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978-1-107-08153-6 - Heidegger and Politics: The Ontology of Radical Discontent

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Excerpt

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Introduction: Heidegger's Challenge

This book began with a question and a hunch. The question was this: how is it that Martin Heidegger has had such a peculiar and varied political influence, when his work is not evidently political, and when his own political judgments were so noxious? Even if we discount his epoch-making influence within the academy, in virtually every discipline of the humanities and social sciences, his practical, political influence is very striking, remarkably widespread, highly varied, and largely unremarked: Heidegger's thought has inspired Iranian revolutionaries; environmentalists and Greens; dissenters from the Cold War polarity of liberal West and communist East; and, to this day, European fascists. This is a disparate collection of epigoni for a thinker whose own work was never straightforwardly political and who was publicly associated with the National Socialists in Germany. Such observations provoke related questions: if Heidegger himself thought he belonged on the right, then what to make of his influence on the left? Can we reconcile the nonviolence, even pacifism, of certain strains of his influence with another legacy of violence and political revolution? And what of his evident appeal beyond the borders of the so-called West, among political movements in the East? Finally, and most importantly, given that there is no necessary connection between his political influence and his work, is there anything in Heidegger's thought that should invite this variety, that is friendly to this form of transformation?

My hunch was that the contradictions and tensions exhibited in the political opinions of those who were indebted to Heidegger's thought in fact reflected something true – however dimmed or darkened – about the political import of his thinking as such. If this is the case, then for as long as Heidegger may be read, his thought will continue to receive such political expression. Returning to Heidegger with this varied influence in mind might help us to understand the

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predicaments and fundamental character of politics in our time, at the dawn of the post-*Abendland* age.

Heidegger presents himself as a philosopher of loss, of absence, of “radical finitude” (GA 3 296; KPM 207), speaking precisely to a time of despondence and of destitution. In a perverse and roundabout way, then, such a time is an opportune moment: moment meets philosopher. In his secret, cryptic masterpiece, the *Beiträge*, he refers to such an event as a “resonating” (*der Anklang*), in that such a moment should allow the thinker of such a time to speak to such a time (GA 65 107–66; CPE 85–131). He, following Nietzsche, characterizes our age as one of nihilism. For Nietzsche, however, nihilism is a condition wherein “nothing is forbidden.” Nothing is forbidden because nothing is fixed, and what has been revered has fallen. Heidegger, by contrast, characterizes this as a nihilism brought to light by the “abandonment of beings by Being,” that is, everything we thought about the world and the ground of its ordering has been ripped away, exposing an abyss where we had thought there was solid foundation. The exposure of this abyss manifests itself in various ways, for Heidegger sees our time as riven with the “phenomena of nihilism.”¹ These phenomena include wars of unprecedented destruction and titanic horror, havoc on a never-before-imagined scale, whole populations displaced, the entire mechanism of great nations being sent to do battle with one another, and the technological ravishing of nature. He begins writing in the shadow of the First World War, a destruction he would come to see as basically continuous with the Second and its aftermath in the sundering of Germany and the beginning of the atomic arms race. The phenomena of nihilism also include, however, the vast expansion of rote, mundane, bourgeois tedium and crushing dreariness: mass communication, mass transit, pseudo-education, urban business, and purportedly cultivated distractions. Heidegger develops formula for referring to these clusters of phenomena *together*, both unprecedented violence and novel forms of monotony: he refers to technology, to mechanization or machination, to “greatness” as in “bigness,” as well as anonymity. These phenomena, he contends, cannot be viewed in isolation: not just massive destruction and war, neither just bourgeois nonsense and inanity, but both together as encompassing and constituting the whole of human existence in our time. The phenomena of nihilism are not, then, just open uncertainty, confusion, and wariness; the “abandonment by Being” also fosters unseemly confidence, swaggering assertiveness, and hasty insistence. As Heidegger understands nihilism, then, his time is our time.

¹ “For whom is the resonating? And whither? The resonating of the essential occurrence of being in the abandonment by being” (GA 65 108; CPE 85).

“The final entrenchment of the abandonment by being in the forgottenness of being. / The age of a complete absence of questioning and an unwillingness to establish any goals. Mediocrity as status symbol. / *The resonating of the refusal* – in what sort of sounding?” (GA 65 108; CPE 85–6, emphasis in the original text).

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Heidegger sees his task, therefore, as exhibiting the resonance between his thought and the impoverishment that stands behind the bluffing and posturing of our age, the supposed pinnacle of a tradition that prizes wisdom.² He expresses this enigmatically in the *Contributions*:

To make appear by way of recollection the concealed power of this forgottenness *as* forgottenness and to bring forth therein the resonating of being. The *recognition* of the plight.

The *guiding disposition* of the resonating: shock and diffidence, but each arising out of the basic disposition of *restraint*.

The highest plight: *the plight of the lack of a sense of plight* (GA 65 107; CPE 85, emphasis in the original text).

Heidegger's appeal is that he presents himself as a philosopher of finitude to an age in which, because finitude is mostly forgotten, it may be rediscovered. He is a reminder of the spirit of tragedy, appealing to both sides of the phenomena of nihilism. To the war-making, destructive side of contemporary life, his philosophy speaks to the urgent, serious confrontation with destruction and death. To the bored, tranquilized side, his philosophy resonates with the experienced meaninglessness of existence announced in boredom and drudgery. To both, it speaks to a certain contempt for the other side. Heidegger, therefore, can be the thinker both of stormtroopers and the faculty lounge, of Leni Riefenstahl as well as Terrence Malick.

Heidegger speaks of finitude in a broad way. It does not simply refer to our awareness of our mortality or our facing up to death, although that is implied in the term. Finitude so understood only looks forward into the future and sees that we are eminently perishable, and that all of our loves, the objects of our desires, and the promises of permanence that we encounter are only ever properly grasped through the most certain aspect of our existence: that we will die. However, Heidegger observes another side of our finitude, our "thrownness." We did not choose to be born, choose where or when we would exist as who we are. We are thrown into existence, into being rather than not-being, and are given all sorts of "baggage": people to whom we are related, a community to which we belong, and a history to which we are submitted. Reason and the life according to reason are situated in one sense among the practical things we use and have "handy," but are more profoundly situated into a whole world

² Hardt and Negri position Heidegger as a thinker who fails to grasp "poverty" in its most real iteration, namely, economic deprivation. They refer to Heidegger's 1945 lecture, "*Die Armut*," as, "one pinnacle (or nadir) of the ideological effort to cancel the power of the poor through mystification" (Hardt and Negri 2011, 46). Their position assimilates some of the substance of the Frankfurt School criticism of Heidegger to the premises of a Derridean appeal on behalf of global democracy or, as they style it in their appropriation from Spinoza, the "multitude." For a recent appropriation of Heidegger for the sake of a new left-wing political economy, see Vattimo and Zabala 2011.

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that we have been thrown into witlessly. To stress our finitude in this fashion makes Heidegger, by his own lights, “countercultural.” Heidegger thus stands in a rather aggravated posture toward the civilization of the Enlightenment, wherein the entire spectrum of human science has been harnessed for the betterment and improvement of humans, “empowering” them and relieving their otherwise troubled estate. Heidegger in effect testifies to the limits and even the impossibility of this project’s success.

Tragedy is not meant to be the final word, however. If Heidegger evokes the spirit of destruction and loss that prevailed, first in the trenches during the war, then in the capitulation and humiliation of the country in 1919 and the years that followed, he also gives expression to a recollection of unity and wholeness that persevered through these trauma, which recollection is itself, he would have it, the surest testimony to its truth and future possibility. As noxious as the word has become, his allusion to the *Volksgemeinschaft* in *Being and Time*, was meant to summon up the spirit of classless, divisionless unity, a kind of post-political purity that prevailed at precisely the darkest times of the war.³ That the time of destitution may achieve a resonance first in the thought and expression of Heidegger renders it no longer strictly abysmal. Heidegger presents the confrontation with nothingness as an event of unmatched promise, and therefore the time of nihilism as, perversely, a precarious but possibly liberating epoch.⁴ He quotes Hölderlin to this effect in his essay on technology: “Yet where the danger is, the saving power also grows.”⁵ For example, in our time, when nihilism and everydayness are ascendant, we are given to understand precisely that the tradition of philosophy in the West has been nihilistic.⁶ The occlusion of Being by the now global dominion of the Western tradition of metaphysics is discovered as an event, an event of unmatched promise.

³ On the meaning of this term prior to the Nazis assumption of power, consult Peter Fritzsche 2009, 38–55.

⁴ Heidegger on the promise of confronting the nothing: “This nothingness is not the occasion for pessimism and melancholy. Instead, it is the occasion for understanding that authentic activity takes place only where there is opposition and that philosophy has the task of throwing man back, so to speak, into the hardness of his fate from the shallow aspect of a man who merely uses the work of the spirit” (GA 3 291–2; KPM 204).

⁵ See Iain Thomson’s provocative meditation on this point in Heidegger (Thomson 2009). Jerry Weinberger’s discussion of Heidegger’s treatment of the problem of technology is uniquely attentive to this underappreciated element of Heidegger’s thought: the present “dark night of the world” is deeply promising; it “tells us that it is a ‘danger that saves’” (Weinberger 1992, 113; quoting BW 340).

⁶ The American Southern writers Flannery O’Connor and Walker Percy both refer in their work to their characters’ experience of the suffocating dreariness of “everydayness.” These writers give a Christian sense of hope pervading the rot that Heidegger brings to light, an inflection that it would be mistaken to assign to Heidegger. On Percy and O’Connor’s relation to Heidegger and Nietzsche, see the most lucid study by Ralph C. Wood (2004).

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OBJECTIONS TO READING HEIDEGGER

Two serious objections, however, immediately present themselves if we turn to Heidegger to understand the challenges of contemporary political life. The first of these is moral: why should we concern ourselves with the judgment of someone who revealed the extent of his political sense and humanity by siding with the National Socialists in the German Revolution in 1933 and then, what some regard as even more reprehensible, who never recanted or apologized for the support he gave to the regime?⁷ The second objection is more strictly intellectual: Heidegger has no comment to offer on political life; he is an ontologist, a historian of philosophy, perhaps a dabbler in logic or epistemology; he is a ceaselessly abstract thinker, with nothing to say directly or of importance about politics.

To the first objection, I express some sympathy. My initial interest in Heidegger was not friendly, certainly not in the normal sense of that word. I consider his involvement with Nazism to be a reasonable and, perhaps more importantly for some readers, authentic expression of his thinking.⁸ At the very least, it cannot

⁷ On the latter point, see Lacoue-Labarthe 1990; and Lang 1996. The recent publication of Heidegger's "Black Notebooks" (as GA 94–6) has only confirmed what was long known about Heidegger's anti-Semitism.

⁸ There is, as one would expect, quite a lot of literature on this. I mention only a few high points. Zuckert 1990 is the indispensable conspectus of the matter. She responds to the failure of Heidegger's critics to explain how he, who declined to refer to nature as a standard in politics, would support a regime that placed so much emphasis on biology and race. She locates the confluence of Heidegger's philosophy and the ideology of the regime in his lectures on Hölderlin, exploring political themes of fatherland and, above all, language. Thomson 2005a surveys the scholarly literature on the matter with great perspicuity and clarity and argues that, when we see that Heidegger understood his political involvement as an auxiliary of his approach to university reform, we can also see that he, in effect, learned from his failure with the Nazis and so revised his approach to the relationship between philosophy and education. If one wishes to see "philosophy free itself from the work of Heidegger" (Faye 2009, 316), whatever that might entail, then a genuinely philosophical, rather than philological-biographical, labor is required. Lacoue-Labarthe's remark about a previous generation's Heidegger scandals still applies: "The work of the historians has in fact hardly begun. I doubt, however, that it will be able to contribute anything really decisive: it is not in Heidegger's minor (or major) compromises, nor even in his declarations and proclamations of 1933 to 1934, that the crux of the matter is located" (Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 39 n.1). The work of Gregory Fried and Richard Polt provides perhaps the soundest general guide to and scholarly treatment of this topic. See Fried 2000, but for a discussion of the most recent controversies, the latest preface to their translation of *Introduction to Metaphysics* is helpful (Heidegger 2014).

In my view, the matter is clouded by a few misconceptions of the attraction that National Socialism held for Heidegger. The first is the view that he would support the National Socialist revolution out of an "aristocratic authoritarianism" (Rockmore 1992, 72) or a kind of "racial-biological chauvinism" (Dallmayr 1993, 152). As I will try to show in the balance of this book, Heidegger saw the revolution as one of the outcast versus the privileged. The second misconception sees National Socialism as a principally "conservative" movement. Its core appeal among the dispossessed marks it as a movement of transformation, not of conservation. The Nazis did not represent, in either their personnel or their doctrine, the "nobility, the agrarian

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be written off as a personal quirk or a temporary stage in his thinking that need not therefore be taken seriously.⁹ At the same time, it can hardly be denied that his intellectual influence has provoked some of the most refreshing attempts to rethink the very tradition that he diagnoses as nihilistic through and through, and to respond to the political challenges of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁰ It seems hasty, therefore, to suggest that his Nazism is coextensive with the political importance of his work, not least for the further reason that he remained not altogether satisfied with the character of that movement.¹¹ What is more, if the political import of his thought reduces, one way or another, to his support for the NSDAP, he poses no serious challenge to the broad political and philosophic positions that constitute the basic tenets of Western civilization.¹² If Heidegger is fundamentally indistinguishable from any of the semiphilosophical ideologues who propped up a temporarily threatening, revanchist regime, then what serious reason do we have to trouble ourselves with what he thinks about anything? Dismissing Heidegger by reducing his thought to his political biography lets us

landowners, the military, the church, and the old educated and propertied upper class" (Stern 1999, 161). Whatever his preferences for agrarianism, Heidegger was not a "conservative" as that term was understood in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. As Hans Sluga has helpfully demonstrated, there were strong and broad conservative tendencies in German universities, particularly in the philosophy faculties, but Heidegger did not share in them and regarded them as impediments to the ontological revolution he envisioned for German *Bildung* (Sluga 1993). Harry Neumann's analysis of the matter is most helpful:

Only real nazism is sufficiently courageous to incorporate the apolitical or anti-political thrust of science or global technology. As such it has nothing but contempt for all values (any notion of good and bad, right and wrong, true and false) or wholes or universals (anything political, anything common or communicable). Since politics always is concerned with such things, true nazis are radically apolitical ... science is the simple realization that whatever is experienced – a self, a world, the law of contradiction, a god or anything else – is nothing apart from its being experienced.... It is unscientific illusion to believe that any thoughts or words, "scientific" or unscientific theories, are anything more than empty experiences, empty because nothing – including "experience" – is definable or limited by anything.... The reality revealed by science consists quite literally of nothing, of empty, interchangeable nothings.... Nothing – and only nothing – exists in nazism's scientific reality. Nazism's will asserts itself in the face of its own nothingness (Neumann 1985, 226–7, 29; quoted in Ward 1995, 270 n. 11).

⁹ Gadamer notes of claims that Heidegger's "political errors have nothing to do with his philosophy" that "wholly unnoticed was how damaging such a 'defense' of so important a thinker really is" (Gadamer 1989, 428; quoted in Thomson 2005a, 33).

¹⁰ One need only mention the names of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Karl Löwith. If one looks beyond political thought, for example – to philosophy more narrowly defined, theology, psychology, or anthropology – the extent of Heidegger's influence is virtually unfathomable.

¹¹ It is difficult to disentangle Heidegger's mendacity from genuine disaffection. As Richard Velkley notes, though, with characteristic penetration, "Heidegger never anywhere suggests that another regime or movement, actual or possible, had the possibility for ... direction from the 'competent forces'" (Velkley 2011, 85).

¹² This, I think, constitutes the most serious objection to Emmanuel Faye's recent work (Faye 2009, 2012) on Heidegger. The objection applies similarly to Fritzsche 1999.

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off the hook for rethinking the premises of our own political arrangements and the extent to which they may be implicated by his broadly critical assessment of the nihilism of Western civilization and philosophy.

HEIDEGGERIAN POLITICAL LEGACIES

As an inoculation against the error of thinking that Heidegger's political import is coextensive with his Nazism, it is helpful to consider briefly the political life of his work beyond this episode. In contrast to his influence in academic precincts, his political influence is generally underappreciated, but in drawing attention to it, I do not mean to exaggerate its importance for interpreting Heidegger. Four areas of influence deserve some comment: his influence among Iranian revolutionaries, among environmentalists and Greens, among Cold War dissidents, and among contemporary fascists. Here I stress their points of continuity, but one should note their evident diversity and differences from one another. What is more, none of them is a straight Heideggerian in any sense, but evidently mix Heidegger with other elements.

Several of the intellectual architects and principal ideologues of the Iranian Revolution were formed by their understanding of Heidegger, drawing on his thought in their diagnosis of the toxicity of Western civilization, the possibility of a future-oriented revolution that would repeat something of a lost Islamic past, and the notion of a recurrent fall necessitating a permanent revolution. Ali Shari'ati, an influential pre-revolutionary thinker, broke with the traditionalist, conservative clerisy by advocating a reinterpretation of the tenets of Shi'ia Islam that stressed radical freedom as achieved through a futural projection of social justice that retrieves and reforms, in a spirit of radical freedom, the truth of Islam.¹³ He saw this proposed revolution as an alternative to Marxist communism that likewise drew its support from the lower classes. The essence of Shi'ism is its saying "no" to the established religious and political order for the sake of justice and truth. As he conceived of it, "Red Shi'ism changes to black Shi'ism," a dynamic that he referred to as a permanent revolution. By this he meant that the locus of social justice and martyrdom shifts as it makes revolutionary claims upon the established order, which as established is never capable of expressing them adequately and then tends itself to ossify into structures of oppression. In the process, a new body of the oppressed emerges to make claims of exclusion upon the new ruling element.¹⁴

Ahmad Fardid, teaching at the University of Tehran in the period of the revolution, was even more explicit in his recurrence to Heidegger. In a 1979 lecture course, called "The Divine Encounter and Illuminations at the End of Time,"

¹³ On Shari'ati's relationship to Heidegger, see Mirsepassi 2000, 96–128, 146–55. On his intellectual development generally, see Rahnema 2000.

¹⁴ See Ali Shari'ati's essay, "Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'ism," at http://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/ashariati/works/red_black_shiism.php. Retrieved August 2013.

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Fardid identifies “Westoxication” (*Gharbzadegi* – “Weststruckness”),¹⁵ which began with Greek rationality and accelerated in the period of the Renaissance, as the chief enemy of the Islamic spirit of the Iranian Revolution: “The totality of the post-Renaissance world has fallen completely; the exception was Heidegger, who diagnosed the problem” (Rajaei 2007, 183). In the world of “complete darkness,” only the Iranian Revolution, the thought of Heidegger, and the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini represent a brief moment of possibility. He feared, however, that Weststruckness would undermine the Iranian Revolution: “Wherever I see a lack of angered fists and the prevalence of compromise, I will be disappointed. . . . I believe in permanent revolution, and today I am very frightened that the revolution may be undermined and the bourgeoisie will take over” (182, 184). A “permanent revolution” is required to prevent conservative, counterrevolutionary elements in society from returning Iran to the Westernized culture of the “modern cave” of “self-founded nihilism” (182). Fardid’s student, Davari, polemicizes to this day against the reforming, moderating, and modernizing impulses of Soroush and other rationalism-favoring reformers in terms that also invoke Heidegger: Martin Heidegger, he insists, can help Iranians understand the “inner essence” of “the prison of the West” (188–9).¹⁶

Heidegger’s influence among Greens and environmentalists draws on different elements of his thought. The Green movement that has developed in the Western world since the 1970s, in particular that wing of it referred to as espousing “deep ecology,” is closely tied to Heideggerian notions of the nihilism of rationalist, technological civilization. Beginning with Arnold Naess, “deep ecology” rejects a human-centered understanding of “shallow environmentalism” as utilitarian and essentially selfish, and instead adheres to a vision of nature wherein there is no hierarchy among the beings, each life form being connected to every other in a non-dominating process of emergence and decay.¹⁷ In an influential codification of the tenets of deep ecology, Devall and Sessions identify three distinct contributions that Heidegger made to the intellectual development of deep ecology: they write that Heidegger (1) supplied for deep ecology a certain intellectual and historical ballast, linking the critique of the domination of nature to the tendencies of Western philosophy “since Plato.” He also (2) urged a form of thinking that was more “Taoist” rather than analytical, and (3) enjoined a form of authentic dwelling on the Earth, “parallel

¹⁵ The term *Gharbzadegi* can be translated “Westoxication,” “Occidentosis,” or “Westruckness.” It appears to have been coined by Ahmad Fardid, who did not write, but was popularized by the journalist Jalal Al-e Ahmad (Al Ahmad 1982).

¹⁶ Soroush has been explicitly critical of the intellectual influence of Heidegger on the Iranian right (Soroush 2006). On Heidegger’s influence on Iranian intellectual life generally, see the extremely valuable chapter in Mirsepassi 2010, 85–128.

¹⁷ See Naess 1973. The locus classicus of the Green Heidegger is Zimmerman 1990; see also 1994, 2005; Thiele 1995, 1999; and Jonas 1984.

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to our call to dwell in our bioregion ... with alertness to the natural processes" (Devall and Sessions [1985] 2001, 98).

Heidegger has also had a certain influence among prominent dissenters from the polarity of the Cold War – the Canadian pacifist George Grant, and the Czech dissident Vaclav Havel – seeking a viable alternative to Soviet collectivism and American capitalism. These dissidents echoed Heidegger's insistence that the United States and USSR were "metaphysically identical." In the case of Grant, he hoped that after a period of scourging – when formerly independent nations such as Canada had succumbed to the "technological dynamo" of the "spearhead of liberalism," the United States – the Christian church could reemerge as a promised source for human community.¹⁸ Similarly, Havel wrote movingly of the possibility that the "powerless" might "live in the truth" in defiance of the totalizing oppression of the Soviet satellite system. After the collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, he also spoke in the West about the fundamentally similar approach to governing in the West on rationalist, technological assumptions about the world:

The modern era has been dominated by the culminating belief, expressed in different forms, that the world – and Being as such – is a wholly knowable system governed by a finite number of universal laws that man can grasp and rationally direct for his own benefit. This era, beginning in the Renaissance and developing from the Enlightenment to socialism, from positivism to scientism, from the industrial revolution to the information revolution, was characterized by rapid advances in rational, cognitive thinking. This, in turn, gave rise to the proud belief that man, as the pinnacle of everything that exists, was capable of objectively describing, explaining and controlling everything that exists, and of possessing the one and only truth about the world. It was an era in which there was a cult of depersonalized objectivity, an era in which objective knowledge was amassed and technologically exploited, an era of belief in automatic progress brokered by the scientific method. It was an era of systems, institutions, mechanisms, and statistical averages. It was an era of freely transferable, existentially ungrounded information. It was an era of ideologies, doctrines, interpretations of reality, an era where the goal was to find a universal theory of the world, and thus a universal key to unlock its prosperity (Havel 1992).¹⁹

The decay of the Enlightenment project of scientific progress and political liberation has produced – in both the Soviet and Western blocs – a desiccated

¹⁸ George Grant's "Heideggerianism" is most in play in his *Technology and Empire* and *Technology and Justice* (Grant 1969, 1986), but on Grant as offering a Platonic "rejoinder" to Heidegger, see Angus 1987.

¹⁹ This quotation is from a 1992 address to the World Economic Forum (<http://www.compilerpress.ca/Competitiveness/Anno/Anno%20Havel.htm>, retrieved August 9, 2012). See with it Howard 2011 and Havel's *Letters to Olga* (Havel 1989); "Power to the Powerless" (Havel 1985, 10–59); "Living in Truth" (Havel 1990). Havel's encounter with Heidegger was mediated by the great Czech phenomenologist and moral philosopher Jan Patocka; for the latter's critique of Heidegger, see Patocka 1998. On Havel's reading of Heidegger, see Pontuso 2004, 20–43.

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husk of technological rationality, a mode of relating to the world that transcends the merely political differences of regime.

In addition to these nonviolent dissenters, Heidegger continues to be influential among fascists – themselves, in a way, likewise convinced of the interchangeability of communism and liberalism as obstacles to “metapolitics” – in particular in their attempts to distinguish their politics from “traditionalism” or the taint of “conservatism.”²⁰ Aleksandr Dugin is perhaps most remarkable of these figures. He is a Russian advocate for a “Eurasian” counterpole to Atlanticist, Anglo-Saxon liberalism, an imperialism premised on “Dasein” and “Ereignis,” the event of being that emerges from the world midnight of globalization.²¹

It would be easy to overstate the hermeneutical foothold that these various political stances and movements could afford in our attempt to understand Heidegger. But on the evidence of these political connections, I hazard two provisional claims. First, Heidegger has a certain importance for thinking at the margins of the Western project – legalistic, secular, technological, capitalist, socialist, or rationalist – where resistance to this imperative seeks some form of “intellectual” support or guidance, be it in Iran, in the shadow of Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, in the immediate proximity of the “dynamo” of the American “technological empire,” amid traditional communities around the globe, or at the level of local and ecological concerns *within* the borders of the West. These political movements are unified by a diagnosis of the totalizing character of rationalist structures – be these bureaucratic, for example, or technological – which are expressed in the subordination and suppression of nature, but especially human nature or humanity. The homogenizing impulse of this universalizing dynamo of the West extirpates anything local, particular, distinctly individualized, “nonstandard,” or unique in the erection of a stultifying edifice of scientific control. Second, Heideggerian politics, in addition to being unified in what it rejects, may permit of exceptional variety as expressed in the different positive claims made by the figures of these movements: some recur to a particular religion, history, or language; some invoke “nature,” understood in a very particular, “non-Western” way (i.e., not in the

²⁰ On Heidegger’s influence among fascists, see the very helpful article by Feldman, “Between ‘Geist’ and ‘Zeitgeist’: Martin Heidegger as Ideologue of Metapolitical Fascism,” where he assimilates Heidegger to early twentieth-century fascist ideologies (a point from which I express some dissent in the notes to Chapter 1), but then shows his influence on Pierre Krebs and Alain de Benoist (Feldman 2005). See also the discussion by Graham Parkes (2009) of Heidegger’s conjectured influence on Japanese fascism. Victor Farias’s recent study Farias 2010 traces Heidegger’s influence among these diverse groups in considerable detail, even adducing a fascistic Latin American connection.

²¹ Dugin himself disputes whether his “national bolshevism,” which looks for the “revolution in archaic values,” can be characterized as fascist. For Dugin’s recurrence to Heidegger as supplying an intellectual ballast for the “Fourth Political Theory,” the successor to the three failed political theories of liberalism, communism, and fascism, see his *The Fourth Political Theory* (Dugin 2012).