

Introduction

When we study the relationship between a philosopher and a political system, we are led to go beyond the borders of a pure analysis of ideas and abstract meanings. In fact, philosophical and political ideas in themselves bring us back not only to the world in which they exist but also to the practical objectives of the person defending them. For these reasons, a work of interpretation necessarily requires three levels of analysis. First there is the objective historical context, next the concrete practice of the philosopher who had made one or another political decision, and finally the systematic significance of the ideas he or she formulated. This significance is certainly not to be deduced from a given objective context, since that context itself cannot be completely understood without taking into account the context in which the ideas grew and the direction of their application.

In 1962, Guido Schneeberger published some texts, until then unknown, that gave evidence of the full and total adherence of Martin Heidegger to National Socialism during the years 1933-1934.¹ It was this publication that moved me to begin to think about my subject. The documents urgently demanded to be placed in their historical context as well as in the context of Heidegger's political practice. But the studies that followed Schneeberger's were exclusively concerned with treating the question on a purely abstract level. Although the documents furnished by Schneeberger were published years after the works by Karl Löwith and Georg Lukács,² all the studies that came out afterwards, whether meant to stress Heidegger's links to National Socialism³ or to deny them,⁴ failed to examine the available documents concerning the affair.

After several years of systematic research, I offer these first results.

What I have done will in part need to be completed later, for some important sources are still closed.⁵ From my first reflections on Schneeberger's documents, I knew that it was impossible to achieve any really solid results without taking into account historical events that determined Heidegger's adherence to National Socialism or analyzing his political engagement in the light of his later political and philosophical evolution.

My central thesis is the following: When Heidegger decided to join the National Socialist Party, he was following an already-prepared path whose beginnings we will find in the Austrian movement of Christian Socialism, with its conservatism and anti-semitism, and in the attitudes he had found in his native region (Messkirch and Konstanz), where he had begun his studies. By considering the historical context and the texts he wrote in his youth (especially his first writing concerning the Augustinian preacher Abraham a Sancta Clara, dating from 1910), we can see the progressive connections in a thought process nourished in traditions of authoritarianism, anti-semitism, and ultranationalism that sanctified the homeland in its most local sense. This sacralizing tendency was closely tied to a radical populism and carried strong religious connotations. From the systematic point of view, this development is linked to Heidegger's reflections in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*, 1927)—on historicity, "authentic" being-in-community, and his own links with the people, the hero, and the struggle (§74)—and his rejection of democratic forms of social life, a rejection inspired by the ideas of Paul Yorck von Wartenburg and Wilhelm Dilthey (§77).

Heidegger's decision to join the NSDAP was in no way the result of unexpected opportunism or tactical considerations. The decision was clearly linked with his having already acted in a way consonant with National Socialism prior to becoming rector of the University of Freiburg and with his actual political practices as rector and member of the party.

His actions in favor of a National Socialist reform of the universities and his writings at the time make it clear that Heidegger was politically active within a faction of the party that during the years 1933-1934 was trying to take power and lead the movement. In these years, when the general political line of Nazism was still in flux and violent struggles were taking place between factions, Heidegger chose the faction headed by Ernst Röhm and his Storm Troops (*Sturmabteilung*, or SA) and tried to base this variant of National Socialism on his own philosophy, openly in opposition to the racist and biological line of Alfred Rosenberg and Ernst Krieck. At the level of persons, this opposition became a bitter struggle for the ideological leadership of the Nazi movement.

In June 1934, Hitler and the rightist faction eliminated Röhm, thus

getting rid of a project whose radical requirements had almost triggered a military intervention funded by big industrial and financial capital. One consequence of this purification was the collapse of the intellectual and political apparatus that until then had supported Heidegger's political actions (especially his attempts to direct the Nazi student movement), and another was to isolate this movement, which from then on had no voice in official party politics.

From this situation was born the philosopher's conviction that, beginning in June 1934, the Nazis had become traitors to the truth that was at the root of their movement. In Heidegger's eyes it was not the movement but the National Socialist leaders who had taken positions of authority who had abandoned the truly Nazi ideas. On its side, the regime continued to watch him, even to fight against him, but simply as a factional element, not as an unyielding opponent.

Martin Heidegger never broke the organic links tying him to the National Socialist Party. Documents kept in the NSDAP archives⁶ show, among other things, that he remained an active member until the end of the war, continuing to pay his dues, and that he was never subject to discipline nor internal political trials within the party.

It is only by examining Heidegger's political practice that we can accurately reconstruct what links tied him to National Socialism and what convictions drew him to it. I have studied several thematic lines that I judge to be crucial.

The first of these are Heidegger's activities within the movement whose goal was to destroy the Association of German Universities and replace it with one of a totally militant bent. It was in concert with the most radical sectors of the National Socialists that Heidegger sent a telegram to Hitler calling for a complete neutralization of German universities, which according to Heidegger were insufficiently "revolutionary."

The second theme is his efforts to establish a new university organization, which was to be held in reserve until it could replace the Association, which Heidegger judged inadequate to assume the responsibilities needed for the new era. Here, Heidegger collaborated with Ernst Kriek long before he became rector, and he did his best to join forces with this parallel association until certain crucial moves were made by the office Alfred Rosenberg directed.

A third broad theme is Heidegger's election to the rectorship at the University of Freiburg, as well as some episodes that clarify how he exercised his functions as rector.

We, shall then analyze Heidegger's relationship to the National Socialist student movement, which was directed by the Röhm faction and rep-

resented a totally radical, avant-garde Nazism. Then we shall examine Heidegger's political activities, which, in general, were closely and essentially linked to the intrigues of the student base. A sort of special political pact united the spiritual Führer and this "popular" base, whose growth was meant to transform the "ankylosed" structures of the traditional German university.

The fifth group of questions, particularly critical, is linked to Heidegger's nomination to two important universities of the Reich, Berlin and Munich. It is true that Heidegger refused both chairs, yet an examination of the process of the nominations clarifies Heidegger's relationship to the regime during 1933-1934 and later. For this reason, it seems important to compare these nominations with the nomination process in place prior to National Socialism. Under the Weimar Republic, Heidegger had been nominated to teach at Marburg, Freiburg, Göttingen, and Berlin. My research confirms that, despite differences, in its official dealings the Nazi regime never thought of Heidegger as an unyielding opponent, and that he himself did not act like one.

That the harmonious relationship between Heidegger and the regime was never broken is demonstrated by various of his activities after his resignation from the rectorship. His declaration at the time of Hindenburg's death in favor of Hitler's accession to the chancellorship and to the position of chief of state naturally comes to mind. There is also the affair of the Academy of Professors of the Reich: Not only did the Ministry of Education beg Heidegger to formulate a detailed plan for the Academy, but the documents I examined show that the Ministry considered naming Heidegger president of the Academy, whose function was to select, according to political criteria, the new generation of university professors.

It is also significant that, along with Rosenberg and other high officials, Heidegger was asked by Hans Frank, Reichsjustizkommissar, to become a member of the Commission for the Philosophy of Law, an important decision-making body of the Academy for German Law, which was formed and directed by Frank himself and which had been established to replace Roman law by the new, "German" law. At the same time, Heidegger was giving speeches at the highest political school of the regime—the Advanced School for German Politics, at Berlin—with Rudolf Hess, Joseph Goebbels, Herman Goring, and Alfred Rosenberg. Heidegger continued his speeches at least into 1935.

Another theme concerns Heidegger's literary activities during the Nazi period and how his writings were received by the general public and particularly by the regime. This analysis illuminates not only the chro-

nology of his editions but also the political context of his publications. For example, I have been able to affirm not only that the Rector's Address of 1933 was reedited in 1937, but that the text, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," published in the review *Das innere Reich*, was the text of a speech delivered in Rome in 1936, as part of the collaboration between the German and Italian governments at the German Institute in Rome. Also, the publication of "Remembrance of the Poet" in 1943, on the occasion of celebrating the centenary of Hölderlin's death, was made possible thanks to official support, which not only arranged to publish the volume containing Heidegger's article but to coopt the Hölderlin Society as well. We also need to keep in mind how the text "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" came to be published in a regular annual collection edited by Ernesto Grassi. In spite of an official veto by Rosenberg, Heidegger's article was published through Mussolini's direct intervention with Goebbels in 1943. This indicates not only the political friends Heidegger had and the influence he exercised at that time, but also the contradictions tied to the permanent struggle for power in the movement that never ceased to be part of official actions.

These lines of inquiry present Heidegger's political and philosophical activities in a different light and enable us to consider their systematic implications in a new way. It would all be insufficient, however, if we did not take into account Heidegger's subsequent philosophical and political evolution. My own research has led me to the conclusion that, even had Heidegger seen things differently after his "break" with the genuine National Socialist movement, we ourselves could not really understand his later development without taking account of his evident loyalty to a certain principle that rightly belongs to National Socialism and is conveyed in a manner and style that also belong to it. I offer as testimony of this not only the fact that in 1953 Heidegger was careful not to deny his opinion of "the grandeur and internal truth" of the Nazi movement but even more the facts about his clear and repeated refusal to make amends, given the monstrous crimes perpetrated during the Hitler regime, which by that time were widely acknowledged. If we review the whole interval beginning with the courses on Nietzsche's philosophy right up to the posthumously published interview with the weekly *Der Spiegel* (in which, for example, he claims that, when the French begin to think, they find they must speak German), it is clear that Heidegger always remained faithful to a whole spate of doctrines characteristic of National Socialism.

A genuine understanding of Heidegger's thought is impossible if one ignores this fidelity: as in his radically discriminatory attitude regarding the intellectual superiority of the Germans, rooted in their language and

their destiny; in his belief in the primacy of his own thought, much like Hölderlin's, taken as a paradigm and guide for the spiritual development of humanity itself; in his radical opposition to any form of democracy. In opposition to frequent attempts to minimize the importance of Heidegger's connections to National Socialism, my own research has led me to conclude that, through this link, Heidegger found a way to connect himself and his past to the past of an entire epoch, and that, through that link as well, one could trace the subsequent evolution of Heidegger's thought in an essential way.⁷