
Introduction

Can we read Heidegger as a philosopher whose thought moves us without our belonging, in the reading, to an incipient fascism? Or is Heidegger's responsibility terrifying in its demands, as David Krell suggests, terrifying because of the dangerous risks that it takes in the dangers that it reveals in our ethics and dominant ways of life? What is our responsibility as we think with Heidegger? "For me," Samuel IJsseling says, "the only appropriate motivation for a philosopher to judge Heidegger and National Socialism is the desire to become aware of National Socialist tendencies in our own thinking." Do the judgments made about Heidegger's thought come from careful—very careful—reading or with haste and in an almost automatic recoil from his personal alignment with National Socialism? Do we advance or retard incipient fascism by the spirit of our judgments? Such questions run through the chapters of the first part of this book as the authors attempt to understand both the question of politics in Heidegger's thought and the thought that gives rise to that question. The issues of Heidegger's party affiliation, his nondemocratic convictions, and his silence regarding National Socialism have been with us for many years. Now, in a period when political issues have dominated our questions, and when fascism has come to symbolize a way of living and thinking that is both evil and at a considerable distance from our judgments concerning it, the spirit of our thought in response to Heidegger comes to the fore. We pause to wonder whether something facile and self-congratulatory moves us as we gaze at events in Hitler's Germany. Some of the authors

in this volume wonder whether our garrulous condemnations overlook something that Heidegger's silence preserves, whether something is missed by our lack of questions as we rush to judgment, whether something dangerous takes place in our intelligent, ethical separation from Heidegger's perverse errors.

What is clear to the authors in this book is that Heidegger's thought is not well enough understood to afford us the opportunity to summarize it and generalize it, nor do we understand well enough our own thought to speak with final confidence even in our condemnations and excited avowals of what is right and true. These encounters with Heidegger struggle to find how to think with Heidegger's work. As they read him, these authors find problems and insights; their own manners of thought are pushed to disturbing limits; their convictions are checked and placed in doubt. When, for example, his silence is engaged, the reader often finds not that Heidegger has escaped judgment or cowardice, but that 'something' more extreme than moral condemnation brings together the reader and Heidegger's thought, a gathering that does not leave moral condemnation behind, but exceeds it in claim and import. There is danger when we speak of an excess of morality. There is another danger: a world circumscribed by morality. And there is the possibility that in this silence we belong to something not avowable, not available for publicity, something that allows democracy and National Socialism to reveal their dangers in the responsibilities that they procreate.

The issue of technology frequently arises in this book. It is the issue of people's establishing the destiny of things by reference to clear goals for human life that demand efficient values and methods for achieving these goals at the expense of something fundamental for human beings. Above all it is the issue of a way of life that is inevitable at this time and that diminishes life in the pursuit of life. As one experiences dissatisfaction with Heidegger's way of addressing the issue, the issue itself looms larger. It becomes one in which the dissatisfied reader finds him or herself entangled, and one whose importance is intensified by Heidegger's inability to translate his thought into a viable politics. One wonders whether politics can bear the weight of hope that is given to it, whether that hope is too quick and too filled with the expectation of remedy in the midst of histories that are not fully understood and which might indicate that our hope is part of the problem.

The chapters' topics spread out to include many other figures: Parmenides, Aristotle, Hegel, Husserl, Benjamin, Levinas, Foucault.

And, above all, Derrida. Heidegger's engagement with his tradition and the engagements of Heidegger by those who come in his wake occupy the chapters in parts 2 and 3. These chapters are contributions to the continuing work of finding ways to speak and think in the element that Heidegger has made available to us. Must we give up entirely the language of subjectivity if we are to meet the questions posed by Heidegger? Is ethics at the end of metaphysical endeavor? Does the element of Heidegger's thought include flight from the practical world or a creative reinheritance of it? Does Heidegger miss the thought of one or another of his predecessors to such a degree that his own work must be called into question for its omission of something vital? Does his thought trip on misinterpretations? Or can his thinking tolerate serious misinterpretations while it brings us to questions and possibilities that rightfully call us away from established patterns of knowledge and certainty? Do we find in Derrida's love-hate relation to Heidegger a way of writing that brings Heidegger to bear on himself in his failures and overpowering draw?

Throughout this book there is a struggle with words. Which words are we to speak? How are words and phrases to turn in their employment away from their heritage that gave their authority and power? How are we to speak of Heidegger's thought without reinvoking the very ideas whose radical rethinking has turned us to Heidegger? How does our thought regarding Heidegger's work allow its newness, meet it, and yet hold it in question? There is in this book a notable absence of flat commentary. Rather, there are persistent attempts to think with Heidegger, to join him in thought, to rethink thinking and speaking in the process of meeting him. And throughout there is a mood of concern and worry, the mood of encountering something of moment whose implications reach to what is cherished by us and in us, something that cannot be conquered by attack, and something that is not only not fully understood but also resists the priority of understanding the thought. It is not a question of whether Heidegger is relevant. It is one of engaging a way of thought that refigures the claims which allow us to think, a way of thought that gives us to suspect that our words have lost the address that silently moves us.

In addition to worry, these essays at times both reveal and speak of outrage. The outrage of National Socialism, the outrage of being's withdrawal, the outrage of error, the outrage of spirit. Several authors say that outrage is given with being's truth—its revealing/concealing—that we find ourselves in the outrage, that our sameness is found, as William Richardson says, in the horror of darkness and not

in the clarity of unshadowed light. How then are we to be? And why is that not an ethical question? Why is danger present when we find what we ought to do, when we find what we ought to say in response to Heidegger? Presumably it is because we have become subjects who are dangerous to ourselves and do not know how to think this danger. Presumably it is also because we who think, by thinking, are in the danger to which Heidegger found himself exposed. And this danger, presumably, has moved these authors to think with varying degrees of confidence that they have met, not the enemy, but the friend who found that the danger is not only in silence but also in the way we speak of it.

Note

The abbreviation "GA," followed by volume number, year of publication, and page numbers (if any), refers to the collected works of Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, published by Vittorio Klostermann in Frankfurt am Main.