction between the responses of Gadamer and Foucault to the desolation of philosophy. Indicating that Heidegger had seen a great historical reversal inaugurated in 1933, Gadamer goes on to state: "We should scarcely be surprised that such extravagance can be found in a great thinker. On the contrary, I am more surprised that philosophers are constantly being confronted by the question of ethics. The need to ask another person what is honorable or decent or humane strikes me as a distress signal or possibly a sign of the impoverishment of our existing society — even when we seek such answers from a so-called philosopher."<sup>55</sup>

Foucault was very conscious of the different modalities in which the philosopher is able to experience the truth. He did not want the mantle of prophet, describing the law of the future based on the truths of the present. Nor did he see himself as a sage, committed to the revelation of being in general principles. Nor as a teacher-technician, developing a common creed for a body of disciples. At the end of his life, he painted a picture of the philosopher as the parrhesiast, as the one who was compelled to speak frankly, truthfully, of present experience and who appreciated that doing so always ran the risk of great danger. The permanent peril which the philosopher faces is not the outcome of any extreme resistance but the simple consequence of speaking frankly to regimes of truth and spirit as they really are: operating within history, empowering some, silencing others, perhaps even destroying yet some

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<sup>55</sup> Gadamer, "The Political Incompetence of Philosophy" *The Heidegger Case*, p. 368.

others. And philosophy is not just a protection for others; it is a defense of our personal capacity to think and live philosophically. It is the vulnerability of that capacity which philosophy's Fascist adventure ultimately teaches us. It is a lesson that we must certainly fear will be lost for any group of professional thinkers which is secure in its expectations for prestige and rewards as well as segregated from those countless victims with whom they share the modern age. ↷