

1 *VOLK AND FÜHRER*

Investigations of Heidegger's Seminar *On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State*

Marion Heinz

Heidegger's seminars *On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State* from Winter Semester 1933–4 and *Hegel on the State* from Winter Semester 1934–5 have provided the fuel for the debate that Emmanuel Faye has rekindled on the question of the nature and extent of the infection of Heidegger's thinking by National Socialism. As one can already gather from the title of Faye's book—*Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–35*¹—the author wants to fortify the widespread (though very controversial) thesis that it was not only in 1933 that “Heidegger devoted himself to putting philosophy at the service of legitimizing and diffusing the very bases of Nazism and Hitlerism.”² There are good reasons why Faye places the seminars of 1933–4 and 1934–5 in the center of his investigations: these are texts—or more precisely, student transcripts of seminar sessions from the period of Heidegger's rectorate, with corrections by his own hand—which were accessible to only a few Heidegger scholars until 1995 and that were published only recently.³ Thus an analysis of these texts can be brought to bear in a project of unmasking the true form of Heideggerian thought, a project that might even manage to persuade the not inconsiderable number of apologists for Heidegger. For the content of these seminars provides nearly seamless support for Faye's central thesis that the substance of Heidegger's philosophy consists in justifying and

politically and propagandistically validating the *Führer* state, the ideology of blood and soil, and other core elements of the Nazi worldview.⁴

For Faye, the seminar of 1933–4 ranks as “the main text: the one in which we see the total identification of Heidegger’s teaching with the principle of Hitlerism itself.”⁵ While Faye claims these transcripts as the decisive evidence for the propagandistic use of thought, we should keep in mind that the texts were not published by Heidegger himself. This does not mean that the content of the transcripts does not in a general way reflect what transpired in these seminars—after all, they were corrected by Heidegger and thus, in a certain sense, authorized. Nonetheless, they do not have the same status as published texts as regards the trustworthiness of their wording and the exact patterns of argumentation. For instance, these transcripts are not free of contradictions and self-corrections of greater or lesser significance. But this also means that they constitute important documentation of Heidegger’s academic instruction during his rectorate and should be valued as such. So even if there are good reasons not to approach these pieces of evidence by means of classic textual analysis, one should at least review and interpret the course of the seminars and their essential contents, in order to then, in a second phase, consider the relevance of these new discoveries for the assessment of Heidegger’s thinking as regards his support for National Socialism. In what follows I will concentrate on the Winter Semester 1933–4 seminar *On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State*.

As traditional as the title of the seminar may seem at first, the protocol for the first session already makes it clear that Heidegger’s discussions are devoted completely to his own philosophical approach. Here nature, history, and the state are understood as the essential domains “in which our Dasein plays itself out and maintains itself” (17). Their order in the title of the seminar corresponds to their objective order, in which nature is the inclusive domain in which history has its place, and the state in turn belongs within history—so that we are dealing with successively narrower domains of Dasein. This order in which one domain is included in another, or belongs within another, is not a logical and conceptual order, even if the title speaks explicitly of “essence and concept.” As domains of existence, their characteristics are not to be developed from epistemological points of view. Instead, they must be conceived in their essence on the basis of the factual positions and attitudes of Dasein toward them (cf. Session 1). What is at stake, then, is a phenomenological investigation that must ascertain what is given and how it is given. In other words, the essence is nothing other than the thing in the How of its original givenness; here, since we are beginning with Dasein, it is clear in advance that the primary access to

the essence of a thing is not made possible by the logical functions of the concept or judgment, or by cognitions determined by these logical forms. The protocols are full of indications by the “seminar leader” that we must avoid theoretical and epistemological prejudices. Nevertheless, Heidegger uses the term “concept.” But the “concept” named in the title of the seminar is never defined here in its general meaning (as, say, existential concepts are defined as a type in *Being and Time*). No general phenomenological concept of the concept is developed, but kinds of the concept are introduced: with regard to all three domains, a formal and a material concept are to be distinguished. By formal concept, Heidegger understands the “way of Being” of something, and by material concept, the totality of what belongs to a certain domain in accordance with this formal concept. Heidegger gives an ontological interpretation to the conceptual relation between intension and extension, in such a way that the formal concept of a thing means the way of Being that determines the thing, a way of Being that is to be exhibited in its own sense and distinguished from others; this way of Being permits us to understand beings as having a certain Being (Session 2). The sum total of the beings that are determined by a particular way of Being is what Heidegger wants to understand in this seminar as a domain or realm. This ontological interpretation of the concept of concept goes hand in hand with a depreciation of logic as the basis of knowledge and an appreciation of language. For according to Heidegger, language is responsible for the connection between way of Being and domain, that is, the formal and material concepts. Here the ontic-ontological function of articulative discourse in *Being and Time*, which is manifested in the hermeneutic “as,” returns in a new form.

Nature cannot be understood adequately in terms of the meaning of the Latin word *natura* (being born), a meaning that has been sedimented in the German *Natur* and English *nature*. Instead, we have to go back to the inception of the Western conception of nature, which is manifest in the Greek word *physis*. The Greek understanding of nature does not yet treat nature as a special domain separate from art; nature, understood formally as a special kind of movement—a “coming-forth-from-itself,” a “being-moved-by-itself,” or a “growth” in the broadest sense—is seen materially in Greek thought as the whole of beings, included in this “conceptual extension” (24). Accordingly, beings as what grows and emerges have the sense of “Being-present,” “Being-in-the-light-of-day”; as such, they are opposed to what is concealed. “Thus, for the Greeks, growth, Being, and Being-unconcealed are bound together in a unity” (27).

History is understood analogously to nature, with regard to its material and formal concept. Materially, history is the entire domain of past, present,

and future happening. Formally, Heidegger defines history as happening, in order to make a transition to the theme of temporality as the phenomenon that comes to expression in the essence of history (25–6). Here too, theory interferes with our access to the phenomena. The Newtonian and Kantian theories of time, which grew on the soil of modern philosophy, must be irrelevant to defining time; instead, we must determine the essence of time on the basis of our relation to time. Unlike *Being and Time*, the seminar begins with the now-time that is accessible in our use of clocks in order to display the original phenomenon of time—temporality as the fundamental constitution of human beings, which in turn is the condition for the everyday experience of time (cf. Session 4). This authentic time is what is decisive for the understanding of history: “we are talking about history as *our* past, as what was the fate of our ancestors and thus is our own” (37). In accordance with *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains the priority of the future in authentic temporality, but draws a conclusion that emphasizes the past: “We persist from the past into the future, and only in this way do we persist in the present” (42). It is decisive for all of Heidegger’s further remarks that this definition of happening is itself indebted to human historical self-understanding—that is, it is “spoken from our own historical Dasein in this moment” and, like all propositions and truths about human beings, “which always have to be attained in one’s own decision,” it is “subject to a certain intelligibility” (37).

These preliminary considerations on the status of the claim to truth of philosophical statements, such as statements on the concept of history, prepare for the explication of the state as the third and narrowest domain of existence. Methodologically, the preliminary considerations serve to legitimate the procedure that Heidegger observed in what follows—namely, to derive the truth about the essence of people and state from historical considerations. For Heidegger, this is justified because knowledge of the state arises from historically motivated decisions (cf. Session 5). As we will see in detail below, Heidegger’s appeals to historical circumstances are fundamental elements of what he conceives as political education. Heidegger categorically rejects the attempts to found the state rationally as a structure of sovereignty by means of the figure of the social contract, which are definitive for modern theories of the state: for Heidegger, the state is not to be understood as an arrangement created by human beings for a particular end (cf. Sessions 5 and 8). Applying the distinction between the formal and material concept to the conception of the state, Heidegger defines the state, as regards its material concept, as *Volk*: “the people is the being that *is* in the manner of a state” (38). Thus the state can be approached formally as “the way of Being of a people” (43).

Nevertheless, it is apparent that Heidegger’s method of defining the state departs significantly from his definition of the other domains of existence: because with the disclosure of authentic temporality and historicity we have reached the foundation of the historical truth that is definitive here, the state cannot be treated using the procedure that has been employed so far to define the essence of a domain—namely, using the formal concept to yield the material concept. The phenomenon under consideration demands the opposite procedure, that is, by reflecting historically on one’s own present, one should bring the definition of the essence of the state into the decisive situation of the moment. In other words, if the concept of the state is approached as a human way of Being, then it is the historically existing human being who puts his own historical truth up for decision with the formal definition of the state. Because the domain of the state is materially the people, and because human beings who have been unified into a people must define themselves on the basis of their particular historical truth, the essence of the state must be derived from its material concept, that is, from historically existing human beings; in contrast, a theory of the state cannot be used to define the entity that has this way of Being. Accordingly, Heidegger embarks on a historical reflection on how the Renaissance and its guiding idea of great men could eventuate in a decline of the political, so that politics could end up as one domain of the will to individual development, alongside other domains such as science and art. The dynamic of specialization of activities and dissociation of the domains of life, set in motion by the will to individual achievement, culminates in the collapse of “our state” that we can ascertain today (42). Heidegger interprets the Renaissance as the beginning of a distortion that extends to the present: the individual human being now becomes the end of Being, and this defines the meaning of all the domains of human life. In Heidegger’s perspective, the liberation of the individual that occurred in the Renaissance corresponds to the liberal concept of the state, which conceives of the state as a means to the end of “the development of the personality in the liberal sense” (52). Like Carl Schmitt, Heidegger sees liberalism as the cause of the decline of the state (although his understanding of liberalism differs from Schmitt’s). The liberal picture of the world and humanity, and the inherent dangers of this picture, must be opposed by philosophy today inasmuch as philosophy seeks to win back the proper rank of politics, understood as the “practical and theoretical occupation . . . having to do with the state” (41). Politics must be enabled to take its place as “the fundamental characteristic of human beings who philosophize within history, and as the Being in which the *state* fully develops, so that the state can truly be called the way of Being of a people” (42–3).

This requires us to take up the Aristotelian doctrine of the human being as *zōon politikon*. With this return to Aristotle, Heidegger initially rejects a purely biologicistic foundation of people and state through the theory of race, yet at the same time he presents his own attempt to found the antidemocratic *Führer* state in terms of existential ontology as the legitimate continuation of the Greek inception. Heidegger interprets the Aristotelian definition of the human being as the political animal as meaning that human beings have the possibility and necessity of forming and completing their individual and communal Being in a community (Session 6). He thus lays out a path to authorizing his own position: for Heidegger, grounding the Being of the state in human Being means founding it in a “historically fateful decision” (45). This appeal to Aristotle, which is decisive for everything that follows, is hardly as innocuous as it may seem at first. Aristotle’s definition of the human being as a political animal is undergirded by a conception of the human being as a rational, speaking animal whose telos, *eudaimonia*, is to be realized in the common deliberative praxis of free and equal citizens; but this conception plays no role in Heidegger’s thought. He simply adopts the formal notion of the teleological orientation of human beings to life in a community, but founds it on his own concept of temporal Dasein.⁶ This philosophical amalgam interprets the essence of the political in a completely new way, which is incompatible with Aristotle, as “historically fateful decision”; furthermore, the state is now newly defined as the human way of Being that springs from this decision, a way of Being that is to be founded and formed by the historical essence of humanity. Heidegger also introduces the concept of the *Volk* on this basis: the people is “something other than the mere sum of the citizens of the state. We mean something even more strongly binding than race and a community of the same stock: namely, the nation, and that means a kind of Being that has grown under a common fate and taken distinctive shape within a *single* state” (43). So what is constitutive for the people is not its natural Being, nor is it a political community that emerges from a social contract among the citizens. Instead, “the Being of the state is anchored in the political Being of the human beings who, as a people, support this state—who decide for it” (45). Accordingly, people and state are based on the historical Being of humanity, whose fundamental possibility and distinctive way of Being is the political.

With this definition of the human being as a political animal, the fundamental traits of existence in *Being and Time*, as well as the relation between individual existence and people in that text, are fundamentally transformed.

For the existential ontology of *Being and Time*, the happening of Dasein is “defined as *destiny*. With this we designate the happening of the

community, of the people” (*Sein und Zeit*, 384). These statements from §74 of *Being and Time*, which remain unclarified in their ontological conditions of possibility, namely their temporal sense, but which have been repeatedly identified as the point of departure for Heidegger’s adoption of National Socialism, are taken up and transformed in this 1933–4 seminar. In *Being and Time*, the happening of the people is grounded in the happening of the particular, individual Dasein, which is essentially a happening-with as a consequence of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, which is determined as a Being-with; but in this seminar, Heidegger implements the political as a central ontological determination of human beings. The conception of the essential relatedness of the particular existing individual to beings that lack Dasein’s type of Being and to beings as Being-with—in such a way that the entirety of these meanings of beings disclosed by one’s own individual Dasein is the world—is now narrowed down to care for Being within the community of the *Volk* and for this community itself. We could sharpen this point by saying that while in *Being and Time* the measure of existing consists solely in whether the particular Dasein grasps itself in its “essence” as a finite domain of projection, in order as such to take decisions on particular matters, Dasein is now conceived as directed teleologically in advance to a particular possibility: existing in the political community. The way in which this highest end is realized now decides how Dasein is. The state as telos of Dasein’s Being now becomes the authentic founder of the meaning of Being: the state is “the most actual actuality that must give all Being new meaning, in a new and original sense. The highest actualization of human Being happens in the state” (64).

This also means a shift in the temporal foundations of existing: who Dasein is, is not based on the way in which temporality temporalizes, but instead, a historical reflection on the situation of the people leads to a sort of appeal to the particular Dasein; in response, the individual Dasein can either show that it is fit for the appeal, or fail. Otherwise than in *Being and Time*, philosophy no longer has the role of calling the particular Dasein to authentic, finite existing by means of existential projections; the task of philosophy is now to interpret the historical moment and to bring Dasein before its historical decision as a political being.

The formation of the political as a fundamental possibility of Dasein cannot, then, simply be left to the existentiell resolve of the particular Dasein. Instead, it needs “political education, that is, what leads us into our own political Being” (45), or in other words, “the creation of a new fundamental attitude of the will” (63). The task of philosophy is to prepare a knowledge of the essence of the state and people that is

intrinsically oriented to praxis, or as Heidegger says, to the “leap into the accomplishment of the goal” (61). This knowledge—which is also communicated concretely in the situation of this seminar—can “now” address itself only to individuals: “Every individual must now reflect in order to arrive at knowledge of the people and state and his own responsibility” (46). It is not accidental that Heidegger presents this imperative, as well as the essential contents of this knowledge, as the result of reflections on the present political situation as the moment in which a Third Reich is being founded. In a new historical reflection that now concentrates on the fate of the Reich, Heidegger considers the continuities and ruptures between the first and second German Empires and tries to define the present situation as marked by the collapse of the Second Reich, a collapse partly due to Bismarck.⁷ In accordance with the insight into the essential historicity of truth, it is in such a historical consideration of the fate of the German Reich that the fundamental insights into the construction and structure of the state are to be gained—insights that are supposed to be definitive for philosophical education in the present, which is understood as a moment of decision. As befits the historicity of the truth of the knowledge that Heidegger is seeking here, after critically evaluating the subjectivism that is set free in the Renaissance, he reflects historically on the concrete situation of human beings existing here and now; the function of this reflection is to determine the contents and the addressees of philosophical education, in order to prepare the historical moment of decision for the new Third Reich.

We can sum up Heidegger’s philosophical reflections on the state in the following sketch:

Unlike in Plato’s *Republic*, the educators, the philosophers, should not also be the rulers of the state. “For the origin of all state action and leadership does not lie in knowledge; it lies in Being. Every leader *is* a leader; he must be a leader in accordance with the marked form of his Being; and he understands, considers, and brings about what people and state are, in the living development of his own essence” (45). “A leader does not need to be educated politically—but a band of guardians in the people does, a band that helps to bear responsibility for the state. For every state and all knowledge about the state grows within a political tradition. Where this nourishing, securing soil is lacking, even the best idea for a state cannot take root, grow from the sustaining womb of the people, and develop” (45). So according to Heidegger, the state is constituted in such a way that it is led by a *Führer*, a leader qualified by his own Being, who must rely on a political nobility as the guardians of the political tradition. But because the Second Reich under Bismarck, unlike the First Reich under

Otto the Great and Prussia under Frederick the Great, “overlooked” the need to root the state in a political nobility, this tradition was cut off with the collapse of the Second Reich, a collapse that was due in no small part to this neglect. And this break is the reason why “now” every individual is challenged to develop knowledge about the state and take responsibility for the state. “The state depends on our alertness, our readiness, and our life. The manner of our Being marks the Being of our state” (46). So according to Heidegger, philosophy must reflect historically on the “fate” of the German Reich and thus disclose its own present as a historical moment in which philosophy can carry out this “development and transformation of thinking about the state”; this development will put individuals in a position to learn “that their individual life decides the fate of the people and state—either supports it or rejects it” (49). Accordingly, philosophy itself must ground itself historically on a “reflection” on the fate of the German Reich, for its task of developing thought about the state is determined by the historical moment (Session 7). And the philosophy that thus grasps itself in its own momentaneity prepares the ground for individuals to be in the moment, in the sense that they will decide the Being of the people.

Even the temporal ontology of Dasein in *Being and Time* did not understand itself as having the task of ascertaining facts about Dasein, but of bringing Dasein before the truth of its existing so that it might decide on its own whether it corresponded as an entity to this way of Being (*Sein und Zeit*, 315). Now this evocative understanding of truth is decisively transformed: on the basis of the temporal conception of Dasein, Heidegger develops a sort of meta-reflection on political history whose intention it is to bring Dasein, understood as a political being, into the situation of deciding for a particular form of community-building. The temporal determination of Dasein is saddled with these considerations on political history as a second level of temporal interpretation. Now philosophy is put into the position of identifying particular, concrete possibilities of existing—which according to *Being and Time* can arise only from the individual Dasein that grasps itself within the limits of its Being; these possibilities are to be identified as decisive for a particular historical-political human situation and elevated to the rank of the tribunal that should decide on the momentaneity of existing. The existential characteristics of individual Dasein lose their formal character and are instituted as concretely determined, philosophically authorized standards for the political situation of Heidegger’s time when he demands that the present be determined on the basis of the future, so that by taking over the fate of the German Reich, one should grasp the founding

of a Third Reich that overcomes the collapse of the Second Reich but preserves its essence.

These preliminary clarifications of the addressees and contents of political education are carried forward with an explicit explanation of the relation between people and state. This relation is defined more precisely as a reciprocal one: the people forms and characterizes [prägt] itself in the state, and the state gives the people its form and character (Session 5). If it is furthermore the case that the people is the entity that relates to its state as to its own Being (Session 7), we must explicate the relation between people and state further by way of the relation between entity and Being. Being is said in many ways, and what is distinctive of human Being consists, as Heidegger says here, in that the human being has consciousness of his own Being and the Being of other beings; consequently, he can be concerned with his own Being (cf. Session 7). But with this, human beings—unlike animals—are also in danger of becoming “unconscious, derelict, or indifferent” in relation to their own Being, and thus losing “their most proper worth” (48). Through their knowing and caring relation to Being, human beings are confronted with the Nothing in a twofold way: they can themselves become null through lack of consciousness, and they have to “expose themselves to the danger of the Nothing, of nihilism, in order to grasp the meaning of their Being by overcoming nihilism” (47). Obviously two different thoughts are linked here.

On the one hand, Heidegger refers to the initially trivial state of affairs that the human being, as Dasein, understands Being—and thus is confronted with the Nothing inasmuch as Being is a nonentity, and so in a certain sense a Nothing. Only on the basis of the analysis of anxiety does the condition that we are held out into the Nothing—a condition that is intrinsic to the understanding of Being—gain a voice: the relations to beings that we rely on become null so that we can experience the uncanniness of the world as world. “Within the self-evident there suddenly opens an abyss, unsurveyable and dangerous, but unavoidable for whoever truly *questions*” (47). The meaninglessness of beings at the same time opens up the possibility and necessity of Dasein for it to project itself in its own Being. This bold move [Zumutung] is decisive for understanding Heidegger’s decisionism: without an orientation to rational principles, Dasein is resolved upon itself as an entity that understands Being and decides upon particular, concrete possibilities of existence. The choice of these possibilities is based solely on the undisguised realization [Vollzug] of Dasein’s finite, temporal existing.

On the other hand, nihilism here is also probably to be understood in Nietzsche’s sense, as a historical movement that brings to light the nullity

of all values. It is not accidental, then, that there are echoes of the last man, from the prologue to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, when Heidegger speaks of a lack of consciousness that makes man himself null. Only if man is defined as Dasein—as Heidegger will openly say—can this half-hearted nihilism be countered, for Dasein cannot have recourse to values or rational principles. In its understanding of Being, Dasein exposes itself to nihilism and at the same time overcomes it by taking itself over in its own nullity. Thus, the connection between politics and philosophy that has already been articulated in the definition of the political essence of the human being is now invoked again. Only the philosophically existing human being who faces the abyss of the understanding of Being can escape the danger of his own nullity by grasping the meaning of Being in the overcoming of nihilism.

To further clarify the relation between people and state, Heidegger repeatedly draws an analogy to the relation between an individual and his own Being. Just as the individual has a caring, knowing relation to his Being, “the people as a being has a knowing fundamental relation to its state”; just as the individual “loves his Dasein in the world, the people wills the state as its way to be as a people” (48). The existential-ontological grounding of the state by way of this analogy culminates in the interpretation of constitution and law as the actualization of “our decision for the state,” as “factual attestations of what we take to be our historical task as a people, the task that we are trying to live out” (48–9). The “constitution of the state is . . . an essential expression of what the people takes to be the meaning of its own Being (48). It is superfluous to say that every form of a rational grounding of the state, or a rational system of law, is eliminated here: Without being able to indicate more precisely what we are to understand by the will of the people (cf. Session 9), Heidegger surrenders state and law to a collective decisionism that can hardly be concealed by the appeal to historical roots. The desperate pathos of this decisionism as the founding of meaning in the confrontation with nihilism is nothing but embarrassing.

The modern idea of the state fundamentally conceives of it as an order of rule grounded contractually by free and equal citizens; for Rousseau and Kant this is an order of freedom, so that the state must preserve the freedom and equality of those who submit to the social contract. Heidegger abandons this idea in favor of the medieval idea of a state order grounded in the relations of rule and service among human beings. “Like the medieval order of life, the order of the state today is sustained by the free, pure will to following and leadership, that is, to struggle and loyalty” (49). According to Heidegger, rule (*Herrschaft*) has nothing to do with “power, enslavement,

oppression, or compulsion”; here rule is defined positively as subordination to a “common task”:

Only where the leader and the led bind themselves together to *one* fate and fight to actualize *one* idea does true order arise. Then spiritual superiority and freedom develop as a deep dedication of all forces to the people, the state, as the most rigorous breeding, as engagement, endurance, solitude, and love. Then the existence and superiority of the leader sinks into the Being, the soul of the people, and binds it in this way with originality and passion to the task. And if the people feels this dedication, it will let itself be led into struggle, and it will love struggle and will it. It will develop and persist in its forces, be faithful and sacrifice itself. In every new moment, the leader and the people will join more closely in order to bring about the essence of their state, that is, their Being; growing with each other, they will set their meaningful historical Being and will against the two threatening powers of death and the devil—that is, ruination and decline from their own essence. [49]

This harmonizing interpretation of the relation between the people and the individual to the state, and of the leader to the people, depends on affirming a common fate and serves all the clichés of heroic nihilism. The harmony he depicts does not restrain Heidegger at all from taking the further step, when he clarifies the nature of ruling, to answer the question of power wholeheartedly in favor of the leader. “Mastery is power in the sense of implementation of the will” (58). What distinguishes willing from wishing is that will always grasps the end with a view to the means and ways of its realization. “Will grasps the situation, the whole fullness of time; in the will works the *kairos* that demands resoluteness and action” (59). the will of the *Führer* is directed to the will of the *Volk*, “in order to elicit this or that action or attitude” in this community of wills (59). Heidegger has no qualms about misusing Kant to characterize this action of the leader as moral-practical action, rather than instrumental action, because of its relation to human beings as free and moral; he goes on to describe those who are subject to this will euphemistically as the ruled, but will not qualify them as oppressed (61). The philosopher Martin Heidegger teaches, in February 1934, that it is time to establish such an order of rule, that “our task today is to direct the fundamental attitude of our communal Being toward this actuality of people and leader” (60). His account of the state in general, in terms of Being and beings, is finally supplemented by a view “from below, in a certain sense, from the people and the state, from us ourselves” (52).

From this perspective, the spatiality of the people is understood as a leading principle of individuation. Reacting critically to Hans Grimm’s slogan “people without space,” Heidegger explicates his own notions of “people in space”:

Relatedness to space, that is, the mastering of space and becoming marked by space, belong together with the essence and the kind of Being of a people. So it is not right to see the sole ideal for a people in rootedness in the soil, in attachment, in settledness, which find their cultivation and realization in farming and which give the people a special endurance in its propagation, in its growth, in its health. It is no less necessary to rule over the soil and space, to work outwards into the wider expanse, to interact with the outside world. The concrete way in which a people effectively works in space and forms space necessarily includes both: rootedness in the soil and interaction. [55]

Heidegger defines the relation between the two aspects of a people’s relation to space by explaining that rootedness as the expression of the homeland determined by birth can become the way of Being of a people only if it is supplemented by working out into the expanse, by interaction. Thus he distinguishes between the space of a people and the space of its state. “In summary, then, we can say that the space of a people, the soil of a people, reaches as far as members of this people have found a homeland and have become rooted in the soil; and that the space of the state, the territory, finds its borders by interacting, by working out into the wider expanse.” (56). The political implications of these existential-ontological interpretations of “people in space” become manifest, first, as regards so-called nomads, and secondly, as regards Germans living outside the borders of the Reich. History teaches us about nomads in general that they “have not only been made nomadic by the desolation of wastelands and steppes, but they have also often left wastelands behind them where they found fruitful and cultivated land” (55). This means, then, that the specific living-space of a people marks it with a sort of essence that it also displays in quite different spaces. This sets up a criterion of exclusion in accordance with which certain peoples do not fit into, or belong to, certain living-spaces. Thus Heidegger not only adopts the Nazi ideology of blood and soil (even if it is transformed in terms of existential ontology), he also links it ideologically to an overt antisemitism when he says that “the nature of our German space . . . will perhaps never be revealed at all” to Semitic nomads (56). In plain language, the Jews as nomads are a danger to the German people in that they tend to devastate the living-space of this people. And they stand

outside the possibility of experiencing the kind of revelation of nature that belongs to this space, for “this original participation in the knowledge of the people cannot be taught” (56); thus they are essentially marked as non-Germans. In the place of biologicistic theories of the worthlessness of the Jewish people, Heidegger affirms a racism founded on existential ontology with his theory of the Jews as aliens and enemies of the life of the German people.

By way of the second aspect of a people’s relation to space, working into the expanse, Heidegger tries to explain why the ethnic Germans who live outside German territory are suffering from a sort of essential lack: they do have a German homeland, but because they do not belong to the German state, the Reich, they are deprived of “their authentic way of Being” (55). Every participant in the seminar can easily infer in what way such an essential lack should be remedied.

In this consideration of people and state “from below,” the relation of the three domains of nature, history, and state presents itself as follows: “nature works on the human being, roots him in the soil, only when nature belongs as an environment, so to speak, to the people whose member that human being is. The homeland becomes the way of Being of a people only when the homeland becomes expansive, when it interacts with the outside—when it becomes a state” (55).

This means that the natural influences on human beings become a way of Being that determines them as historical beings only through the state. If the Being of man as a political entity is fulfilled in the state, every domain of Dasein is also teleologically oriented to the state; that is, as domains of Dasein they must be defined in their sense on the basis of the state.

As the narrowest domain of human Dasein, the state is also the “most actual actuality,” “the highest actualization of human Being” (64). In his reflections based on the concrete spatiality of people and state, Heidegger goes so far as to identify the state as the most actual actuality, in the sense of the essential completion of the human being, with the really existing *Führer* state of National Socialism: “Our task today is to direct the fundamental attitude of our communal Being toward this actuality of people and leader in which both as a single actuality are not to be separated” (60). But what is the justification for this Hegelianizing notion of the unification of essence and actuality in the recognition of the actual state as the essential fulfillment of the German people? The definition of the state in general must evidently be brought together with the concrete characterization if we are to bring the justifying connections into view: the leader has the most powerful at his disposal—a will that comprehends “the situation, the whole fullness of time” (59); the “implementation of the will [means] awakening the same

will in another, that is, the same goal and engagement or accomplishment. The implementation of the will, in this sense, transforms people in proportion to the greatness of the effective will” (62). Thus, “The Führer state, as we have it, means the completion of the historical development: the actualization of the people in the leader” (64). The *Volk*, which has already been constituted by its relation to space as homeland, is first formed into a people in the highest and authentic sense, as a community of will, by the *Führer* and his powerful will. If the state is not to be understood as a contractually established arrangement for the securing of law, but as a destined community, then the community of the state can be founded only by the will of the leader. The leader’s will—bound to nothing, freed of all values and rational principles, exposed to the pure Nothing—is what creates the political community by transforming the will of the individual. In resolute obedience to the leader, Dasein can complete itself both as a being that understands Being and as a being that belongs to a community. Heidegger’s Being-historical legitimation of the Hitler state thus depends decisively on the thought that in the Being of the *Führer* the historical truth of Being is grasped in such a way that by the transformation of individual will a political community can arise in which “all Being” can receive a new meaning (64). With the affirmation of the will of the leader, the individual does not subordinate himself to an alien will, but finds the highest actualization of his essence, insofar as his historical and political Being are brought into convergence: Dasein brings itself into the historical truth of its existence, so that from this truth there simultaneously springs the true form of political community. Being political in this way, as historical existence, and existing historically as a political being, means being involved in the truth-happening of the creation of a new meaning of Being. And with this, the true rank of politics as the “fundamental characteristic of human beings who philosophize within history” (42) is restored.

Thus, the characterization of historicity as the fundamental constitution of the Being of Dasein has proved to be the basis of Heidegger’s political doctrines. This justifies the historicity of all truth, so that it becomes imperative to prepare a moment in which the political future will be decided, and to reveal by means of historical considerations which tasks and particular contents are the issues that must be decided at this moment. This philosophy of history does not just define the role and task of philosophy in general as an authority that evokes historical decisions, it also defines the particular task of philosophy in this historical situation—philosophy must work against the decline of the political that is evident in the present, as a result of individualization, specialization, and dissociation, by winning back the rank of politics. At the end of his seminar Heidegger

names three great “disintegrations” that have determined modernity: the disintegration of Christian faith and the self-grounding of humanity in reason; the disintegration of community and the elevation of the individual as the final court of appeal; and finally, the separation of mind and body (63–4). Heidegger sees the distinctive character of the historical situation of his time—again, in a Hegelianizing perspective—in the fact that we must supersede these modern oppositions. But this is to be achieved not by reason, but on the basis of Dasein as defined by its understanding of Being. The truth of existing that consists in grasping the meaning of Being by overcoming nihilism is to be brought into effect as the principle of constitution for all human relationships. Only in this way does Heidegger think that any future can be secured for Western man, who exists on the basis of philosophy (Session 8). In the National Socialist *Führer* state, Heidegger recognizes the actuality that fulfills or can fulfill this demand, if it can successfully be transformed into the essential (Session 9).

There is no doubt that this seminar proves that Heidegger used his philosophy from *Being and Time* to legitimate National Socialism, the *Führer* state, obedience, sacrifice, and struggle—as well as antisemitism and the particular mission of the German people in the ideologically invoked history of the West. He rejects law and democracy and declares that reason and criticism are obsolete, by appealing to existence and its historicity. The Third Reich, which he proclaims as the salvation from all the dangers of modernity, is grounded both as a whole and in all its elements on existential ontology and the history of Being: The *Führer* legitimates himself as such through his Being; the *Volk* has an existentiell relation of care to its state and its *Führer*; rule is a community of fate under the will of the *Führer*. All these relations are carried by decisions whose end is established by analysis of the factual—of history or the actual *Führer* state.

This seminar also validates the clear-sighted diagnosis of Heidegger's student Herbert Marcuse from 1934. Marcuse recognized existentialism as the philosophical basis for the totalitarian concept of the state.⁸ Marcuse relied on Carl Schmitt to demonstrate the intrinsic connection between the totalitarian concept of the state and existentialism, but the text of this 1933–4 seminar now proves that Heidegger himself transferred his philosophy of *Being and Time* into a political existentialism whose points of agreement with Carl Schmitt would need to be investigated in a separate study.⁹

Marcuse sees Heidegger as a thinker who betrayed his own origins and ended in existentiell opportunism, while Faye interprets Heideggerian thought as the “deliberate introduction of the foundations of Nazism and Hitlerism into philosophy and its teaching.”¹⁰ We must raise the question of whether Marcuse's interpretation of the doctrine of *Being*

and Time is too conciliatory. Marcuse blames Heidegger's deviation on a subjective error, and Marcuse himself initially took up *Being and Time* as a promising attempt to develop a conception of the concrete subject. In my own view, neither this occasionalist view nor Faye's notion of a seamless continuity between *Being and Time* and the political philosophy and propaganda of the Nazi period is correct. Under the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy, which Heidegger confronted intensively starting in 1929, the doctrines of *Being and Time* are put into the perspective of the history of Being; in this perspective, they are built up into the philosophical potential of overcoming nihilism, and only then do they become serviceable for a justification of National Socialism.¹¹ The confrontation with the breaks and losses of modernity and with Nietzsche's radical diagnosis of nihilism forces Heidegger to stop emphasizing only the meaning-potential of individual Dasein. Only the ambition to give Being as a whole a new meaning, which develops from his intensive engagement with Nietzsche beginning in 1929 and which cannot even be formulated in terms of *Being and Time*, promises the possibility of overcoming the epochal crisis. Against the disappearance of all greatness, against the anxiety in the face of the collapse of philosophizing Western man into unconsciousness, Heidegger deploys the doctrines of *Being and Time* as a decisive reservoir of salvation.

Heidegger's approach in terms of man understood as Dasein allows him a twofold connection to Nietzsche. First, by establishing pre-rational structures of understanding of Being as the human essence, Heidegger satisfies Nietzsche's critique of reason. Heidegger agrees with Nietzsche that reason is in no position to get a grip on the epochal crisis of meaning. Secondly, the understanding of Being as such is qualified in such a way that it both exposes itself to nihilism and in itself offers the possibility of overcoming nihilism. The understanding of man as Dasein thus proves to be the only philosophical position that is up to the level and radicality of Nietzsche's thought and is to be developed on the basis of a different conception of the overcoming of nihilism than the one offered by Nietzsche—the self-affirmation of will in knowledge and the greatest burden, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence of the same.¹² If the understanding of Being as such is thought as nihilistic yet at the same time as a capacity that can overcome nihilism, everything depends on directing human relations as a whole toward founding a new meaning of Being. The historical crisis of meaning cannot be brought under control by an appeal to the individual to exist authentically; for it requires a collective to be directed toward a new meaning of Being—and this means, for Heidegger, toward the leader as the highest potency of the understanding

of Being and of the implementation of a new meaning of Being that originates in his own Being. The *Führer* as the figure that links Nietzsche's overman and the resolute Dasein of *Being and Time* is a creator in a double sense: he projects a new meaning of Being and also makes this meaning dominant by transforming human will. A turning of need,¹³ in the sense I have sketched, is thus possible only when philosophy becomes political and politics is brought by philosophy into its true essence as the destined founding of Being. The presumption of a *salto mortale* that perverts the "autonomy" of individual existence into following the *Führer* must be understood as the *ultima ratio* of a thinking that believes it can counter the abyss of world history only by implementing a new, supra-individual way to establish meaning, which renounces rational principles. The complete disempowerment of reason forces this philosophy to resort to the factual, to elevate the actual charismatic leader himself as the "principle" that promises the turning of need. Heidegger's affirmation of the "*Führer* principle" arises neither from some banal political opportunism nor from mere decisionism, but from the philosophical conviction that only a philosophy based on the concepts of temporality and historicity can offer an adequate answer to the challenge of nihilism by setting free the *kairos* in the shape of Adolf Hitler. The notion of demanding submission to the *Führer's* will and using philosophy for its legitimation is revealed as the paradoxical figure of thought, which bears Christian features, of winning oneself by giving oneself up—an *auto-da-fé* of philosophy in decline, staged as an ultimate rescue and revolt. In an unparalleled perversion, while displaying the pathos of extreme radicality, Heidegger makes his thinking abet the fulfillment of the factual.

2 HEIDEGGER IN PURGATORY

Peter E. Gordon

"History is always written from the sedentary point of view [. . .]. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history."

GILLES DELEUZE AND FÉLIX GUATTARI, *A Thousand Plateaus*

At this late date, it may seem there is little more that could be said concerning *l'affaire Heidegger*. That Heidegger was not merely a political *naïf* but an ideologically committed partisan of the Third Reich can no longer count as scandalous news but should be obvious to anyone who confronts the documentary evidence with open eyes. Nor can we take comfort in drawing a clean line between his politics and his philosophy. All too often in the early 1930s Heidegger mobilized the intrinsic terms of his own philosophy (Dasein, Being, and so forth) to express his political support for the regime. No less troubling, however, is that even in the postwar era Heidegger never offered an unambiguous explanation for either his actions or his readiness to justify his Nazi commitments with philosophical appeals.¹ Even sympathetic readers have felt troubled at the possibility of a "positive implication" between Heidegger's politics and his philosophy.²

For many years, the response of critics to this situation could be located on a spectrum, from totalizing condemnation to apologetic containment. At one pole lie the critics who find the evidence so damning they no longer feel Heidegger's works merit inclusion in the philosophical canon at all. At the other pole are readers who wish to

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