George Pattison, The Later Heidegger, London: Routledge, 2001.





# 1933 and after

## Heidegger's silence

Heidegger's philosophical career is controversial for the same reasons that all philosophical careers are controversial: the interpretation and evaluation of his work remain debated in the same sorts of ways as in the case of a Wittgenstein, a Sartre or a Russell. But there is a further dimension of controversy in the case of Heidegger that is virtually unique amongst modern philosophers, owing to the fact that in May 1933 he very publicly joined the Nazi Party, was elected Rector of Freiburg University, and set about enthusiastically promoting the policy of *Gleichschaltung* (or 'co-ordination'), whereby, in the cause of national unity, the traditional independence of the university was to be subordinated to the policies of the Hitler regime. Although Heidegger resigned from the rectorship a year later and gradually drifted away from the Party, to the point where his lectures were monitored by Party officials, he never decisively repudiated the Nazi regime and, after the War, never made more

than the most enigmatic of comments on the Holocaust nor acknowledged his own responsibility as a public servant for helping to create the climate in which the totalitarian state could take root and flourish.

We shall return to the question of the nature and extent of Heidegger's involvement in National Socialism, but first we have to ask whether – apart from the fact that it has been one of the most hotly debated points of Heidegger studies in the last ten years – this is an issue that should concern us in a study devoted to the philosophical aspects of Heidegger's thought and, especially, to his later thought. After all, ever since Thales fell down a well while looking up at the stars it has been customary to regard philosophers as rather impractical characters whose absorption in 'higher things' often blinds them to the realities of everyday life, including the realities of social and political life. Consequently, if Heidegger is not primarily a political philosopher in the narrow sense (though this is not, of course, a question we have yet addressed, let alone decided), do his personal political views and actions really matter philosophically? Can we not just, regretfully, shrug our shoulders and say 'What a pity that such a great philosopher was such a political ass'?

Now, unless one is committed to the kind of Marxist approach to philosophy that sees every nuance of theory as charged with ideological significance, this is perhaps in many cases a possible line of argument. If we were to ransack the biographies, private papers and correspondence of many great philosophers we would almost certainly come up with a great number of peculiar and even distasteful opinions on various aspects of political and moral life, including gender, race, democracy, crime and punishment and many other issues, in addition to evidence of appalling or idiotic personal conduct. In many cases, however, we could (or, at least, we usually do) hold such shortcomings at arm's length and refuse to allow them any significance with regard to our philosophical evaluation of the author concerned.

Such a separating-out of the personal from the philosophical may seem appropriate in the case of Heidegger also. Certainly there is some evidence that, if not politically innocent, he was politically inept. The rapid failure of his rectorship and his hasty retreat from active political involvement, together

with anecdotal evidence as to the more ludicrous aspects of his behaviour in 1933–4 could well suggest the image of a head-in-the-clouds philosopher getting worsted in the rough-and-tumble of real political life, and being driven back into the seclusion of his study. On this view the episode of the rectorship was no more than a bout of madness, a momentary aberration that does not disclose anything about Heidegger the thinker.

It would be possible to go further in support of this view by emphasising the need for a more than usual level of historical imagination and sensibility in trying to make judgments about the conduct of German citizens in 1933. Above all, we have to remember that no one then knew what we know about the final outcome of the whole Nazi misadventure. Germans who voted for Hitler in 1933 were not voting for the Holocaust, they were voting for a right-wing, nationalistic party, with clearly illiberal and anti-Semitic tendencies, that was prepared to define and to defend what it regarded as the territorial integrity of the nation with military force. None of that, however, made it obviously a party of genocide. If Heidegger erred, many others also erred, their desire for strong leadership and national renewal (powerful rallying-calls even in mature democracies) blinding them to the true nature of the beast they were about to unleash. It was not impossible – foolish perhaps, but not impossible – to believe that anti-Jewish violence was a fringe phenomenon that would be curbed once the Party was securely settled in power. Even some German Jews, including prominent academics, expressed enthusiasm for the new regime (see Safranski 1998: 230). Karl Jaspers, whose wife was of Jewish origin and who was generally held to have conducted himself during the Hitler years in such a way as to be beyond reproach, responded positively to Heidegger's inaugural address as Rector, despite the fact that its rhetoric was richly imbued with Nazi images and associations. Outside Germany there were many admirers of the new regime. It is a sign of the times that Albert Speer's design for the approach avenue to the Nuremberg Stadium where Nazi Party rallies were held won the Grand Prix at the 1937 Paris World Fair.

Heidegger erred, foolishly, we might conclude, but understandably – and to understand is, of course, to forgive.

Nevertheless there are several points we should consider before settling for this relatively comfortable solution.

Firstly, and most importantly, we cannot but take into account the sheer enormity of the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. As I have already said, the German public at large did not vote 'for' the 'Final Solution' in 1933, and perhaps few in the Party envisaged anything like that as a clearly defined goal at that point. We cannot blame Heidegger for not foreseeing that outcome. However, it is deeply troubling that after the War, and after the evidence of the Holocaust had been made public, Heidegger said little or nothing to show either that he grasped the import of what had taken place or that he had any deep regrets relating to it. The occasions when he was faced with the question did not elicit anything like a clear and distinct response. When Herbert Marcuse, a former student, wrote to him in 1947 requesting a clarification of his position, Heidegger replied that the charge of genocide could only be justified if, at the same time, one made the same charge against the victorious Allies' treatment of the East Germans (Wolin 1993: 152ff; Ott 1994: 192–3).[1]

Two crucial texts come from Heidegger's lectures to the Club in Bremen in 1949. In the lecture 'The Enframing' Heidegger drew an analogy between the death camps and industrial production in general: 'Agriculture is now a motorised food-industry – in essence the same as the manufacturing of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the starving of nations, the same as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs' (Young 1997: 172). This, though brief, is a complex assertion and brings into play some of the fundamental assumptions about the nature and the threat of technology that are so important for the whole thinking of the later Heidegger and that we shall be examining in more detail in the next chapter. One way of taking it would be to see in it a simple – and gross – failure to recognise the unique enormity of the Holocaust. Thus Miguel de Beistegui in his study *Heidegger and the Political* describes it as 'a failure of thinking itself' because it ignores the singularity of Auschwitz, 'this gap in history, this black hole from which we must learn to rethink light and reinvent the day' (de Beistegui 1998: 154). Instead, according to de Beistegui, Heidegger integrates Auschwitz into a class

of events that, properly seen, just aren't on the same scale. More sympathetically, Julian Young has argued that such a 'damning' reading of the text ignores what is most obvious in it, that 'the force of the linkages in the passage is not to minimise the moral horror of the Holocaust, but rather to maximise, to render vivid, a sense of horror at the contemplated means of winning the Cold War and at modern methods of food production' (Young 1997: 187). Young goes on to point out that Heidegger is not, as a casual reading might suggest, asserting the moral equivalence of modern methods of food production and the Holocaust, but is suggesting that both are manifestations (and this does not mean identical or morally identical manifestations) of the same essence of technology that is the metaphysical truth of modernity. If we were to push the defence of Heidegger further, and this is a point that Young also makes, we might read the passage as implying that, so long as the danger concealed in the essence of technology remains unrecognised and unnamed, further Holocausts will recur. If this reading is sustained, then Heidegger could indeed be said to be taking the Holocaust seriously as a decisive warning from history.

In another Bremen lecture, 'The Danger', Heidegger said the following: 'Hundreds of thousands die *en masse*. Do they *die*? They succumb. They are done in. They become mere quanta, items in the business of manufacturing corpses. Do they die? They are liquidated inconspicuously in extermination camps ... But to die is to endure death in its essence' (Young 1997: 172). Again the reference is ambiguous. Heidegger's critics argue that he here endorses the executioners' dehumanisation of their victims, that it reduces the Jews murdered in the camps to items on an industrial conveyor belt. Again, Young offers an interpretation that says almost the opposite. In revealing that this is indeed the executioners' perspective, Young claims, Heidegger in fact subjects that view to the most extreme censure. Not only do we need the context of Heidegger's whole critique of technology to understand what is being said here, we also need to be aware of the significance of death, of being able to die, for Heidegger – and death, as we saw in the previous chapter, was a central theme in early and in later Heidegger alike. Already in *Being and Time* he had declared that only Dasein, only human individuals can *die* in the fullest sense, by deliberately

choosing to take upon themselves the burden of their mortality. Plants and animals, by way of contrast, only perish. (BT: 47/240–1) Not dissimilarly, the later Heidegger speaks of death as 'the shrine of Nothing' and, as such, 'the shelter of Being'. If we hear Heidegger's words about the extermination camps in this context, then, we might well hear them as an indictment of the desecration of this shrine by the managers of the liquidation process and therefore an ultimate denial of the humanity and dignity of their victims – compared, say, to some 'traditional' forms of execution that allow the victim the consolation of religion, the opportunity to deliver a last word, to say or to write a last farewell or time to smoke a final cigarette. In this light, Heidegger is deepening rather than trivialising our understanding of the crimes of the perpetrators.

Yet, even on the most generous readings of these pivotal texts, many of Heidegger's philosophical admirers might wish that he had named and repudiated the crimes of the Party to which he at one time belonged in simpler, clearer, unambiguous words. In this respect one might compare his attitude with that of his Japanese contemporary, Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962). Tanabe played a highly influential role in Japanese philosophy in the 1930s, but in the closing stages of the war arrived at a vivid sense of his own culpability with regard to the catastrophe brought upon his country by the imperialist policies to which he had given philosophical legitimacy. This realisation led him to completely recast his philosophical position and to practise 'philosophy as metanoetics' (deriving from the New Testament Greek term 'metanoia', meaning 'repentance').[2] But there is nothing analogous to this in the case of Heidegger. Even Heidegger's defenders have found themselves embarrassed and chagrined, experiencing what Paul Celan, perhaps the most significant poet to have endured and survived the camps, experienced when he visited Heidegger in July 1967, writing in the visitors' book of his hope 'of a word to come in my heart.' Yet neither on this or on their subsequent meeting did any word come.[3]

## 1933

We have run on ahead of the actual events of 1933–4, and the question of Heidegger's post-war silence does not of itself decide the question as to the

extent either of his active involvement in Nazism or, more importantly to us, of the entanglement of his philosophy in Nazi ideology.

There is much in these years that remains debated. Heidegger's own version of events, at best extremely sketchy, has been extensively challenged by recent literature, most notably in the biographical study *Heidegger: A Political Life* by Hugo Ott. What is, however, not in doubt is the fact of the rhetorical tone and, in some cases, the overt political content of many of Heidegger's public statements in these crucial years.

Most notorious, precisely because most public, is the *Rektoratsrede*, Heidegger's inaugural address as Rector of Freiburg University, delivered on 27 May 1933. Heidegger himself had been involved in preparing the programme of events, in which the 'German Greeting' ('Heil Hitler') was prescribed and the Horst Wessel song was to be sung – a popular Nazi marching song that included such verses as 'Raise high the flag, stand rank on rank together! / Stormtroopers march with firm and valiant tread. / Comrades gunned down by Red Front and reaction / March on in spirit, swelling still our ranks' (Ott 1994: 152).

Heidegger was to contest the interpretation of the address as a political statement, asserting that it was simply a development of the 'fundamental questions of thinking' that had been broached in *Being and Time*. 'The question which concerned me directly as a teacher in the university was the question concerning the meaning of the sciences and, in connection with this, the question of the determination of the task of the university' (Wolin 1993: 95). Now clearly the address *is* concerned with the nature of the university and the meaning of the sciences and can, as de Beistegui has interestingly demonstrated, be contextualised in an ongoing debate about the nature and organisation of academic life in Germany that reaches back to the early years of the nineteenth century and beyond (de Beistegui 1998: 35ff.). However, the manner in which this concern is articulated in the address exploits the characteristic rhetoric of Nazi speechifying, curiously fused with the language of *Being and Time*, and issues in a call to heroic confrontation with a singular moment of decision.

> The teachers and students who constitute the rector's following will awaken and gain strength only through being truly and collectively rooted in the essence of the German university. This essence will attain clarity, rank, and power, however, only when the leaders are, first and foremost and at all times, themselves led by the inexorability of that spiritual mission which impresses onto the fate of the German Volk the stamp of their history ... Does this essence truly have the power to shape our existence? It does, but only if we *will* the essence fully ... The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science as the will to the historical spiritual mission of the German Volk as a Volk that knows itself in its state ... [Teachers and students must] stand firm in the face of German fate extreme in its extreme distress
>
> (Wolin 1993: 29–30)

This will to the essence of science must, Heidegger continues, be developed in relation to the original beginning of science amongst the Greeks, but it is also what creates for the German *Volk* today 'a truly *spiritual* world': 'And the *spiritual world* of a Volk is not its cultural superstructure, just as little as it is its arsenal of useful knowledge and values; rather, it is the power that comes from preserving at the most profound level the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood [*Boden und Blut*] of a Volk' (Wolin 1993: 33–4). These forces have awoken amongst the German students who are now resolutely and fatefully 'on the march', with Heidegger, their rector, at their head. But what is to be achieved by this march? Firstly, that 'the much praised "academic freedom" is being banished from the German university, for this freedom was false, because it was only negating' (*ibid.*: 34). Instead, academic life will put itself under the threefold constraint of the essential bonds of society: ethnicity and nationhood, as realised in the obligation of work for the state; the bond of mutual defence, realised in the obligation of military service; and the bond that lies in the spiritual mission of the *Volk*, the service of knowledge.

In upbeat mode, Heidegger concluded 'it is our will that our Volk fulfil its historical mission ... "All that is great stands in the storm"' (*ibid.*: 39).

Even apart from its rhetorical invocation of such favourite Nazi themes as

struggle, will, hardship, blood and soil and *Volk* (people),[4] it is clear that Heidegger's address is a massive refusal of the Enlightenment conception of the university. The first obligation of the academy is not to the universal, disinterested pursuit of knowledge but to the people, the 'ethnic and national community'. Of course, Heidegger does not understand this in terms of subordinating academic enquiry and debate to the dictates of politics but in terms of positive participation in the collective life of the people as a necessary precondition of academic work. Yet the policy of *Gleichschaltung* ('co-ordination') between university and state that Heidegger promoted as the practical expression of such participation did, inevitably and even obviously, open the door to direct political influence on academic life. Moreover, Heidegger took entirely seriously the idea that military and labour service should be an integral part of university life and actively promoted military training amongst students. Military training, labour and the pursuit of knowledge came together in a work-and-study camp Heidegger led near his Black Forest home, to which the students marched in a body, and for which they were encouraged to wear Nazi uniforms (which was hardly surprising, given that the purpose of the camp was 'The lively inculcation of the aim of a National Socialist revolution in our university system' [Ott 1994: 229]). Nor is it entirely incidental that memoirs of those attending the camp agree that Heidegger's own presentations were characterised by an extremely aggressive attack on Christianity.

Unfortunately, the rectorial address is by no means the most directly Nazistic of Heidegger's public speeches in this period. The day before, he had called upon the students of Freiburg to emulate the student Leo Schlageter, who had been executed by the French occupying forces in 1923 for sabotage. In a speech in June Heidegger declared that '*A fierce battle* must be fought' against the present university situation 'in the national Socialist spirit, and this spirit cannot be allowed to be suffocated by humanising, Christian ideas that suppress its unconditionality' (Wolin 1993: 44). The struggle 'will be fought out of the strengths of the new Reich that Chancellor Hitler will bring to reality' (*ibid*: 45). In November 1933 Heidegger issued a flurry of appeals to the German students to support Hitler in the plebiscite that was decisively to confirm his

grip on power. The message was, simply, that 'The Führer alone *is* the present and future German reality and its law.'

> 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 [Dasein] or does *not* want it ... This ultimate decision reaches to the outermost limit of our people's existence ... [because it concerns] the most basic demand of all being [Sein] that it preserve and serve its own essence.
>
> (Wolin 1993: 47)

> The Führer has awakened this will in the entire people and has welded it into a single resolve ... And so we, to whom the preservation of our people's will to know shall in the future be entrusted, declare: the National Socialist revolution is not merely the assumption of power as it exists presently in the State by another party ... Rather this revolution is bringing about *the total transformation of our German existence* [Dasein].
>
> (Wolin 1993: 49, 51–2)

Apart from depressingly demonstrating how unqualified was the support Heidegger gave to the Nazi cause in 1933, what is most striking in all these speeches is the way in which the language of existence, Being, essence, decision and resolve that Heidegger had developed in *Being and Time* is put so directly to political use. Thus far we can say that Heidegger himself was justified in his retrospective claim that the topic of the rectorial address had grown out of his purely philosophical concerns in *Being and Time.* As he also commented (to Karl Löwith in 1936), his whole involvement in Nazism could be traced back to the concept of historicity in *Being and Time*, i.e., that authentic decision concerning its own essence could only be accomplished by Dasein on the basis of insight into its own thoroughly temporal, historical nature and thus in the power of a 'moment of vision' that enables Dasein to seize the time in unblinking recognition of his utter temporality and finitude.

It is for such reasons that it is impossible to dismiss Heidegger's Nazism as simply a personal foible that does not concern Heidegger the philosopher. But what is the nature of the connection between his Nazism and his philosophy? Does the evidence suggest that the existential analyses of *Being and Time* are themselves inherently fascistic?

There are a number of reasons to hesitate before drawing such a conclusion. Not the least of these is the fact that a number of Heidegger's own pupils and contemporaries who had been decisively influenced by *Being and Time* or who embraced it as mirroring their own philosophical vision (Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Herbert Marcuse and Paul Tillich are obvious examples) set themselves on a completely different political course. The philosophy of existence was by no means the preserve of the right. The case of Tillich is particularly instructive. A Christian socialist who held a chair in philosophy in Frankfurt and was one of the founding figures of the neo-Marxist 'Frankfurt School' of social theory, Tillich was also one of the first university teachers to be dismissed by the new regime. Most interestingly, his book, *The Socialist Decision*, which was in the process of publication when Hitler came to power, argued in terms closely analogous to those used by Heidegger for an anti-nationalist Marxist resolution of the German crisis. The 'socialist decision' advocated by Tillich is a matter of seizing the crucial moment of decision in the power of a courageous resolve that is also, simultaneously, a self-revelation of Being.

But if the philosophy of existence did not necessarily lead directly to Nazism, does it follow that it was essentially apolitical, adaptable to whatever prejudices and commitments its various proponents held dear?

Importantly, Heidegger himself had drawn a distinction in *Being and Time* between what he called the ontic and the *existentiell* on the one hand and the ontological or existential on the other. In terms of this distinction he categorises Kierkegaard as a Christian psychologist who operated on the 'merely' ontic level, analysing and describing how individuals lived through the crises of religious faith and the encounter with their individual deaths. By way of contrast, Heidegger understood his own project as existential and ontological, that is, as

concerned with the deep structures of Being that underlie the kind of specific, individual situations with which Kierkegaard is preoccupied. Now it is not easy to make this distinction absolutely clear-cut, since the data of ontic, existentiell life are themselves the phenomena that reveal the deeper ontological structures, the existentialia. Indeed, at several points Heidegger catches himself on the edge of coming up from the ontological depths to the surface of individual life. In speaking of the joy that accompanies Dasein's resolute readiness-for-action, he quickly adds that 'the analysis of these basic moods would transgress the limits which we have drawn for the present Interpretation by aiming towards fundamental ontology' (BT: 62/310).

In terms of *Being and Time*, however, what we generally call political life operates on the plane of the merely existentiell, no less than individual life. The crucial division is not that between individual and community, or between private and public, but between the surface appearance or phenomenality of beings, individual and communal, and that which the phenomena disclose and which actually determines how they disclose themselves. In this perspective it could be argued that the 'mistake' of 1933 was simply that Heidegger forgot his own self-limitations and applied the ontological categories in a directly ontic, existentiell way.

## 1933 and the later Heidegger

This study is, of course, primarily concerned with the later Heidegger, and it might be said that none of this is relevant. For what has the connection between *Being and Time* and the events of 1933 to do with the later philosophy which, however one dates it, is definitely post-1933? This query might seem to receive added force from the observation that Heidegger's own post-war comments on his involvement in Nazism were very few and extremely reticent. If the later Heidegger left the events of 1933 in a fog of reticence, should we not also leave things there and limit ourselves to the question of reticence itself and the implications of the philosopher's failure to take responsibility or to show remorse for the crimes in which, however marginally, he was implicated?

The connection between Heidegger's Nazism and *Being and Time* – however

one understands this connection – is clear, but, precisely in the light of the reflections in Chapter 1 on the continuities and discontinuities of Heidegger's thought, it is impossible simply to confine the question of Heidegger's Nazism to the 'early' Heidegger. This might seem attractive – after all, isn't the highly subjectivist rhetoric of decision, resolve and struggle precisely what the later Heidegger repudiated or strongly qualified in his turning away from the philosophy of existence to the task of becoming a shepherd of Being?

However, this already suggests one way of seeing the importance of the Nazi episode for Heidegger's later thought: that the 'mistake' of 1933 brought into focus for Heidegger what was wrong, or, at least, unsatisfactory, in his work thus far. The later development would then be an attempt by Heidegger to reconstruct his thought from within in such a way as to make it resistant to the kind of temptation to which he succumbed in 1933. One way of understanding this is represented by Tom Rockmore.[5] Essentially Rockmore takes his bearings from a much-quoted line in a 1935 lecture 'Introduction to Metaphysics', where Heidegger speaks of 'The works that are being peddled (about) nowadays as the philosophy of National Socialism' as having 'nothing whatever to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement (namely, the encounter between global technology and contemporary man)' (see Wolin 1993: 103). His argument is that although Heidegger turned away from actual National Socialism relatively early, what he never renounced was 'an ideal form of Nazism' (Rockmore 1992: 123–4), i.e., a Nazism that preserved the 'inner truth and greatness' of the movement without being contaminated by its actual history. Nevertheless, this 'ideal form of Nazism' is still a 'form of Nazism', and, unless one holds the line between the ontological and the ontic, the ideal and the real, with an extraordinary degree of tenacity, the ideal form of Nazism that is professed by the later Heidegger is chronically liable to give ideological aid and comfort to actual Nazism. But is it adequate to say that Heidegger simply elevates his Nazism to an ideal level? Does this really do justice to what is going on in the gradual transformation of his thought that is indicated, perhaps over-simplistically, by reference to 'the turning'? Another way of looking at it, then, might be to say that, in the light of his 'mistake',

Heidegger undertook a re-examination of the philosophical commitments that had led to it. Such a re-examination brought about a recognition of the excessive subjectivism of *Being and Time* (or, at least, of the failure of *Being and Time* to guard against a subjectivist reading) and of the need to define more closely the relationship between the ontological and the ontic, between Being and beings. This is, of course, a shift that would have been possible with or without the Nazi episode and can arguably be said to represent a line of development that genuinely takes further the trajectory of Heidegger's own internal development. In this light there is a convergence between the philosophical development and the personal disappointment over the failure of his rectorship and the concurrent recognition that Nazism was not what he had taken it to be. On this view the thought of the later Heidegger is not an ideal or spiritual Nazism but a genuine alternative – albeit at an ideal rather than at a political level – to Nazism (amongst other things). Whether, in that case, it is not only a genuine but also an effective alternative is another question.

Either way, it will not be surprising to find resonances between the later Heidegger and aspects of Nazi ideology, although, as I have been arguing, we might hear these resonances in quite diverse ways. Let us, then, briefly examine these, beating in mind that a number of them will already have been adumbrated in the earlier Heidegger.

Beginning with the rectorial address itself we can already see some of the themes that will continue to characterise the later philosophy. Negatively, these include the repudiation of the Enlightenment model of universal reason and the liberal political values derived from it. More positively, it hints at an axis linking the original metaphysical thought of the Greeks with the contemporary crisis of knowledge – and, as we shall see, this is to become one of the pillars of the later Heidegger.

Moving beyond the rectorial address we might note Heidegger's continual privileging of the values of the world of the Black Forest over against the world of the 'city man' and his technology. In 1936, when Heidegger was offered a chair in Berlin, he justified his decision not to accept in a radio broadcast entitled 'Creative Landscape: Why do we remain in the Provinces?'

In the broadcast he describes how, working at philosophy in the solitude of his mountain hut, he shares the world of the farmers. Whereas 'the city man believes that he is going "amongst the people" the moment he condescends to have a long conversation with a farmer', Heidegger pictures himself just sitting with the locals through long evenings, smoking their pipes together, saying nothing, except every now and then to pass comment on a cow that's about to calve or the weather. The climactic conclusion arrives when Heidegger relates a meeting with a seventy-five-year-old farmer who has read about the 'call to Berlin' in the papers, and, looking the Herr Professor in the face, puts his 'trusty and concerned hand' on Heidegger's shoulder and simply, silently shakes his head. Heidegger realises at once that he belongs with the farmers, as one of them (GA 13: 9–13).

Such 'folksiness', anticipated in the Leo Schlageter speech when Heidegger relates the young hero's clarity of vision and firmness of will to the skies and mountains of the Forest, sets Heidegger in a long tradition of German national and nationalist writing. This tradition is summarised by Simon Schama as

> organised around a series of oppositions between those aspects of the land shaped by the engine of the market and those which has escaped its force. The 'road' connected producers and consumers while the 'path' connected villagers and citizens. The most strongly opposed countryside worlds were those of the open field and the forest – respectively, commercialised agriculture and the wilderness – the forests were 'the heartland of [German] folk culture' ... the home of community, the absolute opposite of a Germany made over into one vast overupholstered, department-store-manufactured bourgeois parlor. If in this scheme, the rootless Jew was the purveyor of this corrupted, citified society, the forester was his antithesis – the embodiment of ethnic authenticity, rooted like his trees in the ancient earth of the Fatherland.
>
> (Schama 1995: 114)

Heidegger's susceptibility to this tradition famously drew the fierce contempt of Adorno, for whom it marked the degeneration of the philosopher's 'reflected

unreflectiveness' 'into chummy chit-chat ... the description of the old farmer reminds us of the most washed-out clichés in plough-and-furrow novels ... Philosophy which is ashamed of its name, needs the sixth-hand symbol of the farmer, as a way of acquiring some otherwise unavailable distinctiveness' (Adorno 1986: 55–6).[6]

One-sided as Adorno's criticism is, it is painfully close to the mark. Fortunately, the folksy tone of 'Creative Landscape' is rarely laid on quite so heavily elsewhere in the later work. Nevertheless the whole of the later philosophy is pervaded by images drawn from the forest life, from the world of craftsmen and woodcutters and the landscape of river and mountain.

If this puts the later Heidegger in a certain proximity to images and values exploited by Nazism, it does not of itself make the later Heidegger a Nazi: it merely indicates that his world was that of a conservative, patriotic countryman – and we must remember that many conservative, patriotic countrymen died in Germany as opponents of Nazism. Moreover – and the remark about the encounter between humanity and technology is very important here – it is clear that, from the mid-1930s onwards, the later Heidegger did not regard Nazism as justified in representing itself as the true guardian of those values, since Nazism, like Communism and Americanism, is also seen as merely one more agent of planetary technology.

We can pursue the significance of these issues further by following Julian Young in his study *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*, in which he attempts to reconstruct the ideology that guided Heidegger's political misadventure. Young emphasises what he calls the 'ideas of 1914', and he sees Heidegger's ideology of 1933 as essentially a repetition of those ideas.[7] What, then, were they? Fundamental was the idea of *Volk.* Typically, the *Volk*, the people, was conceived in terms of an organic whole, as opposed to an artificial assemblage held together by a merely external contract. A *Volk* could be conceived naturalistically, as a kind of living entity, a conception of which the Nazi ideology of race was an extreme development. But this was only one way of conceiving the *Volk.* Heidegger himself, in his Nietzsche and Hölderlin lectures of the 1930s and 1940s, repeatedly attacked the biologistic, pseudo-Darwinian thinking that lay behind such a view. More mainstream, at least amongst the intellectuals of

1914, was a conception of *Volk* in '*geistig* (spiritual-intellectual) terms'. This meant seeing the *Volk* 'as, essentially, a person; an entity endowed with a distinctive set of historically revealed virtues, talents and character traits and with, accordingly, a distinctive task or "mission", a role in world-history, assigned, uniquely, to it. So far as the German *Volk* is concerned, its chief characteristic was taken to be *Innerlichkeit* ... 'inwardness', spirituality.' (Young 1997: 14) This inwardness was connected with the German genius for music and, as epitomising 'culture', was contrasted with the superficiality of French 'civilisation'. At the same time, this justified the German people in warfare aimed at securing the economic and social foundations necessary for culture to flourish. In doing so, however, they are not acting merely selfishly but vicariously, on behalf of the world, because culture is a necessary bulwark against nihilistic levelling, the empty, technological materialism of the Anglo-Saxon world and, after 1917, of Russian communism. The heroic spirit of the German *Volk* was needed against the mercantile spirit of England. In the light of this mission the *Volk* must take priority over the individual. Its social form was that of *Gemeinschaft*, community, over against *Gesellschaft*, society, 'a nation of atomic individuals standing in a fundamentally competitive relation to each other and lacking authentic meaning in their lives'.[8] Not only did this conception of *Volk* call for loyalty and self-sacrifice on the part of individuals, it also encouraged a negative attitude towards democracy. As Young quotes Wilhelm Wundt, one of the spokesmen for the 'ideas of 1914', "'Between democratic and German thought no accommodation is possible"' (*ibid*: 22). This does not necessarily mean a dictatorship of the right, since it could also be understood as endorsing the co-operative values of socialism. Moreover, class and privilege are relativised in favour of the needs of the whole.

Now, these attitudes were shared by many opponents of Nazism, as well as by some Nazis – nor are they without some parallel in contemporary forms of communitarianism of the centre-left variety, where they are promoted as the basis of a gentle or caring alternative to the rigours of unrestrained free-market neo-liberalism.

However, as Young points out, a further distinction needs to be made between the various adherents of *Volk* ideology. On the one hand are those – Goebbels

is the example given by Young – who embraced technology and the military-industrial complex as a means by which to realise the destiny of the *Volk*, and those – like Heidegger, Young suggests – who saw such an embrace as profoundly antithetical to the whole world of the *Volk.* In these terms, Young argues, Heidegger is an anti-modernist, akin to the 'Nazi Greens' whose ideal was to recreate 'an agrarian, *völkisch*, premodern society' for which the 'conquest of *Lebensraum* in the East [was] precisely that which would make possible the significant de-urbanisation and de-industrialisation of German society' (Young 1997: 34). This was, for example, the position of Himmler.

Now this is a deeply unpleasant twist to the concept of *Volk* but, as far as Heidegger is concerned, somewhat speculatively runs on ahead of the evidence. For, if Young's account very broadly captures the overall cultural frame of reference within which Heidegger (including the later Heidegger) operated, there is no evidence that he actively endorsed an unprovoked conquest of the Eastern territories or looked to settle them with German farmers. Indeed, such a policy would run against Heidegger's continual preoccupation with the specificity of the southern German landscape and the intimate bond between a people and its original land. Nevertheless, the split between those Young describes as modernist and anti-modernist Nazis does throw some light on Heidegger's disaffection with the Party. Although some of the reasons for the failure of the rectorship were personal and are connected with Heidegger's lack of political savvy, as well as with the mismatch between his enthusiasm to serve and the Party's lack of eagerness to accept him wholeheartedly, we can begin to see how precisely the question of technology could provide the focus for this disaffection. If, in 1933, Hitler might, to someone as politically unaware as Heidegger, plausibly seem to be offering an escape from the world-historical dominion of technology, all such hopes were eclipsed fairly early on. As we have seen, Heidegger was already drawing a contrast in 1935 between the 'inner truth and greatness' of National Socialism and what was being 'peddled about' as Nazi philosophy – the latter, fairly clearly, being what was endorsed by the Party itself. Moreover, this 'inner truth and greatness' was precisely to do with the question of technology.

Now Heidegger's critique of technology was, as we shall see in the next chapter, intimately connected with his critique of science and metaphysics, the basic outlines of which were already apparent before 1933.[9] Indeed, in his earliest phenomenological writings Heidegger is already setting his face against the then dominant positivism that characterised the philosophy of science. However, the explicit critique of technology and the search for an alternative vision of the world was to provide one of the unifying threads of Heidegger's later thought. This concern with technology goes well beyond the question of Heidegger's politics in the narrow sense, but it is important to see the profound interconnection between the development of this critique and the disillusionment with Nazism. In this sense, the critique of technology and the positive attempts to think 'beyond' technology may be said to constitute an 'inner emigration' from or an 'inner resistance' to Nazism, rather than, as Rockmore sees it, a simple spiritualisation of Nazi values. Even if this falls short of hailing Heidegger as a 'resistance fighter' (as in his son's introduction to the 1990 edition of the *Rektoratsrede*) the concept of inner emigration implies an element of reserve or critique in face of the claims of the regime.

These reflections help us to make sense of the way in which, for example, Heidegger links the death camps with the industrialisation of agriculture. In Heidegger's own perspective this is not a trivialisation of what happened at Auschwitz but the assertion of the world-historical significance of this event as the ultimate outworking of the levelling, dehumanising process of modern technology and mass production.

Also relevant here is the emergence of the question of art in Heidegger's thinking during the 1930s. In terms of the dominant cultural paradigms of post-Industrial-Revolution societies, art acts as a 'natural' counterpoint to science and technology, and it might seem almost inevitable that, in sharpening his critique of technology Heidegger should turn to art. However, this too is connected with the issue of Heidegger's Nazism in complex ways. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, following the insights of the German film-maker Hans Jürgen Syberberg (especially in the latter's film *Hitler – A Film from Germany*), has drawn attention to the aesthetic dimension of Nazism itself and suggested that

Heidegger's turn to poetry and art is itself deeply congruent with his Nazism (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990). Again, however, I shall argue that we can see this development as an outworking of Heidegger's inner emigration.[10]

Yet doubts remain. Is Heidegger's inner emigration characterised by the kind of moral passion that events of such enormity should inspire? We do not need to subscribe to the view that Auschwitz was an event without parallel in history, 'planet Auschwitz', in order to demand that any discussion of the circumstances of its occurrence be conducted with an appropriate seriousness and, above all, an appropriate sense of responsibility. Did Heidegger say enough? He may have retreated and resisted, but did he repent? Isn't the whole business of his critique of technology conducted in a way and on a level that obscures the moral dimension that is, in this case, a *sine qua non* of authentic discourse?

Again, the question is not merely a personal one. It is also philosophical.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the holy grail of Heidegger's entire philosophical quest was the question of Being. It is, in the last resort, the way in which it covers up the question of Being that requires us to take metaphysics and its progeny, technology, to task.

In the view of Richard Wolin it is precisely this concern with the question of Being that provides the key to Heidegger's political thought and also to what is wrong with it. Wolin's position is condensed into his comment that 'In his political thought, Heidegger wilfully sacrifices the plurality and difference of human practical life on the altar of an atavistic Eleatic totem – the totem of "Being"' (Wolin 1990: 14). If Heidegger's actual Nazism, according to Wolin, is the putting into practice of what has already been prepared in *Being and Time* and the transformation of the question of Being from a genuinely philosophical question into the first principle of a worldview, the later, less subjective, less humanistic conception of Being is no great help. Wolin comments that '... one might be justified in interpreting [Heidegger's] later doctrine of the history of Being as an involuted rationalization of his own failed National Socialist involvement' (*ibid*.: 133). Heidegger's later privileging of 'earth' and the values associated with it against technology is, according to

Wolin, one result of this, since earth (rather than Dasein) is now identified with Being (a comment I regard as completely misleading, since, as we shall see, 'earth' is only one dimension of the 'fourfold' in which Being manifests itself and behind which thought cannot penetrate). This critique of technology is, Wolin remarks, 'almost' fruitful, but, precisely because it is conducted on the plane of ontology (which Wolin refers to as 'the mystified perspective of neo-ontology' [*ibid*.: 163]), it avoids historical concretion. Similarly Heidegger's characteristic doctrine of truth leads him to deny any fundamental difference between truth and error, but this renders him incapable of formulating any intellectual or moral argument against genocidal evil, or, indeed, contributing anything to any serious political issue (*ibid*.: 117ff.). There is no significant place for the human other, since only Being, physis, etc. are allowed to matter (*ibid*.: 149).

For reasons that will become clearer as we proceed, Wolin's account of Heidegger's later view of Being is too one-sided and limited to do complete justice to the situation. Yet his words suggest a caution that is worth heeding: that whatever our philosophical commitments may be, they should not be such as to blind us to the claim of the local, particular, concrete other; that philosophers cannot and should not use their philosophy to hide from their own moral responsibility.

This missing dimension of Heidegger's thought, perhaps especially of the later Heidegger's thought (although, as previously indicated we can also connect this with the distinction between the ontological/ existential and the ontic/ existentiell as found in *Being and Time*) is well described by R. Safranski:

> the problem of [Heidegger's] silence is not that he was silent on Auschwitz. In philosophical terms he was silent about something else: about himself, about the philosopher's seducibility by power. He too ... failed to ask the one question: Who am I really when I am thinking? ... The contingency of one's own person disappears in the thinking self and its great dimensions. The ontological long-distance view lets the ontically nearest become blurred. There is a lack of acquaintance with oneself, with one's time-conditioned contradictions, biographical accidents, and idiosyncrasies.

> He who is acquainted with his contingent self is less likely to confuse himself with the heroes of his thinking self, or to let the little stories drown in great history. In short: knowledge of self protects against seduction by power.
>
> (Safranski 1998: 421)

Yet if that failure is not merely personal but is also, in whatever measure, conditioned by the philosophy, what does it mean for those who seek to go a certain stretch of the way with Heidegger in their own philosophising? Can one go any way at all 'with' Heidegger without falling under his spell and becoming vulnerable to analogous seductions, even if they will only rarely have as terrible outcomes as the events of 1933? But perhaps such a question is unanswerable unless or until we have set out along Heidegger's path and taken a larger view as to what that involves than has so far been possible. If, then, despite the spectre of Heidegger the Nazi, we do set out on this path, we do so with a certain caution, a certain fear and trembling, lest we too, for all our philosophising – or perhaps precisely because of all our philosophising – become blind to what is humanly most important.

# Notes

## 1 Is there a later Heidegger?

1 This raises the kind of problems that bedevil Heidegger's translators. William J. Richardson, for example, reverts to the Anglo-Saxon 'beon' for the occasions when Heidegger adopts the 'Seyn'-spelling (Richardson 1963). However, this is misleading, since 'Seyn' was still in use in philosophical works in the nineteenth century and would be seen and heard by Heidegger's contemporaries as a variant of 'Sein', whereas 'beon' would be incomprehensible without further explanation to most contemporary English speakers. In such ways Heidegger-in-translation is often made to appear perhaps more obscure than he really is – however, this doesn't help the translator who has to face the lack of any obvious English equivalent!

2 *Beiträge zur Philosophie* was only published in German in 1989 and, at the time of writing, its first English translation is still in preparation. *Besinnung* appeared in German only in 1998.

Because these are texts that are not likely to enter into the mainstream of English-language philosophy teaching for some time, I have not addressed them extensively here. However, the issues with which they deal overlap at many points with those we shall be discussing.

3 'Besinnung' itself is another term that defies easy translation. The easiest options, 'reflection' or 'recollection', are problematic in a philosophical context because of the very specific connotations of these terms, connotations that 'Besinnung' is precisely intended to avoid. What Heidegger means is a kind of thinking that is reflective, recollective, somewhat introverted, like the 'remembrance of things past' that comes upon us when we revisit a childhood scene and recall the vanished voices and faces.

## 2 1933 and after

1 Wolin gives an excellent anthology of primary sources relating to Heidegger and Nazism. Also useful is Ott 1994. Influential in starting the contemporary debate was Farias 1989, although this last is highly tendentious and has been subjected to an incisive critique by Lacoue-Labarthe 1990. Many commentators include passing discussions of Heidegger's Nazism, and extensive treatments are also to be found in de Beistegui 1998, Ward 1995, Young 1997, Zimmerman 1990 and, of course, Safranski 1998. Heidegger's remark about the Holocaust and the East Germans echoes a frequent complaint in post-war Germany – compare with more recent equivalences such as Russia in Chechnya = NATO in Kosovo.

2 See Tanabe 1986 and Pattison 1996.

3 On Heidegger's non-meeting with Celan see Safranski 1998: 421ff. Also Fóti 1992.

4 Wolin's retention of 'Volk' (unitalicised) in his English translation undoubtedly serves to emphasise the Nazistic character of the speech as a whole. However, there is not a generally satisfactory English word that covers all the connotations of the German term.

5 See Rockmore 1992.

6 However, it is somewhat ironic that, having castigated Heidegger (who, after all, was actually acquainted with some farmers) for his 'sixth-hand' knowledge, Adorno goes on to say that 'Here we find an ignorance of everything we have learned about rural people', citing a series of French novels and stories from Balzac to Maupassant – hardly 'first-hand' knowledge, still less 'social research'!

7 A broadly similar approach is taken in Zimmerman 1990. This is an excellent source for much of the material covered in this chapter and the next.

8 Young 1997, p. 21.

9 Although some argue that *Being and Time* itself endorses a technological-pragmatic view of the human subject. See, e.g., Haar 1993. Haar's view is summed up in his comment that in *Being and Time* Heidegger is 'blind to the earth' (1993: 19). Zimmerman, however, emphasises that Heidegger was already privileging the world of the craftsman's shop over against factory production in *Being and Time.*

10 See the discussion of Van Gogh in Chapter 4 below.

## 3 Technology

1 A more extensive discussion of these passages will follow in Chapter 4 below.
2 Here is another way (not Heidegger's) of making the point. Imagine you are to make a photographic record of a stained-glass window. What would be the 'best' image you could produce? Would it be the image produced by removing the window from its frame, placing it over a light-box in a studio, thereby ensuring equal and standard illumination across the whole surface of the glass? That might seem the most correct, least subjective view. But that is not how anyone ever actually *sees* the window. What people see is far more complex, and the interaction of light and shade is crucial to such 'normal' perception.
3 For a further discussion of Heidegger's use of the verbal form 'wesen', see Chapter 7 below.
4 See Stiegler 1998 for a discussion of the priority of technology in relation to humanity, a point that he argues with reference not only to Heidegger but also to the possible influence of early tool-making and tool use amongst prehominids on human evolution itself.
5 For a good discussion of Jünger, see Zimmerman 1990.

## 4 Seeing things

1 This may be translated 'Forest Paths'. However, it means more specifically the kind of path that turns out to lead nowhere, petering out or running into thick undergrowth.
2 It will be clear from what follows that I do not accept the view that Heidegger's turn to art reflects the aestheticism of Nazi politics, interesting as that idea is – partly, because, as will become clear, Heidegger's concern is, at one level, not with 'art' at all.
3 See Pöggeler 1994: 110ff.
4 See Derrida 1987.
5 In the best-known of such auctions of impounded works, held in Lucerne, Switzerland on 30 June 1939, a self-portrait by Van Gogh was the most expensive work on sale.
6 We shall attempt to grasp the full significance of this point later, in discussing Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin (see Chapter 7 below).
7 Heidegger does not pause to discuss this, but he will have been very well aware that, even when the material substratum of art is acknowledged and given its place in aesthetic theory, it was usual for the different forms of art to be hierarchically graded according to the extent to which this materiality was sublimated and subordinated to the 'meaning' element. Hegel's aesthetics is an outstanding example of this.

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