

The Development of Heidegger's Nietzsche-Interpretation

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“...[W]hat remains decisive is to hear Nietzsche himself: to inquire with him and through him and therefore at the same time against him, but for the one single innermost matter that is common to Western philosophy.
Martin Heidegger, Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst, 33/24.

Years ago, I argued that, during the 1930s, Heidegger's thought underwent a developmental “turn” (Kehre), perhaps related to his unhappy political experience.ⁱ More recently, however, a number of commentators have maintained that if there ever were such a turn, it occurred much earlier, perhaps around 1919. It may be true that Heidegger's basic themes—for instance, history of Being (Seinsgeschichte), and the interplay of presence and absence-- occurred to him in their basic outlines early in his career. Moreover, important aspects of his views on thinkers such as Nietzsche remained relatively constant. Nevertheless, as I argue in the following, Heidegger's Nietzsche-interpretation began moving in a new direction after he read Ernst Jünger's essay “Die totale Mobilmachung” in 1930, and Jünger's book, Der Arbeiter, two years later.ⁱⁱ

During the 1930s, Heidegger held two conflicting Nietzsche-interpretations. According to the first interpretation, Nietzsche was the first thinker to point the way to a new beginning for the West. This interpretation is found in Heidegger's 1936-37 lecture course, Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst. According to the second interpretation, which was profoundly influenced by Jünger's writings, Nietzsche was the final thinker of the first beginning, that is, he was the herald of planetary industrial nihilism, which was the destiny of Greek productionist metaphysics.

From 1930 to 1938, Heidegger's public pronouncements about Nietzsche generally adhered to the first interpretation, which emphasized the proximity between Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Nietzsche's thought. Even in this first interpretation, however, Heidegger acknowledged Nietzsche could not contemplate the essence of truth (das Wesen der Wahrheit), which was Heidegger's authentic Sache des Denkens. During this same period of time, Heidegger developed his second and far darker Nietzsche-interpretation, which—to the astonishment of many subsequent readers—equated Nietzsche's Overman with Jünger's Worker. Important elements of the second interpretation can be found in Beiträge zur Philosophie (1936-38).ⁱⁱⁱ

The tension involved in Heidegger's conflicting Nietzsche-interpretations was heightened because he developed them during the era of his involvement with National Socialism. Both fascinated and horrified by Jünger's vision of planetary industrial-technological nihilism, Heidegger saw in Hitler and National Socialism the promise of a way beyond that nihilism. Whereas Jünger portrayed Nietzsche as the prophet of the

primordial Gestalt stamping man as world-dominating worker, Heidegger publicly interpreted Nietzsche very differently: as pointing to a humanity (and thus to a worker) endowed with a post-productionist understanding of Being (Seinsverständnis). For several years during the 1930s, with great determination and intensity, Heidegger attempted to move the National Socialist revolution toward an alternative to technological-industrial nihilism. After concluding in 1937-38 that he had misjudged Hitler and the revolution, and that he could no longer sustain his more affirmative interpretation of Nietzsche, Heidegger collapsed from exhaustion and despair. Never again did he interpret Nietzsche as he did in Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst. Although until 1944, Heidegger held out some hope that the Nazi movement would occasion a new beginning for Germany, the movement he had in mind was primarily (if not entirely) drawn from his own thought. By the mid-1930s, most Nazi ideologues had already dismissed Heidegger's thought as misguided and even as dangerous.

Because of limited space, I must restrict my examination of the development of Heidegger's Nietzsche-interpretation to the era starting in 1930. Heidegger's earlier discussions of Nietzsche are comparatively limited, although they show that he regarded Nietzsche as a serious thinker.^{iv}

Heidegger's Appropriative "Development" of Nietzsche's Thought

Heidegger creatively appropriated the ideas of thinkers such as Aristotle, Kant, and Schelling, in order to reveal their attunement with his own concern with Being and time, presencing and absencing. In his view, all great thinkers think "the Same," although always in their own unique manners. Previous metaphysicians, however, had been unable to think the "truth" of Being, namely, the finite clearing within which beings can show themselves in their intelligibility and in that sense can be. From Plato and Aristotle onward, Western thinkers focused on the leading-question (Leitfrage) of metaphysics, "What is the Being (basis, foundation, origin) of beings?" When referring to this ontological foundation, Heidegger uses the term "beingness" (Seiendheit) rather than "Being" (Sein). The Leitfrage is distinguished from what Heidegger regarded as the crucial question, the ground-question (Grundfrage), "What is Being (Sein) as such?" Plato first defined "beingness" (Seiendheit), that is, the foundation for what, how, and why entities are, as eidos, and many centuries later Nietzsche defined Seiendheit as the will to power. As Thomas J. Sheehan has tirelessly pointed out, however, Heidegger was not primarily concerned less with Sein and more with how time (Zeit, Zeitlichkeit, Geschichtlichkeit, no-thingness, clearing, world, openness, transcendence, lethe) makes possible the self-showing of entities.^v

Drawing on Aristotle's notion that all beings have a specific kind of movement (kinesis), Heidegger argued that human Dasein's specific movement is ecstatic temporality. Dasein stands out from (transcends) itself (and all other beings) by moving out toward Being, that is, by opening up in advance the domain of meaningfulness in terms of which entities may show themselves in their intelligibility. Finite-temporal transcendence draws Dasein out of itself towards Being, but precisely so that it can return to deal with beings as beings. Dasein's mode of presencing (Anwesen, Sein) involves relative absencing (Abwesen). Truth as revealing or self-showing (a-letheia) presupposes a self-concealing aspect (lethe, transcendence, clearing). Neither time nor Being are entities, but instead constitute the transcendental conditions necessary for the possibility

that things can “be” in the sense of manifesting themselves. That from Plato onward Being as Beingness means permanent presence (beständiges Anwesen) indicates that metaphysicians have always operated with a sideways glance at the relation between temporality and Being. According to Heidegger, however, only Kant began to articulate this relationship explicitly, and even then without any adequate understanding of the clearing, which was the enduring focus of Heidegger’s thought.

With all this in mind, let us return to Heidegger’s Nietzsche-interpretation. Recently, Jacques Taminiaux has described WPK as a “profound connivance” with Nietzsche’s thought, insofar as Heidegger tried “to draw Nietzsche’s questioning into the perspective of the question that the book entitled Being and Time was attempting to address.”^{vi} “Connivance” means an act of collusion, tacit approval of someone’s wrongdoing, or closing one’s eyes to what is really going on. Heidegger, however, can hardly have been conniving with Nietzsche, who died in 1900. By connivance, then, Taminiaux must mean the following. “[A]t this point in [Heidegger’s] own itinerary,” that is, in the mid-1930s, “Nietzsche provided [Heidegger] with an indispensable inspiration,” one that allowed him to elucidate aspects of his own fundamental ontology by a creative rejoinder to and appropriation of Nietzsche’s thought.^{vii} But why did Nietzsche prove to be so inspiring at just that moment? Because Heidegger believed that reading Nietzsche a certain way would move the National Socialist revolution in the right direction. In WPK, Heidegger engaged not so much in connivance with Nietzsche as in subtle political subversion of National Socialist ideology, including its biological-racial reading of Nietzsche. In the first published version of this lecture-course (1961), Heidegger omitted passages that shed light on the course’s political orientation. These passages are retained in volume 43 of his Gesamtausgabe.

In WMK, Heidegger had at least two motives. First, he wanted to show that he could draw out his own fundamental ontology (with the notable exception of the “truth of Being”) from Nietzsche’s thought, thereby rescuing it from the clutches of Nazi ideologues. Second, he wanted to demonstrate the abyss lying between the reductionistic Nazi interpretation of art (e.g., as the “expression” of the Volk’s racial essence, or as formless intoxication [Rausch] à la Wagner), on the one hand, and the sublime view of art available in an ontologically informed interpretation of Nietzsche’s works, on the other. Given that Nazi politicians accorded such importance to aesthetic concerns, and given that Heidegger’s sought to transform mere political revolution into a genuinely new beginning for Germany, it was no accident that his lecture-course is called Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst. A year earlier, 1935, Heidegger began work on “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes.” His political goal is made clear by the following remarks, which were suppressed in the 1961 version of WPK: “And accordingly we take Nietzsche’s interpretation of art above all in the direction of the revolution [Umwälzung], not in relation to its staying behind or stuck. [GA, 43, 160; NI, 154; ET 131]

Appropriating Nietzsche’s view of art was part of Heidegger’s overall attempt to “steal the language of the [Nazi] revolution,” as Frank H.W. Edler has put it.^{viii} Retrospectively, Heidegger claimed that in using and redefining Nazi terminology, he was attempting to subvert the actual direction of the revolution, in order to prevent it from stopping far short of the mark. Heidegger wanted to keep the revolution alive, in order to provide greater opportunity for a more profound possible outcome. Here is not the place fully to rehash the debate about Heidegger’s relation to National Socialism, but

as someone who has criticized Heidegger's politics, I would like to make the following observations.^{ix} Publication of Heidegger's lecture-courses from 1933-34 and 1934 (GA 36/37; GA 38) gives credence to elements of his postwar justification for his political activity. Conceding that at first he enthusiastically supported Hitler, Heidegger tried to transmute Nazi terminology into something not intended by the vast majority of Parteigenossen, not to mention one of Heidegger's main ideological opponents, Ernst Krieck, who rightly discerned the anti-racialist impulse of Heidegger's comments on the revolution. In his Nachwort to GA 36/37, editor Hartmut Tietjen writes:

Indeed both lecture courses [summer semester 1933, winter semester 1933-34] show an approximation to the contemporary political diction, yet the gulf between Heidegger's thoughtful basic-position and National Socialist ideology remains unbridgeable. [...]
Heidegger's harmonizing in the pathos of the revolutionary outbreak undeniably [unüberhorbar] stands over against the urgent warning, that this [outbreak] is carried out on this basis of a topsy-turvy view of man and world, a view that corresponds to the shadowy realm of the cave-dwellers in Plato's myth. (GA, 36/37, 303)

In WMK, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche as consistent with fundamental ontology, rather than with the biological-racial approaches of National Socialism. At times, Heidegger strains his readers' credulity. Could Nietzsche's frequent references to physiology, blood, and organic degeneration be so readily transformed into Heidegger's ontological concepts? A few years later, Heidegger strains the credulity of other readers when he depicts Nietzsche as the metaphysician of modernity's technological nihilism.

In 1936-37, Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's concept of will to power as resoluteness (Entschlossenheit) to oneself. Moreover, he reads both will to power and affect as transcendence, as going out beyond oneself. In willing beyond one's current state of power, one always wills ever-greater power. Power, however, involves not subjugating others, but rather attaining lucid mastery over oneself. By Rausch, Nietzsche means not drunken dissolution of everything into the boundless, as in Wagnerian music, but instead rapture or ecstasy, defined as lucid transcendence. As a feeling of plenitude, rather than lack and resentment, rapture is attuned to all phenomena. Beauty erotically transposes us into the feeling of Rausch, which allows us to ascend out beyond ourselves, that is, to move toward Being and thus back to beings in a way that allows the latter to manifest themselves in richer, more essential ways. (GA 43, 239-243)

Art, the most distinctive Gestalt of the will to power, is techne, not as making or producing, but rather as disclosing and bringing forth. Indeed, the artist is anyone capable of bringing something forth. If will to power is understood rightly, not as capricious domination but rather as bringing-forth, then art can be understood as letting things be. Art "is an irruption by the man who knows and who goes forward in the midst of physis and upon its basis. Nevertheless, such 'going forward,' thought in Greek fashion, is no kind of attack: it lets what is already coming to presence arrive." (82) Far from being boundless raving, "Rausch means the most glorious victory of form." (119) Rausch allows a being to come to a stand up its own limit, boundary, or Gestalt, thereby showing itself in its outward appearance, eidōs, through which it emerges, achieves pure radiance, and thus "is." (119) As the countermovement to nihilism, defined as the flattening out or impoverishing of beings, great art in the grand style involves the world-

historical decision—within the freedom granted to Dasein—to lay the groundwork for new standards, rank, and distinction. The great artist brings forth a being—the work of art—that liberates humankind (Mensch) to a new view upon the Being of beings. (196) For Nietzsche, “Art, grand style, is the authentic law-giving for Sein.” (GA 43, 272) When Nietzsche says that “art is worth more than truth,” he means that truth is a fixed “perspectival shining” of beings that preserves life, whereas art is a transfigured “perspectival shining” that allows life to move out beyond itself into new and richer possibilities. (GA 43, 217)

[The will to power] as the basic character of beings, as the essence of reality, is in itself that Being [Sein] which wills itself by willing to be Becoming. In that way Nietzsche in will to power attempts to think the original unity of the ancient opposition of Being and Becoming. Being as permanence is to let Becoming be a Becoming. The Origin of the thought of ‘eternal recurrence’ is thereby indicated. (GA 43, 218)

For Nietzsche, art “demands knowledge of the event [Ereignis] of nihilism, which knowledge includes “the will to [nihilism’s] overcoming, indeed from primordial grounding and questioning.” (GA 43, 273) Heidegger adds: “Being able to appraise, that is, to act in accordance with the standard of Being, is itself the most elevated creating. For it is readying of readiness for the gods; it is the Yes to Being. ‘The Overman’ is the man who grounds Being anew—in the rigor of knowledge and in the grand style of creating.” (GA 43, 274; NI, 54, E220: My emphasis.) In suggesting Nietzsche’s doctrine of the Overman was preparing the Germans for the (coming) gods, Heidegger emphasizes Nietzsche’s kinship with Hölderlin, on whose poetry Heidegger was lecturing around the same time. In an appendix to GA 43, Heidegger writes that Nietzsche’s philosophy involves a “leap of Being,” a going-over to “the other beginning of Western thinking.” According to Heidegger, “Only from the thoughtful preparation of this other beginning is Nietzsche’s philosophy to be conceived as that end and therewith newly to be conceived in the going of the over-going.” (GA 43, 283)

Here, Heidegger seems convinced that Nietzsche’s thought achieves the ontological leap out of nihilism and into the new beginning, but Heidegger was ambivalent. In WMK, he also insists that Nietzsche could not effect an essential transformation (Wesenswandel) of truth, because he was unable to raise the question about the essence of truth and the truth of essence. (G, ; E, 67, 148-49) Like every previous metaphysician, Nietzsche could not encounter the nothingness so closely coupled with Being, understood as the self-manifesting of beings. Although sometimes enthusiastic about what Nietzsche had accomplished, at others times in WMK, Heidegger recognized Nietzsche as a prophetic thinker incapable of reaching the promised land.

Changing Perspectives on a Transitional Thinker

Even though acknowledging in the mid-1930s that Nietzsche lacked an appreciation of the Seinsfrage, failed to clarify the ontological status of “values,” and had no essential conception of clearing, world, or truth, Heidegger nevertheless appropriated Nietzsche’s thought in order to promote his own vision of what he would later call “the inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism. In vain (and naively), he sought to provide spiritual direction for the National Socialist awakening (Aufbruch), and also to

keep it alive long enough to achieve a genuine new beginning, rather than devolve into yet another version of technological nihilism, which Jünger described so chillingly.

Within a few years, however, as he grew more disillusioned with Hitler and the Nazi regime and more convinced of his inability to influence its direction, Heidegger's public utterances began revealing a more critical assessment of Nietzsche's thought as culminating the history of metaphysics in the guise of technological nihilism. Already in 1930 Heidegger was moving toward this conclusion, which he later elaborated in Beiträge zur Philosophie, and in later lectures and essays. Partly for political purposes, Heidegger withheld that view from public scrutiny until continued meditation and political events—for instance, the National Socialist commitment in 1936 to full rearmament, and thus to total mobilization, by 1940—persuaded him that “really existing” National Socialism could not bring to fruition its (allegedly) authentic possibility. Moreover, according to Otto Pöggeler, who worked closely with Heidegger in publishing the two-volume Nietzsche, Heidegger experienced a life-threatening personal crisis and breakdown in 1937-38.^x The crisis followed Heidegger's recognition that, on the one hand, he had badly misjudged Hitler's capacities and intentions, and that, on the other hand, he had to give up any pretense that Nietzsche's thought could be construed as the passageway to the new beginning. Indeed, far from overcoming nihilism, Nietzsche's thought was the culminating metaphysical expression of the technological nihilism that Heidegger had hoped would be avoided by the National Socialist revolution. Reportedly, Heidegger said: “Nietzsche did me in” (Nietzsche hat mich kaputt gemacht).^{xi} According to Pöggeler, Heidegger's wife, Elfrida, was so concerned about a possible repetition of his depression, that she urged him not work on his two-volume Nietzsche (1961).^{xii}

If Sein und Zeit's goal was to conceive Mensch as other than rational animal, Nietzsche's thought ultimately proved to be of no help. There was no escape from the conclusion: Nietzsche's thought remains inextricably tied to the metaphysical definition of Mensch as rational animal. This remains true, even though Nietzsche reversed the positioning of the terms: instead of conceiving Mensch as “rational animal,” that is as a living being differentiated by the gift of logos, a gift which for neo-Platonism and Christianity linked Mensch with the Divine, Nietzsche conceived of Mensch as the “animal who is rational.” The will-driven animal uses rationality as a tool to dominate everything else for the sake of enhancing the animal's own power and security. In Heidegger's lecture-course, Zur Auslegung von Nietzsches II. Unzeitgemässer Betrachtung (1938-39, GA 46; henceforth, ZUN), we read that Nietzsche celebrates man as a beast of prey (Raubtier) who loves to attack and who longs for victory, booty, and ever-greater power. Although the human Raubtier is endowed with rare nobility unknown to the common animal (Viehzeug), Nietzsche defines even the noble and the rare in terms of animality. Hence, his notion of Mensch as the “still-incomplete animal” is oriented toward increasing human power. Nietzsche's stance regarding Being (Sein) was this: either Sein in the sense of preserving and thus increasing life (Becoming), or “nicht-Sein” in the sense of loss, falling, and degeneration. (GA 46, 217). What Nietzsche meant by Sein was not presencing-in-absencing, but instead Seiendheit, the what, that, and how of the whole of beings. Nietzsche decides for man “as the subject and for its securing and unfolding, which [Sein] increases [man's] Raubtier character into the limitless, the conditionless, so that [Sein] establishes Being in the whole in the sense

of ‘life’ as over-powering life.” (GA 46, 217) In this way, “The individualism of the individual subject is replaced only in order to return as the limitless and violent domination of the subject in the sense of the all-living and of the Volk and of the all-in-common, and to remain measure-giving.” (GA 46, 217) For Heidegger, the crucial decision is whether:

all Seyn presences from its truth and the essence of man is snatched away from animality; not in order to make [him] harmless and respectable and happy, from the Raubtier [into] the domesticated animal [Haustier] in the house of an unquestioning drifting [Dahintreiben], but rather in order to show to man the wholly other summit of his essence as Da-sein, as which man becomes appropriated [übereignet wird] to the highest re-soluteness: the resoluteness to guardianship of the truth of Seyn,... [GA 46, 218]

In overturning the other-worldliness of Platonic idealism and by proclaiming the death of God, Nietzsche called on humankind to “remain faithful to the earth,” that is, to adhere to a this-worldly understanding of humankind in the midst of the whole of beings. Nietzsche’s this-worldly orientation has led some to read him as a proto-environmental thinker. Quite to the contrary, however, Heidegger claims that Nietzsche’s metaphysics justifies the technological domination of the earth!^{xiii} Blind to the truth (self-concealing clearing) of Being, Nietzsche was unable to discern the difference between otherworldly, eternity-seeking transcendence, on the one hand, and the transcendence involved in the truth of Being, on the other. Throwing out the transcendental baby with the metaphysical bath, Nietzsche was unable to develop a post-metaphysical conception of humankind. His attempt to halt physiological degeneration by “re-animalizing” Mensch proved to be the final stage in the ontological degeneration of Mensch.

Heidegger credits Jünger for enabling him to understand Nietzsche’s thought as the swan song of Seinsgeschichte.^{xiv} In the early 1930s, Heidegger, his assistant Werner Brock, and a few others discussed Jünger’s work. Heidegger writes that he himself:

tried to show how they express a fundamental understanding of Nietzsche’s metaphysics, in so far as the history and present of the Western world are seen and foreseen in the horizon of this metaphysics. Thinking from these writings and, still more essentially, from their foundations, we thought what was coming, that is to say, we attempted to counter it, as we confronted it. (484, *The Rectorate*)

In 1939-40, Heidegger again discussed Der Arbeiter with a small group of colleagues, who were still put off by Heidegger’s views

until ‘the facts’ bore them out. What Ernst Jünger thinks with the thought of the rule and shape of the worker and sees in the light of this thought, is the universal rule of the will to power within history, now understood to embrace the planet. Today everything stands in this historical reality, no matter whether it is called communism, or fascism, or world democracy. (485)

In the mid-1930s, Heidegger hoped that the Nazi Aufbruch would initiate a new beginning that would forestall the technological nihilism described by Jünger. Soon enough, however, Heidegger concluded that National Socialism was merely another version of that nihilism. Having elsewhere examined in detail how Jünger’s writings

shaped Heidegger's work, I limit myself to the following remarks.^{xv} Sometimes described as a "conservative revolutionary," and at other times as a "reactionary modernist," Jünger (1895-1998), was a gifted author, a member of Europe's interwar artistic avant-garde, a political activist, and one of Germany's most highly decorated soldiers in World War I. His front-experience was simultaneously horrifying and transfiguring. The unimaginable scale of death and destruction wrought by industrial mass-warfare, and the accompanying dehumanization of millions of soldiers transformed into half-animal, half-mechanical warriors, tore away the comforting façade of bourgeois individualism and led Jünger to conclude that social and political events were guided by unseen "elemental" forces, a shorthand for what Nietzsche called the will to power. Like others transformed by the front-experience (Fronterlebnis), Jünger was dissatisfied by postwar attempts to establish a constitutional democracy, which threatened to re-establish the class-conflict that had been temporarily overcome, when laborers and bourgeoisie established solidarity on the front lines. Jünger called for eliminating all remnants of the pre-war order and for establishing a post-class society, details of which were somewhat sketchy, but usually aligned with the views of certain right-wing politicians. In the end, Jünger proved inassimilable to National Socialism, not only because he avoided anti-Semitism, but also because he was no ordinary nationalist. Instead of using national interests to make sense of the apparently incomprehensible destruction involved in the Great War, Jünger concluded that warriors on all fronts in the war had taken part in a world-historical event that transcended national identities and borders insofar as it ushered in the era of der Arbeiter.^{xvi}

After publishing several books in the 1920s, including the best-selling war-memoir, In Stahlgewittern, Jünger wrote "Die totale Mobilmachung" and Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt.^{xvii} To explain the planetary reach of modern technology, which transformed man into the Worker and the earth into a gigantic foundry at his disposal, Jünger concluded that class-structure and political-economic approaches were inadequate. Instead, one must peer behind outward appearances in order to discern "a great, autonomous, and independent Gestalt," which harbors a unique lawfulness. Gestalt corresponds in many important respects both to Nietzsche's notion of the will to power animating all phenomena, and to the morphological view of human history described in Oswald Spengler's book, Der Untergang des Abendlandes, the first volume of which is called Gestalt and Wirklichkeit. In Der Arbeiter, Jünger writes: "As Gestalt we characterize a highest, meaning-giving reality [Wirklichkeit]. Appearances are significant as symbols, representatives, and imprintings of this reality. The Gestalt is a whole that comprises more than the sum of its parts. This more we call totality. [...] The authentic 'revolutionary' act of the Worker subsists in raising a claim on totality, since he conceives himself as the representative of a super-ordinate Gestalt." (SW,8, 312-313) From Nietzsche, Jünger also drew the term Typus to name the emerging human stock, the fearsome and ruthless Worker prepared to transform himself into half-human, half-mechanism, an 'organic construction.' Armament is the most significant use in the realm of work, because "the most mysterious sense of the Typus and his means are directed at domination. Here there is no—be it ever so special—means that is not at the same time a power-means, i.e., an expression of the total character of work." (SA I, 313) Likewise, from Nietzsche (as well as from a host of other turn-of-the-century artists and writers) Jünger adopted an aesthetic stance to the phenomenal display, which he

witnessed as it were from a very high altitude. Jünger's attitude reminds one of the following passage from The Birth of Tragedy, written when Nietzsche was still under the spell of Schopenhauer:

[W]e may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author [the Will], and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified—while of course our consciousness of our own significance hardly differs from that of soldiers painted on canvas have of the battle represented in it.^{xviii}

Akin to his contemporaries, the Futurists, who regarded as aesthetically enthralling the industrial battlefield and the technological marvels everywhere appearing, Jünger appreciates der Arbeiter as a magnificent and crucial element in the astounding spectacle constituted by dominating the world through industrial technology. Negating the bourgeois individual, who yearned for uniqueness and lived for himself, der Arbeiter transformed himself into a helmeted, uniformed, masked, and replicable cog, sacrificing himself in the service of what could not be halted in any case: the overwhelming technological juggernaut.

The Gestalt of der Arbeiter refers to the metaphysical “stamping” [Prägung] and “imprinting” [Stempeln] that attracts and organizes everything, like iron filings lined up within an invisible magnetic field. According to Jünger, the Gestalt cannot be conceived as an entity, but instead as the very Being [Sein] of the Worker. Although often speaking of Being as the deepest reality, as life, or as the will to power, Jünger sometimes used the term Being in ways similar to Heidegger, for instance, as a kind of prism that refracts a “light” enabling der Arbeiter to discern and to mobilize “the whole Bestand without distinction.” (160???) Hence, “the farm worked with machines and fertilized with artificial nitrogen from factories is no longer the same farm.” (DA 167) The Worker senses that the Gestalt is an expression of a concealed and transcendent “hidden center,” which has no purpose external to the completion of the goal of the totality.” (DA, 153) Technology, then, is not so much the manifestation of the will to power, but rather of the will to will, as Heidegger would later call it.

Jünger's writings enabled Heidegger to place Nietzsche in the Procrustean bed of Seinsgeschichte. In the history of productionist metaphysics, a significant shift occurs with Descartes. Whereas for ancient Greek and medieval thought, for something to be means for it to be produced (hergestellt), for example, as a creature of the Creator, after Descartes for something to be means for it to be represented (vorgestellt), that is, to be an object for the self-certain and power-seeking subject. Arguably, prior to 1930 Heidegger had concluded that Hegel had culminated Western metaphysics, thereby allowing Heidegger to interpret Nietzsche as Nietzsche understood himself, namely, as initiating the necessary new beginning. Because of Jünger's writings, Heidegger eventually gave up this view of Nietzsche and concluded instead that Hegel and Nietzsche, each in his own way, were the culminating thinkers of Western metaphysics.

Heidegger's discussion of Gestell as the essence of modern technology is very much indebted to Jünger's notion of Gestalt as the hidden ontological principle that discloses everything as “standing reserve” (Bestand) for the industrialized humankind. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Heidegger makes extensive use of the term Gestalt.

Indeed, in Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst, he describes art as the most basic Gestalt of the will to power.^{xix}

Heidegger affirms his enormous debt to Jünger in “Zur Seinsfrage” (1955), which he wrote in response to Jünger’s essay “Über die Linie” (1950).

Ernst Jünger’s work Der Arbeiter is important because it, in another way than Spengler, achieves what all the Nietzsche literature was up to now unable to achieve, namely to communicate an experience of the entity and of how it is, in the light of Nietzsche’s projection of the entity as will to power. To be sure, Nietzsche’s metaphysics is by no means conceived in a thinker’s manner; on the contrary, instead of being questionable, in the true sense, this metaphysics becomes self-evident and apparently superfluous.^{xx} (42-45)

According to Heidegger, Jünger described with startling prescience the major features of the rising technological epoch, and did so in terms drawn largely from Nietzsche’s thinking. An exception here is the crucial term Gestalt, which Nietzsche himself apparently never used, or only very rarely. Indeed, Gestalt does not appear at all in Karl Schlechta’s index to his three-volume edition of Nietzsche’s works. The word Gestalt, which in the early twentieth century rose to prominence in connection with metaphysical holism and Gestalt psychology, appears in the titles of books by Spengler and by Jünger. Although impressed by how these two authors described the condition of technological modernity, Heidegger regarded them as philosophically limited. According to Heidegger, Spengler offered the negative view of nihilism, whereas Jünger offered the positive view: the technological destiny that the Worker wisely embraces rather than resists.

Heidegger’s political engagement occurred, in part at least, because he was convinced that the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei promised a way beyond productionist metaphysics, the historical outcome of which was modern technology. Heidegger’s 1934 lecture, “Die Deutsche Universität,” shows how much he borrowed from Jünger, and how much he hoped that National Socialism would allow Germany to escape the destiny forecast by Jünger. According to Heidegger, politico-economic interpretations overlook the hidden, but decisive ontological processes that give rise to industrial modernity: “Technology [Die Technik] demands industrialization and the rise of the proletariat and thereby the rending of the people into classes and parties.” (GA 16, 295) The self-concealing Gestalt of the worker, not conflict between different groups of real human beings, then, was responsible for class struggle. War and Marxist revolution “awakened to the Volk a Führer who would lead the Volk once again away from its lostness, back to its own calling, and to a new will of Dasein.” (GA 16, 297) National Socialism arose from the front experience of the Great War, in which “a wholly new idea of community was formed. This new front-Geist bears in itself the strong will to become actual, after the war, as determining power in the Dasein of the Volk.” (GA 16, 299) Ordinarily, we regard events such as war in terms of their external outcomes, including winners and losers, changes in national boundaries:

And yet the historical meaning of the monstrous event that we call ‘world war’ lies beyond the question of guilt and innocence of its causes, beyond the question of imperialism or pacifism.

By establishing winners and losers we in no way encounter the authentic decision; for the decision is a spiritual one. It concerns the disposition and behavior of all [European] peoples. The World War is for every Volk the great test of whether it is capable in itself of transforming this occurrence spiritually-historically. The World War is the question to individual Völker, as to whether they want to rejuvenate themselves or to become old.

The awakening of the front-spirit in the war and its establishing after the war is nothing else but the creative transformation of this event into a shaping force of future human Dasein [zu einer gestaltenden Kraft des künftigen Daseins]. (GA 16, 299)

Heidegger goes on to say: “The essence of the National Socialist revolution consists in the fact that Adolf Hitler has raised and carried out that new communal Geist to formative power [zur gestaltenden Macht] for a new ordering of the people.” (GA 16, 302) Rather than a mere rearrangement of political power, the revolution is “the inner re-education of the whole Volk to the goal of willing its own harmony and unity.” This will be achieved “Through the fact that the doing and allowing of every individual, every group, and every Stande is conceived as work.” (GA 16, 299) “The worker,” reconceived through the new communal Geist, cannot be understood in Marxist terms merely as the object of exploitation by the ruling class, or in other terms familiar to political economy. Instead “Work is every knowing doing and acting *from care for the Volk* in readiness for the will of the state. [...] Thus every work as work is determined by disposition, behavior, and understanding of work, i.e., something spiritual. Work is not punishment and effort, but instead the preeminence of free men. According, the right to work is denied to the animal.” (GA 16, 303) Clearly, even though calling on the manly rhetoric associated with Jünger’s “heroic realism,” Heidegger hoped that National Socialism would provide German’s with the goal of appropriate caring for themselves through dignified work, rather than the goal of self-abandonment to the wasteland of technological nihilism. However misguided Heidegger was regarding the possibility of this alternative, this is what he once hoped for.

After having formerly portrayed Nietzsche’s Overman as the transition to the post-metaphysical man of the new beginning, after 1938 Heidegger always read the Overman as the culmination of the tradition that reduced humans to clever animals seeking control over all other entities. Jünger’s vocabulary figures prominently in Heidegger’s darker Nietzsche-interpretation. Heidegger writes that “The securing of the highest and unconditioned self-unfolding of all capacities of humankind to unconditioned dominance over the whole Earth is the hidden thorn, which drives modern man on to ever newer and to the newest awakenings [Aufbrüchen]...” (GA 48, 184) Modern Mensch is bound by this drive, whether in the Gestalt of Enlightenment rationality, or the self-positing nation, or the “proletariat of all lands,” or human development as world-governing order and progress, or “the creating of a humankind which finds its essential Gestalt neither in the ‘individual’ or in the ‘masses,’ but instead in the ‘typus.’” (GA 48, 148) According to Heidegger, “In his thought of the Overman, Nietzsche does not envision [vorausdenken] a special ‘type’ of Mensch, but instead envisions for the first time Mensch in the essential Gestalt of the ‘typus,’” forerunners of which include the Prussian army and the Jesuit order. (GA, 48, 185) Nietzsche’s metaphysics anticipates

what we see today: that the “modern ‘machine economy’, the mechanical reckoning-up of all activity and planning, demands in its unconditioned Gestalt a new humankind, which goes out beyond Mensch up until now.” (GA, 48, 205) The Overman or typus nihilistically negates the previous conception of Mensch as rational animal, by a reversal that puts the rational in the service of the animal. Moreover, Nietzsche reverses the position of the animal, which is no longer considered lower than Mensch, but instead as equated with the living body [Leib] common to all forms of the will to power. (GA 50, 41-42)

Required now is a humankind which “from the ground up accords with the unique fundamental essence of modern technology and its metaphysical truth, that is, [a humankind that] allows itself to be wholly governed by the essence of technology.” (GA, 48, 205) As typus, humankind stamps itself “in the simple severity of the simplification of all things and Menschen to the one [goal] of unconditional empowering of the essence of power for the domination of the Earth.” (GA, 50: 55) Such domination requires “a total ‘mechanization’ of things and the breeding of Menschen.” (Ibid.) Nietzsche recognizes the metaphysical character of the machine when, in The Wanderer and His Shadow, he describes “The Machine as teacher.” “The machine teaches through itself the grasping of one another by human hoards, by actions wherein each has only one thing to do: [the machine] gives the model of party-organization and the conduct of war. It teaches not individual self-mastery: it makes from many one machine, and from each individual a tool to one goal. Its most general effect is: to teach the uses of centralization.” (Quoted in GA 50: 56)

Nietzsche’s Overman culminates Descartes’ idea that for something “to be” means for it to be an object, i.e., a clear and distinct idea, of the cognizing subject. Subsequently, Leibniz, Hegel, and Schelling elaborated the centrality of will in this metaphysical subjectivism. At its pinnacle, “the will to power as the completed subjectivity is the highest and only subject, i.e., the ‘Overman’. (GA 50, 51) Driven to will itself constantly out beyond itself, and treating itself as raw material endlessly to be re-shaped to enhance the drive to more power, the Overman becomes in effect inconceivable. (GA 50, 59). “The Overman is the stamp [Schlag] of humankind that for the first time wills itself as stamp and stamps itself as this stamp. For this, however, it has need of the ‘hammer,’ with which the stamp imprints and hardens itself, and everything up until now--because unsuitable--is smashed.” (GA 50, 59) According to Heidegger, Seinsgeschichte ends up by constricting the clearing so much that humankind is reduced to a clever animal whose goal is total domination of the Earth, to be achieved by redesigning humankind and all other beings in whatever ways are consistent with the will to will, that is, the will to power properly understood. Heidegger’s post-1945 analyses of Nietzsche, including Was heisst Denken?, do not significantly deviate from the perspective described above.

Critical Observations

Nietzsche and Heidegger remain appealing for all who regard modernity as the outcome of a long degenerative process, and who believe that modern humanity can somehow be rejuvenated by taking a wholly different path. Critics, however, contest such beliefs. Thomas J. Sheehan argues that Heidegger’s own thought provides no basis for the possibility of a post-metaphysical “new beginning” for the West. Instead,

technology is the fulfillment of Heidegger's own view that beings in effect want to show themselves in all their complexity to humankind, and humans want to manipulate beings (including ourselves) in all the ways that we now do and will do in the future.^{xxi} If Sheehan is right, Heidegger's 1955 essay, "Zur Seinsfrage," still employs the rhetoric of the new beginning, but ultimately concedes that the Jünger of 1928-1932 was right: there is no exit from the advances of modern technology. Hence, Sheehan concludes that Heidegger must have been ironic in his Der Spiegel interview, when he said "Only a god can save us now." Sheehan's position is controversial, but most commentators have to concede that there is at least considerable tension in Heidegger's own thought: is modern technology here to stay, or is a "new beginning" possible?

Other critics claim that Heidegger's Nietzsche-interpretation ignores altogether—or dismisses as tangential to the authentic ontological issues--Nietzsche's subtle psychological observations, which rival those penned by Montaigne and Emerson, two of Nietzsche's favorite authors. In, ZUN, Heidegger shows no interest in Nietzsche's personality or in biography. (GA 46, 6-7), but does remark that modern Mensch suffers from an "enfeebled personality" [geschwächte Persönlichkeit], a claim that at first glance might indicate that a strengthened personality would be preferable. Heidegger goes on to say, however, that "Insofar as 'personality' is the determination [Bestimmung] of authentic human being and indeed of man as individual—although not as isolated individual—what must underlie the concept of personality is the Western conception of man as animal rationale, and from this above all must be determined its modern transformation (man as 'subject')." (GA, 124) Hence, by comparison with the strong personality of someone like Cicero, in whose native Latin the term persona was invented to translate the Greek word prosepon ("mask"), the modern personality is relatively weak. Heidegger then sketches how the concept of personality undergoes a decline analogous to the decline of other key Greek terms translated into Latin. Hence, the reader is left to conclude that personality can have no role in authentic human being! Instead, the authentic human person is the "mask of being," that is, the embodied, temporal-historical, linguistic clearing required for beings to self-manifest. Heidegger's view of the enfeebled modern personality may have been affected by Jünger's view that der Arbeiter's taut, uniform, mask-like facial features starkly contrast with the sensitive, individuated face of the bourgeois personality. This "personality" is in the modern decadent, the "last man" described so caustically by Nietzsche. Heidegger may have concluded that Nietzsche-- by exploring the convoluted byways of the bourgeois personality, even in the guise of "the good European"-- betrayed his own decadence, and thus his inability fully to understand and to confront the implications of the "Overman," that is, the man who negates and transcends man as he has become.

Heidegger's brief history of personality reveals an important shortcoming that prevents him from understanding modernity and modern personhood. Although Heidegger distinguished between human Dasein and other modes of Being, in particular animal Being, his Daseinanalysis lacks a sufficient treatment of interpersonal exchange, the specifically human activity that generates human individuals. In his Phänomenologie Hegel described the ontology of mutual self-constitution as the "struggle for recognition." Heidegger's notion of the shared clearing allows for a social ontology, but Heidegger does not elaborate it. As Michael Eldred has pointed out, Heidegger ultimately adheres to the third-person ontology that dominates Western metaphysics.^{xxii} This third-person

view, discernible in Heidegger's claim that for the Greeks for something to be means for it to be produced, is paradigmatic for Western metaphysicians. Even in his 1936 account of the work of art, Heidegger describes it as a bringing-forth of beings (art works), even if in light of and for the sake of Being.

Eldred shows that Aristotle's account of rhetoric cannot be understood in terms of third-person metaphysical models, whether in terms of causing, producing, or bringing-forth. Rhetoric aims at winning over others to one's own viewpoint. Other humans, however, are not things, but instead existential openness; hence, rhetoric cannot be understood as a *techne* that "produces" a new mood or viewpoint in the others. For Aristotle, rhetoric involves using words to effect change (metabole) in members of the audience, but "effecting change to a mood by means of words is a power of a different kind from the know-how involved in building a house or healing a patient." Instead of dealing with raw materials or organs, the rhetor aims at "the audience's soul," that is, "its openness to the unconcealedness of beings in their [B]eing..."^{xxiii} The rhetor's words are not tools: "Rather, they speak to the other revealingly or concealing or distortingly and call a state of affairs to presence within the other's world and from within a certain mood and ontological pre-understanding. To win over an audience, to bring someone around by talking, to gain the trust of another person, depends on the other giving the speaker its trust and confidence, and this can be freely refused."^{xxiv} Rhetoric, then, always involves exchange, a metabole in which speaker offers words and listeners offer attention, as well as the possibility of agreeing or not agreeing with the speaker.

In his 1924-lecture course, as Eldred notes, Heidegger denies that rhetoric is a techne, but instead a mode of dynamis, that is, possibility. Yet, for Heidegger the essence of techne is not actual producing or making, but a possibility, that is, "a fore-sight that knowingly fore-sees how the product can be brought forth into presence." Hence, both Heidegger and Aristotle end up viewing rhetoric as a kind of productive techne, analogous to healing which has a certain goal, because "this is the only kind of techne that Aristotle closely analyzes in its ontological structure."^{xxv} Eldred warns of the "phenomenological violence" that has occurred in the Western tradition, because its third-person approach to ontology fails to account adequately for the social dimension of human existence. Hence, Heidegger depicts modern technology as a powerful, but constricted way of revealing things, including people insofar as they can be construed as things, that is, as clever animals or human resources. Heidegger's idea of human existence as the clearing, rather than as res cogitans is a step in the right direction toward providing an alternative to third-person metaphysics, but Heidegger focuses too much on how self-concealing Being leads non-human beings to show themselves in this way or that. His infrequent discussions of Mitsein are no way adequate to account for the complexity involved in the social interchanges that help to articulate and to sustain the (free) clearing as embodied by specific persons, engaged in constant acts of recognizing and being recognized. Hegel, another great student of ancient Greek life, gave the most influential modern account of human social interchange, in the guise of the master-slave relationship, which was for him a paradigmatic instance of the struggle for recognition that is not merely an incidental, but instead an essential feature of human existence, and especially so in the modern state where "All are free."

In the sway of the third-person approach to metaphysics, and deeply suspicious of modernity, Heidegger discounted the social ontology of thinkers such as Adam Smith,

G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, George Mead, and many others. Heidegger maintained that human destiny can be neither understood nor carried out by the social interactions of human agents, but instead arises from trans-human processes to which only a few great thinkers and poets are attuned. These few are chosen to alter the topology of the clearing so that beings can show themselves anew to and through humankind. Central to the modern tradition, however, is the idea that individuals, through complex forms of mutual recognition, exchange, and struggle, can form a world that is more differentiated, freer, healthier, and wealthier. Mutual exchange cannot be reduced to material or economic processes, but—arguably—is required for human beings to emerge appropriately in the clearing. Authoritarian anti-modernists, Nietzsche, Jünger, and Heidegger, ignored the dignity of modernity, and focused instead on its dark side. Hence, they discounted the possibility that Western history has evolved greater personal freedom and the social institutions required to sustain such freedom. The limitations of liberal society have been revealed too often to need repeating; what does bear repeating, however, are its genuine virtues and advantages, which are—alas—most deeply appreciated only when they are taken away.

ⁱ Michael E. Zimmerman, Eclipse of the Self: The Development of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981, 2nd edition, 1986).

ⁱⁱ See Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

ⁱⁱⁱ Beiträge zur Philosophie: Vom Ereignis, GA A separate essay would be required adequately to describe Nietzsche's influence on this work

^{iv} Jacques Taminiaux, "On Heidegger's Interpretation of the Will to power as Art," New Nietzsche Studies, Vol. 3, Nos. 1 & 2 (Winter, 1999), 1-22.

^v Thomas J. Sheehan, "Nihilism: Heidegger/Jünger/Aristotle," Phenomenology: Japanese and American Perspectives, ed. Burt C. Hopkins (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 273-316.

^{vi} Taminiaux, op cit., 5

^{vii} Ibid., 17.

^{viii} Frank H.W. Edler, “Philosophy, Language, and Politic: Heidegger’s Attempt to Steal the Language of the Revolution in 1933-34,” Social Research, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), 197-238.

^{ix} See Michael E. Zimmerman, “The Thorn in Heidegger’s Side: The Question of National Socialism,” The Philosophical Forum, XX (Summer, 1989), 326-365.

^x Otto Pöggler, Friedrich Nietzsche und Martin Heidegger (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 2002), 14-16.

^{xi} Ibid., 16. According to Pöggeler, Hans-Georg Gadamer—who first reported this remark—heard it second-hand from one of Heidegger’s family members.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} See my essay, “Nietzsche and Ecology: A Skeptical Look,” to appear in a volume edited by Steven V. Hicks and Alan Rosenberg.

^{xiv} GA 90, Zu Ernst Jünger, ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), was not available in time to be discussed in this essay.

^{xv} See Zimmerman, Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity.

^{xvi} For excellent essays about Jünger, see Ernst Jünger im 20. Jahrhundert, ed. Hans-Harald Mueller and Haro Segeberg (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995).

^{xvii} Ernst Jünger, “Die Totale Mobilmachung,” originally published in Krieg und Krieger (1930), reprinted in Sämtliche Werke, Band 7, Essays 1 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1980), 119-141. Der Arbeiter (Hamburg: Hanseatischer Verlag, 1932) was republished in a revised version in Sämtliche Werke, Band 8, Essays II (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1980), 15-317.

^{xviii} Friedrich Nietzsche, Die Geburt der Tragödie, Band I Werke in drei Bänden, hsgb., Karl Schlechta (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963), 40.
English translation from Walter Kaufmann, Basic Writings of Nietzsche (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), 52.

^{xix} In his excellent English translation of Heidegger's two-volume Nietzsche, David Farrell Krell renders Gestalt as "configuration," thereby inadvertently concealing the term's connection with works by Spengler and Jünger.

^{xx} Martin Heidegger, "Zur Seinsfrage: Über 'die Linie'," Wegmarken (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), 215-254.

^{xxi} Sheehan, "Nihilism: Heidegger/Jünger/Aristotle," op cit.

^{xxii} Michael Eldred, "Assessing How Heidegger Thinks Power through the History of Being," available at Eldred's Artefact website:
<http://www.webcom.com/artefact/artfinvn.html>.

^{xxiii} Ibid., 10.

^{xxiv} Ibid.

^{xxv} Ibid., 13.