

# Tactics, ethics, or temporality?

## Heidegger's politics reviewed

**Peter Osborne**

There are moments in the reception of particular thinkers – especially in translation – when the literature about them, building up a critical mass, explodes, giving rise to whole new subdivisions of the academic industry. It happened to Hegel and Marx in the 1970s and to Benjamin and Habermas in the 1980s. Now it is happening to Heidegger.

Such events are rarely of merely academic interest and Heidegger's case is no exception. Indeed, following Victor Farias's mould-breaking *Heidegger et le Nazisme* (1987, translated 1989) debates about Heidegger's work have acquired a directly political dimension, absent from European philosophy since the heyday of Marxism in the early 1970s. It used to be said that Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism was a barrier to the dissemination of his thought; today, it is the means of its publicity.\*

At first sight, it is hard to see why this should have occurred. After all, Heidegger's involvement with fascism in the 1930s was never a secret; nor is the idea that it was intrinsically linked to his philosophy a new one. Karl Löwith, a one-time pupil, made the connection at the time, in an essay which was published in *Les Temps Modernes* after the war. He was followed by Habermas in his review of Heidegger's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), Lukács in *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), and Adorno in *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1964) – a work which gives free and splenetic rein to an analysis which Adorno had held since the early thirties.

Heidegger's followers have always known about this literature, but they have rejected it, referring their

opponents to Heidegger's apologia for his political history, crafted over the years from his 1945 letter to the rector of Freiburg University (which failed to prevent him from losing his right to teach) to the posthumously published collection *Das Rektorat, 1933/34: Tatsachen und Gedanken* (1983). The defence has two main strands. On the one hand, it distinguishes in principle between the ideology of National Socialism and the terms of Heidegger's thought, on the basis of which he identified himself with the movement, allegedly mistaking its true character. On the other, it involves a series of detailed empirical claims: about the Nazi establishment's increasing hostility to his work after 1934, his political inactivity from then on, his supposed attempt to use his position as rector at Freiburg in 1933/4 to protect university life from political interference, and his attitude and actions towards colleagues who were Jews. More generally, however, Heidegger's supporters have tended to suggest that there is something intrinsically philistine about the very idea that so great a thinker should have his work judged in relation to his (supposedly passing) political opinions, however distasteful. Steering clear of the politics of the work, they have focused on the autonomy of the text relative to the life, confining the question of politics to the level of biography.

Protected by a close-knit band of disciples who stressed the 'turn' in his thought registered in the lectures on Nietzsche (1936–40), Heidegger maintained a silence about his political history so far as was tactically possible. (His famous interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966, 'Only a God Can Save Us', was embargoed until

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\* Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, translated by Allan Blunden, London, HarperCollins, 1993. 407pp., £20 hb., 0 00 215399 8. London, Fontana, 1994. £8.99 pb., 0 00 686187 3.

Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*, Cambridge MA and London, Harvard University Press, 1993. x + 285pp., £23.95 hb., 0 674 387112.

Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1993. xiii + 608pp., £45.00 hb., 0 520 08150 1.

after his death, a decade later.) Meanwhile, outside Germany, the very different inflection of existentialism in France (Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) helped to protect Heidegger's philosophical heritage from political critique. Yet it cannot be said that material about Heidegger's views and activities during the Nazi period was unavailable, for those sufficiently interested to look. A significant collection of documents was published by Guido Schneeberger in Germany in 1962, only to go largely unnoticed. So why all the fuss now? What's new?

The driving force behind the debate has undoubtedly been Farias's use of documentary evidence to expose the duplicity of a number of Heidegger's claims about his actions, and to assert the fundamentally reactionary character of his thought, from its earliest Catholic phase before the First World War onwards. Yet in itself, this would probably not have been enough to provoke the storm which followed. Little of Farias's material is new, although it was not previously wellknown, and the connections he draws between Heidegger's political beliefs and his philosophical writings are often crude. Rather, the decisive factor lies in the change in the stakes of the debate brought about by the influence of Heideggerian anti-humanism on radical thought in France since the 1960s, and especially on deconstruction.

Farias's book appeared at the highpoint of Derrida's influence in the USA. It coincided with both the revelations about literary theorist Paul de Man's collaborationist past in wartime Belgium and the publication of the English translation of Habermas's *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, in which the politically loaded charge of 'undermining Western rationalism' was once again raised against Heidegger, as a prolegomenon to an attack on Derrida. (Habermas subsequently provided the introduction to an expanded German edition of Farias's book.) Lobbed into this heavily overdetermined situation, *Heidegger et le Nazisme* acted as a bombshell in another war. It has since sparked off a series of protracted battles of its own.

Hugo Ott's *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (first published in Germany in 1988, and translated here in its second edition of 1992) is to some extent a product of the furore generated by Farias's book; but it is in no way a secondary text, relative to Farias's research. Professor of Economics and Social History at Freiburg University, where Heidegger held his ill-fated rectorship, Ott has been researching Heidegger's political activities for over a decade now. Farias drew upon his preliminary findings, and Ott has subsequently unearthed further material, although a mass of relevant documentation remains unavailable. (There is an indefinite ban on access to Heidegger's personal papers in the German Literary

Archive in Marbach.) It is a sign of the rapidly widening resonance of the debate, rather than of any kind of biographical populism, that whereas *Heidegger and Nazism* was brought to us by the tiny Temple University Press, *A Political Life* comes backed by the corporate power of HarperCollins. Indeed, Ott's book is in various ways more severe than Farias's, since it foregoes the synthesising perspective through which the latter connects the life to the work, to concentrate on the detail of Heidegger's specifically political involvements. On the grounds of disciplinary competence, Ott leaves judgements about the philosophy to others.

### **Leading the leader**

*A Political Life* displays both the caution and the incisiveness of the professional historian – reflected in the more tentative subtitle of the original, 'Towards a Biography'. Even this, its author worries, 'may sound immodest'. Foregoing polemic in favour of a meticulous scrutiny of the record, Ott systematically exposes the half-truths of the authorized version of events with which Heidegger's followers have held his critics at bay, patiently dismantling its edifice of deceit piece by piece, in a manner all the more devastating for its refusal to moralise. Confronted with the evidence in Ott's book, much of the recent position-taking on Heidegger, on both sides of the debate (and of the Atlantic), sounds like a hollow and irrelevant aside, bearing no real relation to the difficulties of historical understanding. However, by sticking to the biographical, Ott's narrative leaves certain questions not so much unanswered as never even asked.

The book is structured around what Heidegger described as the two 'thorns in the flesh' of his life: his 'struggle with the faith of my birth' (Catholicism) and the 'failure' of his rectorship at Freiburg. Weaving back and forth between Heidegger's own account of these events and the documentary evidence available, Ott assembles a picture of the 'mentality' underlying Heidegger's political aspirations for his philosophy and his apparently consistent betrayal of his mentors. Growing up in a cultural milieu marked by a distinct combination of class (rural petty-bourgeois), regional (southwest German) and religious (Catholic) motifs, Heidegger's youth was characterised by early academic success and the promise of upward mobility, followed by the setback of a triple failure: first to become a priest, then a theology student, and finally, to obtain the chair in Catholic philosophy at Freiburg in 1916, when he was still just twenty-seven.

The first two setbacks were caused by ill health: a heart condition which Ott suggests had psychosomatic dimensions. (This also meant that Heidegger was spared

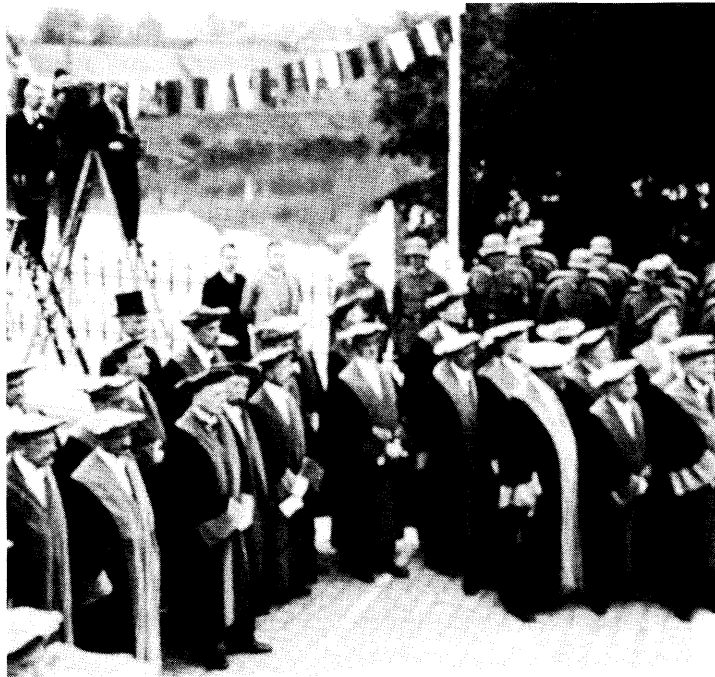
active service in the Great War.) The third was the judgement of academics on whom Heidegger would soon avenge himself by turning away from Catholicism and becoming increasingly hostile towards it – although *not* to the broader tradition of Christian thought. Heidegger reacted by channelling his resentment into the sharpening of an opportunistic sense of ambition and charging his marginalisation with a growing sense of self-importance. (Ott implies that his later dubious treatment of Husserl, after the latter had secured a chair for him at Freiburg in 1928, can be traced back to Husserl's initial indifference to Heidegger when he sought a similar post in 1916, and the consequent necessity for him to spend five years in the shadow of the older man.)

This combination of opportunism, ambition and an ever more messianic self-importance reached its climax after Hitler became Chancellor in the spring of 1933, when

Heidegger came to believe he could become the spiritual leader of National Socialism. For, make no mistake about it, as Ott demonstrates, this was unquestionably his goal. Heidegger's interest in National Socialism cannot be extricated from his understanding of his own philosophy. The national-political instantiation of an initially individualistic conception of authentic existence, the Nazi Party was to be the vehicle of ontological renewal, and thus, the means by which Heidegger might assume his self-appointed role as the philosophical leader of the German people. His aim, he confided to Jaspers, was '*zu führen den Führer*': to lead the leader, Hitler himself.

As Ott remarks, this involved an 'extraordinary loss of reality' on Heidegger's part. For it presumed that a political movement ten years in the making, and already in possession of state power, would surrender itself, ideologically, to an academic philosopher who had not previously been a party member and who, however politically sympathetic and established in his field, was known primarily for the obscurity of his thought and the opacity of his prose. Yet this is precisely what Heidegger appears to have envisaged. And he set about his task with all the seriousness and fervour characteristic of his intellectual work. His opportunity was provided by the Nazis' plans to reorganise the German universities according to the principles of National Socialism.

Elected rector of Freiburg University in April 1933, under a system of academic democracy he would shortly help to abolish, by a plenary council which hoped that his reputation would protect them from undue



The Marburg University Faculty of Philosophy (1927?), Heidegger is in the first row, second from the left.

From Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1994.

interference from Berlin, Heidegger immediately joined the Nazi Party and set about transforming the institution in line with the 'leadership-principle', which was soon to be imposed nationally. (A fetishisation of leadership appears to have been the mediation for the transition from an individualist to a nationalist conception of *Dasein*.) He was formally inaugurated as one of the new *unelected* 'leader-rectors' on 1 October that year. His plans for reorganisation, projected at a national level (for his ambitions far exceeded the rectorship at Freiburg), were exclusivistically nationalistic and enthusiastically martial. On Ott's account, they display clear signs of a compensatory mechanism at work: compensation for the physical weaknesses underlying his earlier failures with 'a curious yearning for hardness and rigour'. Aimed at the 'restoration of honour' and the 'militarisation of academic youth' (his inaugural address cites military service alongside labour service, the service of knowledge, and loyalty as the duties of the student body), Heidegger's practical activities at Freiburg primarily consisted in the establishment of a paramilitary sports camp for training the National Socialist student elite. They were accompanied by the injection of massive doses of a pseudo-religious rhetoric of national salvation ('the total transformation of our German *Dasein*') into academic life, in an exaggerated quasi-military vocabulary in which Hitler meets Heraclitus in the constant exhortation to a generalised 'struggle'. (*Fragment 35*, in particular, is frequently evoked.) The characteristic temporal dynamic of Heidegger's thought

– ‘the return to the new beginning’ – finds here a concrete political correlate in the task of conservative revolution.

But Heidegger had badly misjudged the character of the Party’s interest in him. The Nazis were not looking for a new spiritual leader, still less one with the aspiration to lead the leader himself. They were looking for a transitional figure who would oversee the transfer of power within Freiburg University from the old academic hierarchy to the SA student leadership and its Party organs. As Ott puts it: Heidegger ‘was being used as a figurehead, for purely tactical reasons’. His personal telegram to Hitler (20 May 1933) went unanswered, and by the following spring, his field of action confined to his own university, he was increasingly at odds with colleagues of all stripes about his plans for ‘the radical transformation of scientific education’ through an ‘inward restructuring’ of the lecture programme, in which disciplinary specialisms would be replaced by the integrity of a new philosophy. Frustrated, he resigned his post as rector on 14 April 1934. The induction of the new rector, a colleague recorded, ‘felt like a suicide’s funeral for Heidegger; nobody so much as mentioned his name’. Henceforth, he would sublimate his philosophical investment in the German nation into an identification with Hölderlin, and an increasingly theological evocation of time’s ‘giving’ of Being.

1933 remained the *kairos*, the crucial moment at which the sacred might have revealed itself, but it was overlaid now with the pathos of a missed opportunity. (Heidegger’s anti-democratic nationalism was no ‘passing’ opinion.) In the postwar years, he would inflect his disappointment with National Socialism in a direction more suited to the time. Yet his belated rejection of the movement (he remained a Party member throughout the war) maintained the terms of an interpretation of its ‘inner truth and greatness’ which he never renounced. As Löwith put it: ‘It is not Heidegger, who, in opting for Hitler, “misunderstood himself” ... those who cannot understand why he acted this way have failed to understand him.’ Indeed, from Heidegger’s point of view, it was *Hitler* who had misunderstood himself: misunderstood the true historical task of National Socialism. He felt betrayed by him.

It is remarkable that Heidegger’s adherents have managed to stifle awareness of this dimension of his thought for so long outside Germany. (David Krell’s ‘Heidegger’ entry in the 1989 edition of the *British Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*, for example, continues the falsification of Heidegger’s academic career in its very first sentence, by claiming an uninterrupted teaching period at Freiburg from 1928 to 1958. This conveniently overlooks his

six-year postwar teaching ban, and all that it implies about his previous activities. The piece concludes that Heidegger’s post-war failure to condemn Nazi horrors ‘resists all explanation’.) It is doubly remarkable, in fact, since the idea that Heidegger’s politics is irrelevant to his philosophy contradicts the terms of an existential interpretation of his philosophical project.

This raises interesting questions both about Heidegger’s philosophical understanding of his own biography – we know that he greatly admired Dilthey’s two studies in philosophical biography, *The Young Hegel* and *The Life of Schleiermacher* – and the historical self-understanding of his early philosophy. However, their pursuit requires a confrontation with Heidegger’s writings, beyond the string of duplicitous self-justifications, into the domain of their philosophical meaning. Yet this is precisely what Ott eschews. Heidegger’s Marburg years (1923–1928), which include the composition of *Being and Time*, are skipped over as ‘something of an interlude’ in his life. Nor does Ott attempt to deal with his relationships with either his student Hannah Arendt or his wife Elfride, who we know from elsewhere was already trying to recruit her husband’s students into the National Socialist student group in Marburg in 1925. (Some commentators have seen Heidegger’s complicity in the expulsion of Jews from Freiburg University as part of an attempt to make up with his wife, after his affair with the Jewish Arendt.) Although Ott does stress the role played by his marriage to the Protestant Elfride in his turn away from Catholicism. This was crucial to the development of his philosophy due to the reorientation within Christian theology that it involved, marked by a growing interest in Paul and Luther, and a new interpretation of Augustine.

Ott’s book is to be recommended for its demolition of the myths of Heidegger’s political self-justification, and its eloquent marshalling of biographical materials. But it should not be mistaken for a fully fledged biography, still less the final chapter in *l’affaire Heidegger*. To get to grips with what is at stake in this affair, philosophically, we need both the fine-grained philological analysis of the work and the broader contextualisation of its cultural field offered by Kisiel’s *Genesis* and Sluga’s *Crisis*, respectively.

### Following the leader

It is the virtue of *Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* that, despite its main title, it is not actually a book about Heidegger at all. Rather, it is about the *moment* of his crisis as ‘a turning point in the relation of German philosophy as a whole to the politics

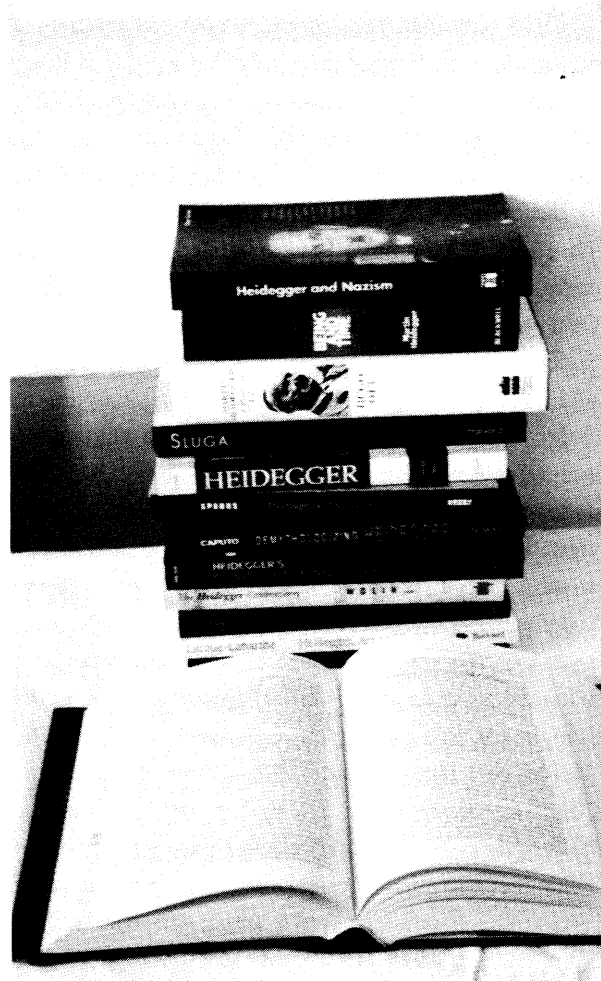
of its time', during which Heidegger was 'by no means the only German philosopher who allied himself to the Nazis in the name of a personal philosophy'. Out of the one hundred and eighty or so philosophers in German universities at the beginning of 1933, Sluga records, only twelve (7 per cent) were members of the Nazi Party. Thirty joined that year; another forty in the years that followed. By 1940 nearly half of the philosophical establishment were Party members. Furthermore, this was no sheerly passive or defensive obligation. All of the philosophical schools which were not prohibited competed for the Party's ear, putting themselves at the service of the regime 'without hesitation'. The real danger, in Sluga's view, was 'not that the politicians made use of philosophy but that the philosophers could make use of politics'. Heidegger's involvement was less the exception than the rule.

A number of factors contributed to this situation. In the first place, Sluga argues, National Socialism never had a coherent political ideology, but was 'an amalgam of diverse ideas and attitudes'. On the other hand, the crisis-situation in Germany in the 1930s was characterised by a strong demand for the legitimation of political choices. There was thus a clear space internal to the discursive framework of National Socialism for a stronger articulation of ideas. German philosophers were well-suited to fill this gap because of the historically distinctive place of philosophy in German culture, as both the queen of the sciences and the spiritual representative of the unity of the German people. This pre-eminent role had been increasingly threatened by the independent development of the sciences during the nineteenth century. The rise of fascism provided German philosophy with the opportunity to overcome its own crisis of cultural authority by connecting itself up to the National Socialist 'solution' to the crisis of German society. If, as Arendt suggested, Heidegger's turn to the *Führer* can be imputed in part to what the French call a *déformation professionnelle*, it was nonetheless a specifically German one. The problem lay in the plethora of philosophical movements and ideas, inherited from the Weimar period, which were competing for the role of leadership.

Reconstruction of the diversity of this ultimately unitary field is one of the major achievements of Sluga's book, surpassing the sketch, focused exclusively on neo-Kantianism, to be found in Bourdieu's *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* (reviewed by Jonathan Rée in *RP* 60). Sluga exchanges the formalist empiricism of Bourdieu's analysis for a broadly Foucauldian approach to the discursive constitution of the philosophical field. Yet he too may be accused of

overstating the continuity of the Third Reich with the Weimar period – the continuity of a diversity which is said to remain 'essentially intact' – at the cost of neglecting the significance of the prohibition of 'Marxist and positivist forms of philosophizing' and the decline of phenomenology, because some of its most prominent representatives 'happened to be Jews'. It would be more than a pity if the repression of fascism in German philosophical history were to be lifted only to be accompanied by the timely disappearance of its main historical antagonists.

*Heidegger's Crisis* is organised by its exposition of four concepts which bridge the gap between the philosophical and political discourses of 1930s Germany: *crisis, nation, leadership* and *order*. Each, Sluga argues, was a central feature of both fields, and he traces their fourfold thematic unity back to Fichte. Heidegger's rectoral address, 'The Self-Assertion of the German University', is shown to have been modelled explicitly on Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1807), in which the ideas of German as a 'primordial language', of philosophy as 'in a special sense German only', and of a total change in the system of education as 'the sole means of preserving the existence of the German nation', are conjoined for the first time. Yet



neither Heidegger's address, nor the other appeals to Fichte characteristic of the time (the 'Fichte Society of 1914' had a powerful influence on the nationalism of German philosophy between the wars), should be considered a simple return to a Fichtean nationalism. Things had changed dramatically since Fichte's day: the German state had come into existence and been defeated, catastrophically, in a European war, the effects of which continued to reverberate throughout German society, breeding a resentment upon which the Nazis would feed. This both broadened and intensified the sense of crisis to which Fichte's nationalism had been a response.

Philosophically, the generalisation of the meaning of crisis is associated with Nietzsche. Sluga follows Foucault in identifying it with a 'will to heroize the present' characteristic of the culture of modernity itself. It is this general structure which he sees manifest in the Germany of the 1930s, in an especially pure form. He describes the various philosophical societies (especially, the 'German Philosophical Society', the DPG) and the journals through which such impulses were given a determinate philosophical form. And he catalogues the names of the philosophers involved, familiar from other contexts: from the older generation of liberals, like Rickert and Frege, who moved sharply to the right during the First World War, to men like Hartmann, Gehlen and Rothacker, whose careers would survive to thrive after the Second World War. The abiding preoccupation of the DPG – of which Heidegger was never a member, but which finally succeeded in 'absorbing almost the whole German philosophical establishment' – was a metaphysical definition of 'the German'.

The construction of such a metaphysics, Sluga suggests, was itself a distinctively German phenomenon. The exclusionary principles of the Nazi world-view (anti-Semitism, racism and social Darwinism) were supports or 'negative complements' to its affirmative notion of Germanness. In this respect, Heidegger's pronouncements about German *Dasein* are read as insertions into a discourse with a long history to which they added little: 'None of these ideas was his invention, and he *made little use of them in his philosophical thinking*.' This is common argument – there is a version of it in Derrida's defence of Heidegger's philosophy against his politics in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1987; translated 1989), for example. Yet it is not a position which has stood up particularly well under scrutiny. Even someone as sympathetic to Heidegger's thought as Lacoue-Labarthe acknowledges that '*Gemeinwesen* was always for Heidegger that of a people [*Volk*], and his analysis of historicity has no meaning if it is not seen against this horizon.'

*Heidegger's Crisis* is perhaps most intriguing for its account of German philosophers' struggle for the attention of the Nazi Party, and the various uses to which the history of philosophy was put to this end. Ott's biography stresses how important the aspiration to spiritual leadership was to Heidegger's sense of himself. Sluga shows how common it was among German philosophers. He divides the contestants into the 'philosophical radicals', who emphasised a sense of the present as a world-historical turningpoint requiring radical institutional renewal, and the 'philosophical conservatives', who identified National Socialism with the preservation, strengthening and reworking of the great tradition of German philosophy, especially idealism. The radicals each stood outside the philosophical establishment, while the DPG was the base for the conservatives.

The radicals picked out by Sluga – Baeumler, Krieck and Heidegger – each gave inaugural lectures or addresses within two weeks of each other in May 1933. (Baeumler arranged for his to coincide with the burning in Berlin of 20,000 books, in which, he informed his audience, 'an alien spirit uses the German word to fight us'.) The same themes recur, in slightly different registers: most notably, the call for an end to specialisation and the separation of disciplines in the name of a newly unifying and distinctively German philosophy. Yet the alliance which was thereby established between the three professors was only temporary. They quickly fell out, over a combination of philosophical differences and political exigencies. Soon they were denouncing each other, and their philosophies, for being insufficiently attuned to National Socialism. (Like Ott, Sluga points out that the argument that 'Heidegger was not a Nazi because he was repeatedly attacked by others for not being a real National Socialist' – used by Heidegger himself after the war – is fallacious, since 'such charges were regularly made by all the philosophical factions' against each other.)

With the breakdown of this alliance, Heidegger's chance of projecting his philosophical ideas on the national stage were effectively over. He settled his philosophical account with Baeumler – who had hailed Nietzsche as the philosopher of the 'new politics' – in his Nietzsche lectures, three years later. Subsequently, Heidegger would cite this critique of Baeumler's understanding of Nietzsche as evidence of his distance from Nazi philosophy. Henceforth, he would forgo any attempt to find what he called 'an immediate echo' of his philosophy in the present. His 1935 lectures, published after the war as *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, signal a withdrawal into an understanding of the 'questioning of

Being' purged of the activist dimension of *Being and Time*. They were complemented by a growing preoccupation with the critique of technology, which he would later apply, retrospectively, to the Nazi system. (The published version of Heidegger's lectures includes material inserted after the war, without comment, alongside his famous remark about 'the inner truth and greatness' of National Socialism, which awoke Habermas from his Heideggerian slumbers.) The overall effect of Heidegger's political involvement on his philosophy thus appears to have been cautionary: the determination of the later work as increasingly contemplative and poetic in the wake of the failure of Heidegger's activism.

Sluga both charts this process and affirms it, philosophically, as a belated return on Heidegger's part to what he sees as the fundamental insight of his thought: namely, that philosophy is a form of questioning which can never legitimately invent 'an original order on which one could ground and justify a political system'. By a startling sleight of hand, *Heidegger's Crisis* thus turns out to have been a philosophical *Bildungsroman* with a deconstructive moral. It is not Heidegger's specific political engagement which is ultimately at fault, but the political engagement of philosophy *tout court*. Sluga balances the self-serving justifications and deceptions of Heidegger's later years with a positive evaluation of his 'determination not to be drawn back into politics'. In this respect, his criticism of the later Heidegger is a subtle one: his withdrawal from politics was still too political – too much of an 'antipolitical politics of waiting' or 'letting being be' – framed by the same 'quadrilateral of the world-historical crisis, the German mission, philosophical leadership, and the aspiration to a political order based on the primordial question of being': 'Where the crisis had once seemed ... to have its climax in the political turmoil of 1933, it was now part of the history of being.'

Rather than entering into the renewed confrontation with Heidegger's thought which this analysis makes possible, Sluga takes its lesson to be a general one, concerning any attempt whatsoever to ground political commitment in philosophical argument. His book concludes by pontificating on the indeterminacy of the relationship between philosophy and politics, 'truth' and 'power', in general, in the manner of the quasi-Foucauldian liberalism familiar from recent North American political theory. Foucault's concept of power is criticised for its Nietzscheanism, but no replacement is forthcoming, leading to a type of discourse analysis which operates without a concept of power at all. What is given with the one (historical) hand is taken away by

the other (theoretical) one.

*Heidegger's Crisis* sheds a welcome light on the broader philosophical context of Heidegger's political involvement, helping to rectify the failure to think about Heidegger's fascism historically which has blighted so much of the literature. In the end, however, its quasi-Foucauldianism prevents it from becoming the intervention it might have been. Fascism is reduced to a mere *symptom* of the crisis-culture of modernity, and Heidegger is chastised for becoming politically involved for philosophical reasons, rather than for upholding any more specific philosophical or political positions.

### **Being the leader**

Kisiel's *Genesis* is another story altogether, not just because it stops in 1927, six years prior to Heidegger's political involvement, but because it is the story of his philosophy. The reason that there is a Heidegger debate is not only because Heidegger was a Nazi – lots of reputable philosophers were, as Sluga shows. It is because Heidegger was also a thinker whose thought lives on. (Habermas, for example, has described *Being and Time* as 'the most significant philosophical event since Hegel's *Phenomenology*' – a judgement he has recently reiterated.) For some, it remains the source of all theoretical contemporaneity. Of those whose careers flourished in Germany during the period of National Socialism, Heidegger alone has a claim to having moved 'the tradition' decisively forward. It is this combination which is so troubling; especially since it involves a rethinking of the concept of tradition itself. (See Simon Critchley, 'Black Socrates? Questioning the Philosophical Tradition', in *RP* 69.) Ott and Sluga each approach the issue via the facts of Heidegger's fascism. Kisiel explores the strictly philosophical background to his best-known work, with a thoroughness unlikely to be equalled; yet her results are far from being merely academic in their significance.

*The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* is an extraordinary book, both philosophically and philologically. It is a systematic reconstruction of Heidegger's intellectual trajectory, from his submission of his *Habilitation* thesis on Duns Scotus in 1915 to the publication of *Being and Time* – a twelve-year period during which Heidegger's thought was transformed several times but he published virtually nothing. *Being and Time* appeared to the public like a bolt from the blue (something which undoubtedly contributed to its success). Yet it was actually the still provisional, faltering product of a complex process of rethinking dating back to the end of the First World War, in which, Kisiel argues,



Heidegger was 'subtly downplaying, disguising, or otherwise distorting some of the deepest roots of his thought'. Forced into print by the pressure on Heidegger to publish, in order to secure promotion, *Being and Time* is notoriously unfinished. (Only the first two of the three divisions of the first part of what was announced as a two-part work appeared.) This has led to a variety of interpretations of its 'failure'. Read in the context of Kisiel's reconstruction, however, neither its literal incompleteness nor its theoretically unfinished character seem in the least peculiar, since it becomes just one more fractured moment in an ongoing process of intellectual renewal. Heidegger described the book to Jaspers as a 'transition work'. For Kisiel, Heidegger's thought is in permanent transition from 1919 onwards, anticipating the motto he coined at the end of his life for his *Collected Edition*: 'Ways – not Works'.

Kisiel's method in *Genesis* is painstakingly straightforward. It is to take us through Heidegger's lecture and seminar courses, chronologically, semester by semester, from the 'war-emergency' semester of 1919 up to the winter of 1925–26, immediately prior to the composition of the final draft of *Being and Time*, in a single month (March 1926). This is followed by a critical exegesis of what is described as the three 'drafts' of the work itself. The level of detail is stunning. (The two courses from the winter semester 1920–21, for example – 'Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion' and 'Augustine and Neoplatonism' – alone take over seventy pages to expound.) Yet at no moment is the point of the story lost. It is a measure of the book's achievement that not only does Kisiel manage to avoid so mechanical a procedure becoming boring, but the narrative gradually quickens as it acquires the form of a philosophical detection, transferring the obsessional quality of its quest onto the reader.



One reason for this build up of interest is the variety of sources which have to be pieced together to produce the picture: annotated manuscripts, student transcripts and voluminous correspondence, alongside published material. Another is the running polemic that Kisiel conducts against the editors of the *Collected Edition* for their record of 'factual misstatement and chronological distortion', deriving from the adoption of the principle of a 'last hand' edition in which it is the ultimate changes to a text, however belated (in Heidegger's case, often decades), which are regarded as authoritative, thus obliterating the differences from earlier versions. Resisting this practice in the name of the objectivity of historical scholarship, Kisiel undertakes a massive labour of retrieval. Finally, there is the intrinsic attraction of the material, philosophically, indicating that it is no mere paraphernalia in which Kisiel is dealing, but the substance of Heidegger's thought: the gradual formation of an ultimately startlingly original conception from the entrails of the philosophical tradition. It is the temporality of this process – a fitful dialectic of the archaic and the new – which links Kisiel's rigorously immanent account of Heidegger's philosophy directly to his politics.

The key to this dynamic – indeed, to the continuity of Heidegger's thought as a whole – lies in the dual role performed by medieval scholasticism in mediating Heidegger's relationships to Catholicism and to Aristotle, respectively. The 'system' of Catholicism represented the present with which Heidegger sought to break. It had its roots in the medieval reception of Aristotle. The critique of this reception from the standpoint of the philosophical present – essentially, for Heidegger, a radicalised phenomenology – was thus the task at hand. This was also, however, a phenomenological *recovery* of Aristotle via the destruction of the traditional reception of his work. Heidegger's methodological aspiration to radicalise Husserl's critique of neo-Kantianism, in order to provide the ontological ground for a 'hermeneutics of facticity', was thus combined, from the very beginning, with the application of this method to the interpretation of Aristotle. This was a process which yielded substantive philosophical results of its own: there was a 'peculiar backflow' into Heidegger's systematic philosophical concerns. Heidegger's dilemma – and ultimately his achievement – lay in the integration of these two radically different strands of the philosophical tradition – the one, apparently backward looking, the other radically futural – into a coherent project. Although he does not go so far as to treat it as part of the draft material, Kisiel convincingly expounds Heidegger's 1922 'Introduction' to his unwritten book on Aristotle as the



'zero-point' of *Being and Time*.

This is already enough to convey something of the genealogical complexity at issue, yet it barely scratches the surface of Kisiel's multilayered reconstruction. Other notable aspects include: the importance of Lask's 'logic of philosophy' to Heidegger's reception of Husserl; the stimulus of Natorp's challenge to the accessibility and expressibility of the phenomenological conception of the 'stream of life' to Heidegger's relation to religious mysticism; Dilthey's repositioning of Augustine in the history of philosophy; Jaspers' concept of the 'limit-situation'; and the underlying structural impulse of Heidegger's theological modernism.

Overall, we are presented with a genealogy of three intertwining phases: the project for a hermeneutics of the fact of life (1915–21); the deconstruction of Aristotle's ontological ontology by way of his own anthropology (1921–24); and the reformulation of the classical question of being out of the temporality of the human predicament (1924–27). It is not possible to go into the details here; Kisiel's *Genesis* is required reading for anyone with a serious interest in the topic. It will suffice to indicate some of the broader issues which arise in the course of the analysis, making it of far more than merely philological significance.

First, there is the depth and continuity of Heidegger's theological concerns (also stressed by Ott), leading Kisiel to agree with Gadamer that after the failure of *Being and Time* Heidegger reverts to earlier insights, previously unpursued. The famous 'turn' (*Kehre*) is, in this respect and suitably enough, a 'return' to Heidegger's theological origins. His 1922 recognition of 'the fundamental atheism of philosophy' modified, but did not contradict, his sense of himself as 'a Christian theologian', working on a project he could describe to Bultmann at the end of 1927 as 'an ontological founding of Christian theology as a science'. Second, there is the identification of phenomenology (and Heidegger's own project for its radicalisation) with philosophical modernity, as the intellectual tool for the pursuit of theological modernism via the destruction of the medieval scholasticism (and back beyond it, the Greek ontology) which bars intellectual access to the 'living present'. The destruction of Greek ontology is intended, emphatically, as a 'critique of the present' – a phrase which recurs in Heidegger's manuscripts from the early 1920s, anticipating Foucault's late reflections on the ethos of the Enlightenment. This is of especial significance in the context of Luc Ferry and Alain Renault's influential but crude critique of Heidegger as a resolute anti-modernist. It also helps explain the attraction of *Being and Time* to someone like Herbert

Marcuse, who between 1928 and 1932 found in its pages the missing philosophical dimension to Marxism. (Habermas admits to having been 'fascinated' by the Heideggerian Marxism of the young Marcuse. Fortunately for Marcuse, Marx's 1844 *Paris Manuscripts* were published in 1932, providing him with the 'real thing' just in time to avoid the intellectual crisis otherwise likely to have been precipitated by Heidegger's turn to National Socialism.) The 'ecstatic-horizonal' temporality of *Dasein* laid down in *Being and Time* – perhaps its greatest philosophical innovation – is prefigured in the temporal logic of Heidegger's working orientation towards the history of philosophy, in the form of a hermeneutic-phenomenological model of philosophical experience.

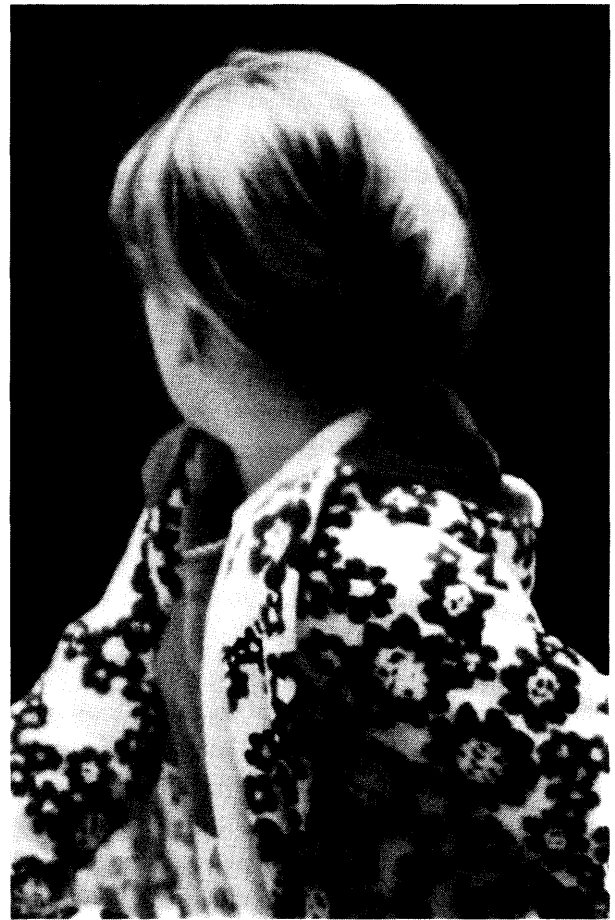
A central feature of this model of philosophy as the fundamental experience of 'the historical I' / 'factual life' / '*Dasein*' (the terminology changes rapidly between 1919 and 1923) is an equally fundamental ambiguity about its theoretical status. On the one hand, following Husserl, what Kisiel dubs Heidegger's 'neo-hellenic phenomenology' is conceived as the 'primal science'; on the other, as a '*pretheoretical science of origins*', it is not really a science at all, albeit from 'excess' rather than lack. Thus, while he laboured to develop a methodology of 'formal indication' to overcome the problem of the unity of the categories inherited from medieval scholasticism, the 'primal something' which Heidegger sought nonetheless retained distinct mystical overtones, leaving him oscillating between the poles of an antinomy he had formulated as early as 1916: 'Philosophy as a rationalistic system detached from life is *powerless*, mysticism as an irrationalistic experience is *aimless*.' Identification with National Socialism would, albeit briefly, offer the power of mysticism the focus of a definite goal: 'The Führer alone *is* the German present and future reality and its law', Heidegger would declare on 3 November 1933 in his address to German students on the occasion of the plebiscite called by Hitler to sanction Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Heidegger never found a stable theoretical form for the mediation of this contradiction, collapsing it in his later work into the celebration of a powerless mysticism, by displacing it into language. However, he did find a practical form for its mediation, prior to his political involvement, in teaching. If there is one thing that Kisiel's book establishes beyond doubt, it is the importance to Heidegger's philosophy of teaching as the medium for his thought. Nearly everything he wrote began, in one form or another, as a teaching text. The interpretive labour he devoted to the exegesis of key

passages from seminal works – always from the standpoint of a prior definition of the tasks of the philosophical present – is astonishing. In the winter semester 1924–25, for example, he took eighteen hours to examine chapter six of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Immediately prior to drafting the ‘Introduction’ to *Being and Time*, his advanced level seminar spent the entire semester discussing the first transition (from Being and Nothing to Becoming) in Hegel’s *Science of Logic*.

Furthermore, the enactment of philosophy as ‘a form of life on the edge of expression’, as Kisiel nicely puts it, rather than a science, was by no means the sole significant feature of Heidegger’s practice as a teacher. Equally important, politically, was the way the classroom situation provided Heidegger with a model of spiritual leadership. Kisiel suggests that his understanding of the teacher–student relationship was the model for the dialectic of leader and followers outlined in his political speeches. (It was because Jaspers considered Heidegger’s manner of thinking to be ‘in its essence unfree, dictatorial, and incapable of communication’ that he recommended to the Denazification Committee at Freiburg University that he be suspended from teaching.) The idea of philosophical knowledge as the basis of leadership is not, of course, an uncommon one. Sluga notes that the thinker most cited in the public speeches of Nazi philosophers in 1933 was neither Fichte nor Nietzsche, but Plato: the *Republic* was ‘the most widely read work on political theory’. In Heidegger’s case, however, this idea of leadership acquired a special significance in the context of his religious development. Like the metaphor of the ‘path’ or ‘way’, it is embedded in his thought at the deepest cultural level. This raises the question of the extent to which its anti-democratic dimension has its origins in the transposition of a certain *religious* model of authority, first to philosophy, then to the university, and finally to the state.

One final textual point of political note: Heidegger turned to an existential terminology for *Being and Time* (which he had previously, with one brief exception, conscientiously shunned) only in the final ‘Kantian’ draft of the book. This makes it unlikely that he had time to think through its full implications for the concept of action. This is important because it involves the whole vocabulary of ‘possibility’, ‘decision’, ‘authenticity’, ‘resoluteness’ and the like, comprising the activist side of the book, and which Heidegger would subsequently use to interpret National Socialism in philosophical terms, and vice versa, with often startling directness. (Löwith remarks that at the end of the rectoral address, ‘the listener was in doubt as to whether he should start reading the pre-Socratics or enlist in the SA.’) It is



precisely this ‘energetic yet empty’ sense of appropriating a destiny which Heidegger would subsequently drop in the wake of his rectorship, in his turn towards the ‘history of Being’. The idea that *Being and Time* is a ‘failure’ may in this regard be connected, quite concretely, to Heidegger’s own description of his rectorship, lending support to the contention that for Heidegger himself the latter was a *test* of the existentialism of *Being and Time*.

Even if we accept this reading, however, it is not to say that Heidegger’s fascism logically ‘follows’ from the ‘premises’ of *Being and Time*. The relationship is hermeneutical, not syllogistic. It does not follow, but it did ‘fit’, at the time. It is not just that *Being and Time* was ‘not incompatible’ with a National Socialist appropriation (this is far too weak a basis from which to launch a political critique); in certain respects, it seems positively to have encouraged one. One might go so far as to say that National Socialism was the only political movement which could translate Heidegger’s existentialism *directly* into political terms. (Marcuse’s Marxist version of existentialism as ‘concrete philosophy’ mediated Heidegger’s ontological categories with the materialist conception of history to produce the opposite political result.) The question thus becomes that of the theoretical conditions of possibility for the historical fit. Here, Kisiel’s fastidious restoration

of the problem-situation of *Being and Time*, in its full genealogical complexity, provides a number of pointers in the direction of a new approach.

### **Heideggerian philosophy, modernity, and conservative revolution**

Reference has already been made to the prefiguration of the 'ecstatic-horizonal' temporality of *Dasein* in Heidegger's working relationship to the history of philosophy, and his identification of this method with philosophical modernity, understood as a 'critique of the present' through the destruction of the fixed forms of the tradition – especially, for Heidegger, that reception of Aristotle in medieval scholasticism which became the basis for the 'system' of Catholicism. What I want to suggest now is that it is the way in which the temporal dimension of this project was developed – as a revival of the openness of the present through the retrieval, beneath the de-structured tradition, of the concealed truth of a distant origin – that structurally ties his philosophy to the politics of National Socialism, beyond any particular ethical stance (nationalism) or tactical or biographical consideration. Indeed, it is this temporal structure – a reactionary appropriation and modification of the temporality of modernity, a *reactionary modernism* – that provides the framework for Heidegger's esoteric nationalism, in which it is the Germans' affinity with the Greeks that is the key to their spiritual destiny.

It is not surprising that Heidegger lost out, politically, in his attempt to inflect the ideology of National Socialism in this direction, to the crude anti-Semitism and biologicistic racial stereotyping of Rosenberg and others – which was an anathema to his thought. The return to the Greek origin was hardly a plausible basis for 'total mobilisation' in the dying days of the Weimar Republic. Yet the *temporal logic* of this call is nonetheless similar to that of Rosenberg's appeal to the 'soul' of a naturalised 'race', insofar as it too has recourse to the self-fulfilling logic of an essentially mythic structure, prior to the historically established social spheres of citizenship and class which were blamed by the Nazis for the crisis.

As a form of conservative revolution, the politics of National Socialism was inscribed within the paradoxical temporal logic of a crisis-ridden hyper-modernity. Under such conditions, the intensification of the experience of change (in this case, exacerbated and epitomised by soaring inflation) ultimately negates duration, opening the way for appeals to principles outside of historical time to restore the semblance of order. Such appeals combine the comfort afforded by the restoration of a lost past with the energising promise of a new dawn, as the

temporal dynamic underlying the experience of crisis is normalised and controlled through the mediating political form of *national* revolution. This is the *Urform* of conservative revolution as a form of historical time-consciousness. Furthermore, if we abstract the temporality of this 'solution' from that of the situation to which it is a response, it displays distinct affinities with the temporal-political logic of the Reformation, in which religious authority was challenged by reference to the concealed essence of an extra-worldly domain (conscience), delegitimising the established Church and energising the present with a newly transcendent futurity: justification by faith alone. In this regard, it is possible to see Heidegger's interest in Luther as a crucial stage on his journey from Catholicism to Hitlerism. The complexity of the mediations is daunting, but Kiesel has done much to help us. The relationship between the theological and political dimensions of Heidegger's thought appears ripe for further, more direct exploration.

The merits of such a specifically temporal approach are many. First, it promises a much more determinate response to the question of the philosophical basis of Heidegger's politics than the established Frankfurt School position. This highlights the abstractness and indeterminacy of the categories of 'existence' and 'historicality' (*Geschichtlichkeit*), and hence their openness to arbitrary historical interpretation. But it so underdetermines Heidegger's diagnosis of the present that it risks degenerating into a form of philosophical guilt by political association, which shifts the critical burden onto the biographical domain. On the other hand, a temporal approach does nothing to undermine the insights of this critical tradition. It can build and reformulate them. Moreover, it has the virtue of specifying the level at which the connection to politics occurs (the temporal logic of conservative revolution) in such a way as to accept the distinctiveness – indeed, the eccentricity – of what one of Hitler's ministers called Heidegger's 'private National Socialism', without this turning into any kind of apologetics.

Heidegger, we might say, plumped for the Nazis because he recognised them as the most authentic representatives of 'conservative revolution' of his day. And he stuck with them, despite the fact that he gradually came to believe that they had misunderstood their 'true' mission, for the same reason. (His criticisms of the regime were always philosophically based, never merely political.) Just as Walter Benjamin supported the German Communist Party because he recognised them as the political representatives of a particular historical standpoint, a particular form of futurity to which he was committed, for philosophical as well as existential

reasons. In this sense, however philosophically derived, Heidegger's National Socialism was fully and maturely 'political', rather than (as Gadamer would have it) an 'illusion' having 'notably little to do with political reality'. This is what so many admirers of Heidegger's work seem unable to face. The consequences for their understanding of the value of philosophical inquiry as an inherently 'critical' activity are simply too momentous. The moral imagination associated with a certain valorisation of philosophy is tested to the limit here and generally found wanting.

Matters have not been helped on the North American side of things by the rigid coding of the debate in terms of the humanism/anti-humanism divide. (To read some authors, one could be forgiven for thinking that the only thing at stake was the place of Derrida's work in American university life.) Heidegger's 'Letter on Humanism' postdates the period at issue. Composed at the end of 1946, and revised for publication the following year, its terms were set, first, by the *defeat* of German fascism and, second, by debates in France. (Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* had appeared earlier in 1946.) Nor was National Socialism at issue later, in the 1960s, when the banner of 'theoretical anti-humanism' was raised by French structuralists in revolt against contemporary representatives of Cartesianism – although Stalinism was. A similar point applies to Sluga's use of Foucault to undertake a rapid generalisation from Heidegger's National Socialism to a 'will to heroize the present', which Sluga understands indiscriminately to characterise the 'culture of modernity' as a whole. Fascism was (is?) a part of such a culture, but surely a rather more specific one (especially in temporal terms) than Sluga allows. In both cases, the narrowness of the definition of the present in relation to which Heidegger's relevance is sought positions fascism as something which is definitively past, which all the participants in the debate can agree to condemn, however much they may disagree about its relations to Heidegger's writings. The actuality of National Socialism, as a form of historical experience provoked and fuelled by crises in economic and political structures which continue to shape our lives, is effaced.

One cannot help but feel that an opportunity is being missed. Recent work has deepened the comprehension of Heidegger's thought by returning it to the politics of its time. What it has thus far failed to do, however, is use Heidegger's work to deepen our understanding of that politics, as a politics of time. For the question of the 'contemporaneity' of Heideggerian philosophy cannot be divorced from that of either the contemporaneity of conservative revolution, or the nature of

contemporaneity itself. The study of temporality in Heidegger's philosophy from the standpoint of his politics has much to offer our understanding of the politics of reaction in general. At this level, jousts between 'humanists' and 'anti-humanists' for the spoils of the sixties seem pretty much beside the point.

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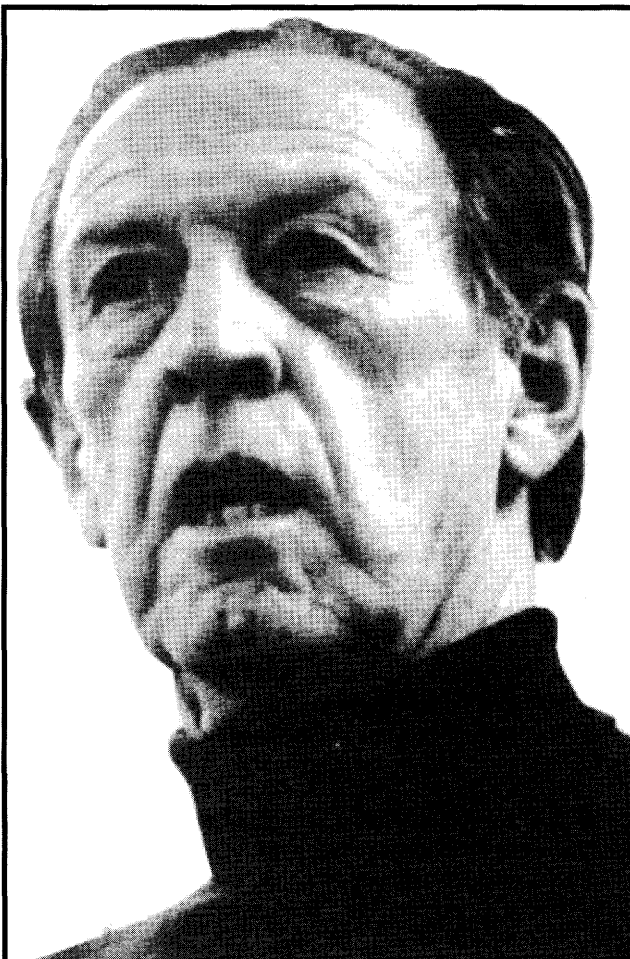
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