The Baby and the Bath Water
On Heidegger and Political Life

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If one knew the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached the heart of the matter?
—Graham Greene, cited by Vernon, in A Book of Reasons

To speak about “Heidegger and political life” is still exceedingly difficult, and the proximate reason for this is painfully obvious: we have precious few texts in the enormous body of works by Heidegger that clearly address themes that one would expect in the matter of political life, and most of the texts that we do have where there is some direct acknowledgment that the character of political community is indeed worthy of philosophical reflection are those entangled in some manner in the most monstrous politics of the twentieth century. For this and other more subtle reasons, I believe that it will be quite some time still until the question posed by the topic of Heidegger and political life can be addressed productively and creatively.

The details both large and small, which seem to preempt any effort to speak about political life from out of the horizons opened by Heidegger, are amply documented and well known.1 It is unlikely that there remain facts that are to be unearthed and that might illuminate the issues for us. Rather, it is our inability to think these facts that needs to be addressed; it is the noncoincidence of the facts and the forms of judgment that we have inherited that deposits us in this difficult impasse. It is the fact that we still do not yet understand that is most disturbing. And yet it is precisely this impasse, this exceeding difficulty we face in any effort to think the conjunction between what Heidegger’s work signals and the task of thinking the enigmas of our shared life in time, that makes this topic all the more urgent. It also is indicative of the situation out of which we might address this topic, namely, that in truth we have not yet moved beyond the forms of thinking that Heidegger has shown in need of overcoming. The aporias of our history and our failure to grasp this history philosophically have
absorbed into themselves some of the most creative philosophizing of our age, and in this regard, Heidegger is preeminent. Consequently, we find ourselves unable to answer even the most basic questions raised by the theme of Heidegger and political life. And so, almost before we can begin to truly address this theme, we must put some questions to ourselves that pry open this difficult nut. How are we to situate Heidegger's own political error with respect to the history that he argued must be overcome, as well as the history that he would open up? What will it take for us to think the situation of political life from the point of view articulated by Heidegger, in other words, from out of a future that does not rely on the forms of thinking that have stilted and ossified our conception of shared life in history? Why is it that the political character of what must surely be regarded as one of the most creative and provocative minds of our era has yet to be unfolded and discussed? Why is it that we have not yet been able to come to any clear understanding of just what it means that such a mind could, in some sense, understand itself in collusion with the one of the most distorted political movements in the history of the West? In the end, what becomes most clear in this matter is that we have not yet come clear about the proper measure that might justly assess the political significance of philosophical reflections that require us to think outside of the framework of assumptions that have come to be taken for granted. What should be clear from the outset is that the one put to the real test by the topic of Heidegger and political life is us.

Perhaps there are two reasons the current state of reflection on this topic is so complicated: one is to be fought against, and one is to be reflected upon. One reason we have yet to come to terms with the awkwardness announced by the conjunction "Heidegger and political life" is simple: there is an effort to discredit Heidegger by tarring him whole cloth with the worst features of his political blunder in the 1930s. This is the argument that Heidegger was and remained a Nazi, and we need to recognize that his thought bears an essential relation to Nazism. Such an argument is one that proposes we throw the baby, Heidegger, out with the bath water of National Socialism, because here the baby drank the bath water. Those making this argument based on moral grounds simply slow the process, whereby we will eventually truly come to think the issues we must confront. However, one feature of this argument is worth noting and preserving, namely, the claim that Heidegger's work cannot be thought independently of history, that it cannot be surgically removed from the tendencies of the times (this means, of course, that the photographic negative of this argument that dismisses Heidegger as a whole—namely, the argument that passes over the dilemma of politics in the matter of Heidegger—is itself thoroughly specious, since it relies on such a surgical strategy). But, generally, the argument to dismiss Heidegger's contributions to philosophy as a whole on political and moral grounds, an argument that would bring to a close without reflection the critique of Western culture that Heidegger has shown to be crucial to our age, needs to be unmasked as itself an obstacle to progressive political reflections. Such arguments, which are simply dismissive of Heidegger and which typically tend to be fueled by a self-righteous moralizing,
need to be fought. We need to ask whether moral grounds are the proper grounds upon which the difficulty of politics in the matter of Heidegger is to be thought.

But the other reason that we have yet to come to real terms with the issues broached by the topic of Heidegger and politics is found in specific character of Heidegger’s thought itself. There we find a complicated argument that claims that the crisis of the historical present is first and foremost rooted in the nature of metaphysics; in other words, that the crisis of culture is, at bottom, a philosophic crisis and so must be addressed as such. Heidegger’s project of overcoming metaphysics, the effort to shift philosophic reflection to a new register, must be seen, in part at least, as an effort to overcome the props of Western culture and the politics possible in such a culture. Of course, Heidegger is not alone in formulating a radical critique of Western culture that links the unfreedoms of that culture to its metaphysical character. The tradition of this argument is a long one begun by Hegel and accelerated by Nietzsche, but what must be acknowledged is that perhaps the greatest leap in this tradition, the moment of its most extensive synthesis (the wedding of the critiques of technology, values, metaphysics, substance, and humanism, to name just a few of its features), is accomplished by Heidegger. But what is puzzling is that this leap, this dramatic effort to open forms of thinking that might lead to a different kind of future, comes, horribly enough, at the precise historical moment that the seeds of the culture Heidegger is criticizing blossom hideously. But this is no accident, and when it is finally properly addressed, Heidegger’s political thought, both its implicit and explicit features, will need to be thought in conjunction with the historical rupture defining the moment of its first real formulation. Revolutionary to the core, Heidegger’s work wants minimally to displace the fundamental terms that have long served to define the goals of political reflection, and even the very definition of political. Here the political is thoroughly subordinated to the philosophical, so that a transformation in the character of philosophy presents itself as a revolutionary act. Strangely, incomprehensibly, Heidegger’s self-understanding of that revolution linked it, for a while at least, to what was paraded about as the National Socialist revolution. But nothing could be more remote from the truly revolutionary character of Heidegger’s thought.

There have been promising efforts to think creatively from a perspective more or less shaped by the horizons opened by Heidegger (namely, to think from out of a profoundly altered sense of our relations to, and the meaning of, time, history, and language). But even the most innovative efforts to liberate Heidegger from his brief but unrepented political self-interpretation in 1933 still must confront that self-interpretation, especially as it is expressed in Heidegger’s address as the Rector of the University of Freiburg. In the end, for the present at least, any reflection on the topic of Heidegger and political life must begin by confronting the Rectoral Address. We must do this not because it represents the best text for understanding how we are to think political life in the wake of Heidegger, but because it is so thoroughly compromised by its own place in history and because it is precisely this entanglement that Heidegger has long argued needs to be thought.
The modest remarks that follow are divided into two parts, each designed to indicate some strategies that might open the paths down which the topic of Heidegger and political life becomes a theme that challenges us in creative ways. In the first part, my intention is to situate the Rectoral Address in a tradition that might let us see more clearly how it is to be read. One purpose of this part is to call attention to what I take to be the serious questions that Heidegger tries to raise in that address. Though frequently discussed, the Rectoral Address seldom seems to be read. In the second part of this chapter, my intention is simply to outline some of which I take to be Heidegger’s real contribution to a possible politics. My intention in this part, largely programmatic in nature, is to widen the horizon of texts that we recognize as pertinent to the question of political life in Heidegger. Here I want to argue—very much against Heidegger’s explicit declarations to the contrary—that Heidegger’s work, especially the work of the decade or so immediately following the debacle of the Rectoral Address, exhibits a profoundly political character.

Two extremely different texts forming bookends in the history of Western philosophy and a closely knit tradition of texts dedicated to the nature of the university help us place Heidegger’s “Self-Assertion of the German University” in an interesting context. The two texts to which I refer are Plato’s 7th Letter and Fichte’s Addresses to the German Nation. The tradition of texts concerning the nature of the university to which I refer begins with Kant’s The Conflict of the Faculties and moves through Schelling’s “Lectures on the Method of Academic Studies,” Hegel’s “On Lecturing on Philosophy in Universities, and Schleiermacher’s “Some Remarks on Universities in the German Sense,” and ends with Nietzsche’s “On the Future of Our Teaching Institutions.” While one can never deny the historical moment in which this address is composed and delivered (and delivered more than once, always to great effect, thus compounding the problem), we do this text a disservice if we only read it against its historical moment. The following remarks are intended to serve as a preliminary effort to unfold and legitimate the suggestion that, while never forgetting its historical moment, we also read the Rectoral Address in the context of these other texts.

Reflecting on Heidegger’s political involvement in the 1930s, Gadamer makes the following remark: “That Heidegger’s revolution in the universities failed, and that his involvement in the cultural politics of the Third Reich was a sad story we watched at a distance with anxiety, has led many to think about what Plato came up against in Syracuse. Indeed, after Heidegger resigned from the rectorate, one of his Freiburg friends, seeing him in the streetcar, greeted him: “Back from Syracuse!” No more pointed, and appropriate, question could be put to Heidegger. No greater parallel can be found in the history of philosophy to serve as a sort of model for understanding Heidegger’s astonishing political naivete than the case of Plato. The reference to Plato’s involvement with Dion of Syracuse is perfectly on target, and it must be said that the kinship between Heidegger and Plato is never greater than in the Rectoral Address. It is a kin-
ship found both in the circumstantial parallels to Plato’s dealings with the tyrant at Syracuse and the philosophical argument that Plato makes regarding political life.

One sees this kinship with Plato in the way that the Rectoral Address makes the thoroughly Platonic move of tacitly suggesting that the philosopher should be the spiritual leader of the people. Here, in thinly disguised form, we find a repetition of the argument that Plato makes in the Republic, that thinking, defined according to an image ruled by the privilege of theory, has prerogatives in all matters of politics and shared life. In other words, here Heidegger succumbs to the ultimate metaphysical self-understanding, namely, that the philosopher should be king. Behind this self-aggrandizement of philosophizing lies a forgetting of the relation of truth and praxis, a forgetting of the riddle of judgment that is masked by the absolutism of the idea. And yet it is precisely this relation and this riddle that Heidegger had so powerfully disclosed and made the leitmotiv of his work from the earliest years, when Heidegger had exposed the finitude of truth and the hermeneutic obscurity of every judgment as so deep that he could say “Das Leben ist diesig, es nebelt sich selbst immer ein.”

Nothing could be more remote from the presumptions of the infinite and absolute claim of the idea than the enduring and finite starting point for thinking that Heidegger formulates.

With Plato, the matter is different, and his 7th Letter, which is an effort to come to terms with his own political misjudgment, struggles to hold onto the conviction that the idea is the proper vantage point of thinking’s relation to truth, and thus is privileged in all forms of reflection. That letter, written as a reflection upon his efforts to educate the tyrant and his hope that he might lead a revolution, thus constructing a real polity on the basis of the idea, is a protracted defense of the most basic metaphysical conviction about the relation of philosophy to politics, namely, that political decision be submitted to philosophical control. Such a view is founded in the notion that the idea, the real currency of metaphysics, is itself free precisely because of its detachment from practical life. In the 7th Letter, Plato says this quite clearly: “Hence I was forced to say in praise of the correct philosophy that it affords a vantage point from which we can discern in all cases what is just for communities and for individuals, and that accordingly the human race will not see better days until either the stock of those who rightly and genuinely follow philosophy acquire political authority, or else the class who have political control be led by some dispensation of providence to become real philosophers.” Plato writes that he was quickly disillusioned by the truth of the situation, and that he soon found himself at odds with the assumptions and habits that animated the culture of Syracuse. Nonetheless, fueled by the conviction of the rightness of philosophy for the tasks of shared life, he persisted in trying to educate the tyrant and thus to change the conditions of the culture. His lack of judgment in this matter almost cost him his life, but in the end he simply comes to the conclusion that, “Some fate too strong for man made havoc of our plans.” Though perhaps shaken (one sees this somewhat in the contrast between the tone of the Republic and the Laws), Plato’s faith in the idea as the element of
truth and in the resulting conception of truth as the determining ground of political life holds fast. It will be Aristotle to whom Heidegger is beholden in so many ways who will first propose something like a genuinely philosophical acknowledgment of the limits of the idea in matters of practical life. And it is precisely this Aristotelean insight, this rejoinder to Plato’s conception of the relation of philosophizing and political life, which will be so decisive for Heidegger in Being and Time.  

Though he seems to argue otherwise, I would suggest that the Rectoral Address gives voice to a conception of political life that finds its solutions in the possibilities of thinking defined by both the idea and the relation to the idea found in technē. In other words, the Rectoral Address is the most Platonic of Heidegger’s texts.

But the parallel to Plato is circumstantial as well as substantial in this case. Like Plato, Heidegger consorts with the tyrant for awhile, and like Plato, it is not with the hope of enlisting himself to the ends that the tyrant has laid out, but with the intention of serving as the spiritual leader of the tyrant, that is, “den Führer führen.” Insofar as this failure to appreciate the limits of theoretical reflection, of the idea, defines the logic and spirit of the Rectoral Address, it must be said that, rather than being an expression of the revolutionary move to overcome metaphysics and the culture built upon its presumptions, this address stands as the epitome of a metaphysical conception of the relation of thinking to political life. If this is so, then we would do well to read Heidegger’s subsequent remarks on the Rectoral Address, the remarks found in the small text “Tatsache und Gedanken” (1945), as Heidegger’s own 7th Letter. Sadly, something more is needed than even this, and yet it must be said that Heidegger’s remarks of 1945 never reach the philosophical level of the 7th Letter.

Interestingly, and tellingly, the conclusion of the Rectoral Address is made with a citation from Plato’s Republic. The final words of Heidegger’s text appear without context, first in Greek, then in Heidegger’s translation. The Greek line runs “τὰ . . . μὲ γάλα ἐπισφαλή”; Heidegger’s translation reads “Alles Grosse steht im Sturm.” The translation is telling, but even more telling is the context of this citation, a context that Heidegger does not provide. This line, which Plato presents as itself a citation (of a proverb), occurs in Book VI when, in a conversation about the twin themes of how philosophy is slandered by those who do not understand its role in the city and the risks to philosophy when philosophizing about political life, Socrates answers a question by saying that it is necessary to understand “How a city can take philosophy in hand without being destroyed. For surely all great things carry with them the risk of a fall, and, really, as the saying goes, fine things are hard [τὰ . . . μὲ γάλα ἐπισφαλή].” Plato, whose teacher was executed by the state, thought he knew well the risks for his understanding of the task of philosophizing in matters of political life. Heidegger would learn this too, or at least if he did not learn this lesson, he would stand as a reminder to us about this risk. What we still might need to understand is the true nature of this risk; above all, we need to understand that the risk is not (as Plato presents it) only to philosophy but comes from philosophy and places the city itself in jeopardy.
But lest the Rectoral Address be misunderstood as a work genuinely concerned with matters of the community rather than a text enlisted for political purposes, it should be said that Heidegger never really conceived of the Rectoral Address as a statement on political life or on the character of community or justice. Rather, his concern here is first and foremost with the nature of the university, and with the role of the university in the political community. Saying this brings me to the second point I would like to make about the context for a reading of the Rectoral Address, namely, that we should read it as yet another contribution to a long line of addresses found in German philosophy about the nature and role of the university. This point also needs to be seen in light of the aforementioned reference to the Platonic character of the address: the turn to the university, the call for its “self-affirmation” or “self-assertion” (a bold claim at this historical juncture), is the specific form that Heidegger’s affirmation of theoretical life takes. When we permit the text to define its own horizons, then we must say that the concerns of this address are remarkably narrow in scope and, while one might justly be troubled by the blindness at work here and by the academic tunnel vision that frames what is said here, we should not on that account read the text too far beyond the borders of its own announced context. If we do let the text define its own context, in part at least, then the question of the wider cultural mission of the university should be recognized as the central axis of this context. The politics driving Heidegger in this text tend to be the lowest form of politics, namely, what we refer to now as “academic politics.” Issues within the university, and issues at stake in professional associations, are more on Heidegger’s mind than the national and international questions shaping world history at this moment. One can only be stunned by the role that such small matters played at a moment that such very large matters were clearly at stake; nonetheless, one should acknowledge the smallness of what is at play in the Rectoral Address as Heidegger conceives it. But there are some larger, and genuinely philosophical, concerns at stake here, and Heidegger is self-consciously joining a tradition that had long sought to understand the spiritual mission of a people, here specifically “the” German people by a set of reflections on the task of philosophy. It is a long tradition, one that finds its most extensive expression in Fichte’s Addresses to the German Nation (a text to which Heidegger’s Rectoral Address owes so much that one must wonder why Heidegger does not acknowledge a debt to it).

Heidegger’s real concern in this address is to renew the university by calling it out of its increasing commitment to professionalization and to a specific conception of science and the role of technology in knowledge. Professionalized and technicized, Heidegger argued that the university had lost its unity and inner articulation. More precisely, his view is that philosophy has lost sight of its privileged role, in other words, that it had lost its metaphysical preeminence, and that for the university to recover its cultural task, philosophizing must recover its central place in the university. The university is thought on the model of a living organism, and philosophizing gives expression to the special nature of its unity. It is an old argument, one made
clearly by Kant and Schelling, and it is an argument still made frequently (and in significant measure justly) today. However, what must be stressed here is that Heidegger links this project of renewing the university to a renewal of the German nation. No longer is the university thought of from a cosmopolitan point of view (as Kant at least tries to do); rather, here the concern with the national is conflated with a concern with the university. This text, which wants to lay out the terms of a renewal of the university and which wants to defend philosophizing from the threats of the present age (largely the threats of the technologization and scientization of knowledge), misunderstands its own task by seeing it wedded to the concerns of nationalism. But it is crucial that we recognize that there are no philosophical grounds for this misunderstanding in Heidegger’s thought, either before or after this text. One can easily see the operation of nationalism in Heidegger’s thinking at this stage, and it will be evident in subsequent works such as the Introduction to Metaphysics and in several of the lecture courses (most notably, those on Hölderlin). However, what one does not see in these works is a philosophical justification of these operations; in other words, this insertion of a nationalistic element does not come from Heidegger’s thought and finds no basis there. The “Self-Assertion of the German University” by all rights should have simply been the “Self-Assertion of the University.” Still problematic in many ways, the address would nonetheless carry a very different significance were it shorn of its nationalist element, an element that intervenes without any philosophic validation. When the Rectoral Address is finally read, it will mean, among other things, that we have finally philosophically learned to raise the question of the national. But it must be said that we remain a long way from genuinely reading this text, which places us in an exceedingly difficult position.

But, as I have suggested, there are far better and far more productive texts for addressing the question of the possibility of a progressive (must it really be said that the questions of political life concern emancipation, the amelioration of suffering, and the extension of justice in the world?) political understanding from Heidegger’s work. In what follows I simply propose to indicate, in a schematic manner, what I take to be some of the most relevant texts for this question and some of the key issues that emerge from those other texts.

The common image of Heidegger’s work, especially in the English-speaking philosophical community, where the availability of translations has proven a powerful determinant in how Heidegger is regarded, has it that his work never touches upon political themes. But as new texts are released—and here three are especially relevant: Beiträge (1936–1938), Besinnung (1938–1939), and Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)—we not only are presented with works that make a more direct effort to confront the problems of the historical present, but we also come to see other texts, texts we have known for a long time, in a new and far more politically charged light—here one thinks especially of Einführung in die Metaphysik
and Brief über den Humanismus, as well as the bulk of Heidegger’s work on poetic language. While I do not agree with Otto Pöggeler’s judgment that the Beiträge is Heidegger’s “true magnum opus,” I do believe that this hermetic and opaque book might prove to be the entry into Heidegger’s real contribution to a possible politics.

What makes this text so pertinent for the questions of political life is that here one finds a critique of what Heidegger refers to as “machination,” which is his designation of the deepest logic of Western culture that has absorbed metaphysics into its own character, and this “critique” (a thoroughly problematic word, since every normative ground has been removed in advance by Heidegger’s own arguments) is clearly aimed at overcoming existing political structures. One also finds there the effort to take up the question of race, a topic clearly directed against National Socialist dogma by demonstrating that it stands as the final form of machination and the obliteration of history. What one finds expressed most clearly in the Beiträge is the view that the philosophical forms of thinking that animate culture are criticized, and that this critique is carried out according to the form in which Heidegger genuinely believes any transformation of political life must first happen. There one sees most clearly that his criticisms of the forms and practices of Western culture are not based on moral grounds but on the failure of those forms to set truth free.

While the Beiträge contains an extensive (and often a Nietzschean-flavored) critique of Western culture, it is, for the most part, rather silent about the shape of the postmetaphysical cultural forms and practices. This is so because Heidegger does not exercise this critique on normative grounds that take constant reference to an imagined future of culture. But some themes and concerns do become evident in the Beiträge and elsewhere. Six themes in particular need to be noted: (1) the insistence that political and ethical reflection be understood as working in a region beyond good and evil; (2) the shift away from the idea as the determining ground of the character of the common; (3) indeed, the shift away from the idea of the common as the governing conception of political reflections to a conception of community formed upon the vitality of differences; (4) a deepened sense of the singularity of the human being; (5) a basic recognition of the fundamental need for freedom to be alive in the world; (6) a commitment to thinking the operations of history as the deepest element of the shared life of mortals. A few remarks about each of these themes might help point to some of the details that need attention as we move forward with these matters.

Like Nietzsche, Heidegger is committed to the view that the Western ideals of “good” and “evil” only serve as props of power and the legitimation of existing forms of its distribution, and that consequently any advance in our understanding of political and ethical life needs to move beyond these notions. This, in part at least, entails a critique of moral theology (the need for a critique of Christianity is especially clear in the Beiträge) but, more importantly, it means overcoming all forms of thinking that rest upon the image that there is a war of good and evil to be fought. Heidegger, again like Nietzsche, argues that this conception of the character of the struggle of shared life is simply mistaken. As Greek tragedy never ceased to remind us, there might well
be evil, even the evil of a suffering that we call down upon ourselves, but there is no “good” that might defend or war against such a possibility. The grounds on the basis of which we seek justice are different than the grounds formed by the idea or image of the good. That is why, troubling as this feels to us, Heidegger never tried to condemn the Nazi atrocities on moral grounds, and why he was able, in a now infamous remark, to equate the extermination camps of Nazi Germany with mechanized agriculture. For him, they both remain symptoms of the same basic failure of Western culture to open itself to its own relation to history and freedom. It is the failure of the West, indeed, the very idea of the West that would assert itself that Heidegger persists in naming. All of the particular manifestations of this failure get thought as expressions of it.

Hand in glove with this need to get beyond good and evil as the measures of political and ethical life is the need to get beyond the notion of the idea as the determining ground for thinking. This means as well that the notion of the common and the universal, both features of the idea itself, and both long regarded as the sacred cows of political thought, needs to be overcome. Heidegger’s hostility to the notion of communism, a hostility that drove him to place his hopes for the future in National Socialism, comes from this point. Against the idea of the common, of an identity that would serve as the ground of the just community, Heidegger argues on behalf of a more differentiated conception of the political world. Overcoming the hegemony of the idea means opening up shared life in history to a more varied conception of how it is that we belong together. No idea overarches thinking. No ground guarantees its security. No common ground absorbs pluralities into itself. Rather, when alive thinking, and what it opens up as possible, never ceases to be open and, like the movement of truth that it opens, it is infinitely self-differentiating.

That is, in part, what it means to suggest, as I did above, that what also emerges from Heidegger’s thought for an understanding of political life is a deepened sense of the singularity of human beings. This is an understanding of political life that has mortals as its central “category.” The “realm [at issue] is through and through not human, i.e., not determinable nor sustainable by animal rationale and even less by the subjectum.” (GA 65, 490). It is a starting point that entails, as its most evident consequence, a deepened sense of the enigma of the other. Such a conception of the beings who stand at the center of political and ethical reflections also has two further important, and yet still unthought, consequences: first, the human being is no longer defined by an image of autonomy and individuality. Heidegger’s conception of the singularity of mortal being does not permit itself to be translated into an Enlightenment sense of the autonomy of individual beings and, even more importantly, perhaps, the human being is no longer able to be regarded as the defining center of political and ethical concerns; rather, animal life and nature now come to be recognized as having a central place in such concerns.

With this translation of the center of political and ethical reflection away from the claims of the human subject Heidegger opens up the realm of such reflections to
the full force of freedom in such matters. Once we truly begin to appreciate the di-
rection in which Heidegger takes political reflections we will, I believe, find it neces-
sary to think, in a manner reminiscent of Schelling, the essence of freedom as the
essence of being itself. This sense of freedom is one not grounded in any ontology of
the subject, not governed by any sense of agency or the will, indeed, it does not even
coincide with anything that we might call a subject. It is this obscure yet elemental
freedom that needs to be thought if we are to move forward with understanding what
might be said of political life after Heidegger, since it is this sense of freedom that dis-
penses history and the possibilities of relation. Out of it emerges the possibility of any
form of community. Out of it emerges as well the risk of evil.

Finally, it is history that will require our attention as these matters finally come
to be thought, since it is the most extensive and elemental arena within which politi-
cal life is to be thought for Heidegger. Here matters become most complicated, be-
cause here freedom emerges in time and sets our shared lives in motion. In the end,
this is where the theme of Heidegger and political life takes us: to the realities at stake
in history. It takes us to the dispensations of freedom that are proper to mortals, and
to that which exceeds what we define and can control. In other words, this thought
of history awakens in us a sense of the limits of what we can know and control in the
matter of our shared life, and it breeds in us a profound sense of the respect which, as
Kant so persuasively demonstrated, is always the moral and political meaning of the
limits we encounter.

Notes

1. Three of the best sources in this regard are: Rüdiger Safranski, Ein Meister
aus Deutschland: Heidegger und seine Zeit (München: Hanser Verlag, 1994); Hugo Ott,
Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1988);

2. One of the first of such attacks is Farias' Heidegger et le nazisme, translated
by Myriam Bennaroch and Jean-Baptiste Grasset (Lagrasse: Éditions Verdier, 1987).
There are numerous other examples of such unreflective judgment regarding Hei-
degger and politics. It also should be acknowledged that those who would simply
 evade the difficulty of the question in order to defend Heidegger succumb to the
same unreflective tendency. It is a tendency capable of gripping even great and large
minds: see, for instance, Adorno's judgment that "Heidegger's thought is fascist right
down to its innermost core" (Letter in Diskus. January 1963). One of the most bal-
anced and judicious attempts to actually think the riddle of politics out of Heidegger
as a philosophical problem is found in John McCumber in Metaphysics and Oppression
(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). I do not, however, agree with
McCumber's opening comment, which has it that Heidegger was a “life-long Nazi”
(p. 1). Equally worth attention, but thought from a different point of view, is Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1998). See also my “Changing the Subject,” in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14:2, 15:1 (1991):441–64. That issue of the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* is a valuable addition to the literature on this theme; it also contains a rather thorough bibliography of pertinent works.

3. Here see de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political*, p. 33ff.


5. Here one thinks of Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), and of Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’expérience de la liberté* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1988). One might rightly argue that the bulk of Jacques Derrida’s work needs to be seen in this light, that is, as an effort to open the political to thinking in a time after Martin Heidegger. It is noteworthy just how much French philosophy has taken the lead on pioneering the issue of a post–Heideggerian politics.

6. On the topic of Heidegger’s refusal to confront the questions posed by his own political activities, see Berel Lang, *Heidegger’s Silence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

7. Some notable exceptions to this are Charles Scott, “Heidegger’s Rector’s Address: A Loss of the Question of Ethics,” and Christopher Fynsk, “But Suppose We Were to Take the Rectoral Address Seriously,” both in the previously cited issue of the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*; also see Gérard Granel, “Appel à tous ceux qui ont affaire avec l’université,” in *De l’université* (Mauzevin: Trans-Europ-Repress, 1982), pp. 75–96.


11. A full treatment of this theme in Plato should take up the (often neglected) *Laws*, which is the dialogue Plato writes while wrestling with the fallout of his own interventions in Syracuse. The longest of his dialogues, it also is significantly different from the better-known *Republic*. 
12. This is something we see dramatized in the opening scene of the Republic, which has Socrates standing apart from the festival that is being celebrated by the community he is observing.


14. Ibid., line 337e.

15. See, for instance, SZ, 68.


19. The translation here is Bloom’s (emphasis added).

20. There are other remarks that have a sort of boldness about them; for instance, Heidegger’s claim that, “But all forms of following carry within themselves resistance” (Heidegger, op. cit., p. 18).

21. Sluga does a very good job of clarifying the details of these academic politics in his Heidegger’s Crisis.

22. This remark should in no way be construed as an excuse or an apology for Heidegger. It is simply part of my effort here to ask about what is really said and thought in the Rectoral Address. That Heidegger would squander the opportunity to address the larger issues of history beginning to play out at that moment is itself a true failure of the philosophical imagination.

23. Two of the elements of Fichte’s text that find a clear resonance in Heidegger are the emphasis on language and the assertion of the role of the Greeks for the Germans. On this, see my On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

24 On this, see de Beistegui, p. 36ff.

25. Here one thinks, for instance, of the celebrated remarks about Europe standing between the “pincers” of America and Russia in Einführung in die Metaphysik (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1966), pp. 28–29.


28. Details of this argument can be found in my “Strategies for a Possible Reading,” in Reading Heidegger’s “Beiträge,” edited by Charles Scott et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

29. On this, see the work of Robert Bernasconi.

30. The remark to which I refer is the following: “Agriculture is now a motorized food industry, the same thing in its essence as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and the extermination camps, the same thing as blockades and the reduction of countries to famine, the same thing as the manufacture of hydrogen bombs.” It is found in the 1949 lecture published in Wolfgang Schirmacher, Technik und Gelassenheit (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1984).


32. On this, see my “What We Owe the Dead,” in Research in Phenomenology XXVI (1997):190–98.