

sal being, thus not a limited and unfree but an unlimited and free being, for universality, absence of limitations, and freedom are inseparable. And this freedom does not for example exist in a particular capacity . . . but extends over his whole being" (*Werke*, II, p. 342).

14. The *German Ideology* says of the critique in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*: "Since at that time this was done in philosophical phraseology, the traditionally occurring philosophical expressions such as 'human essence,' 'species' etc., gave the German theoreticians the desired excuse for . . . believing that here again it was a question merely of giving a new turn to their theoretical garments . . ." (*The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1968, p. 259).

15. This turn from a state outside men to a human relation again illustrates the new problematic of Marx's theory: his penetration through the veil of abstract reification towards the comprehension of the objective world as the field of historical-social praxis. Marx emphasizes that this way of posing the question had already entered traditional political economy when Adam Smith recognized labour as the "principle" of economics, but its real sense was immediately completely concealed again since this kind of political economy "merely formulated the laws of *estranged labour*" (p. 117; my italics).

16. Marx directs his heaviest attacks in the *German Ideology* precisely against the concept of "truly human property" (particularly in his polemic against the "true socialists," op. cit., pp. 516ff.); here, within Marx's foundation of the theory of revolution, this concept obviously has a significance quite different from that in Stirner and the "true socialists."

17. I have gone into this in my essay "Zum Problem der Dialektic" (*Die Gesellschaft*, 12, 1931).

## HEIDEGGER'S POLITICS (1977) An Interview with Herbert Marcuse

Frederick Olafson

in: *The Essential Marcuse* (2007), 115-127.

This interview, published in 1977, is an important, if rather one-sided, source for understanding Marcuse's relations to Heidegger, both biographical and intellectual. As a Heidegger scholar, the interviewer, Frederick Olafson is anxious to discover evidence of Marcuse's lingering interest in Heidegger's thought. He is not very successful and seems to have provoked Marcuse into an extremely negative evaluation of Heidegger's existential analysis, which Marcuse condemns for its false appearance of concreteness and excessive pessimism. Yet occasional indications of interest do appear.

Marcuse concedes some value to Heidegger's critique of technology and aspects of his concept of authenticity. The interview emphasizes, perhaps overemphasizes, the opposition between Marxism and existentialism as can be seen from Marcuse's rather favorable comments on Sartre whose attempted synthesis of these divergent schools of thought impressed him in later years. At one point in the interview Olafson asks whether Heidegger's teaching had a more durable influence than the existential themes Marcuse dismisses here. Marcuse replies that it did as it introduced him to "a certain type and kind of thinking." The reader of Marcuse's writings will find examples of that thinking despite all the disagreements with Heidegger.

**OLAFSON** Professor Marcuse, you are very widely known as a social philosopher and a Marxist; but I think there are relatively few who know that Martin Heidegger and his philosophy played a considerable role in your intellectual career. Perhaps we could begin by just laying out the basic facts about that contact with Heidegger and with his philosophy.

**MARCUSE** Here are the basic facts—I read *Sein und Zeit* when it came out in 1927 and after having read it I decided to go back to Freiburg (where I had received my Ph.D. in 1922) in order to work with Heidegger. I stayed in Freiburg and worked with Heidegger until December 1932, when I left Germany a few days before Hitler's ascent to power, and that ended the personal relationship. I saw Heidegger again after the War, I think in 1946–47, in the Black Forest where he has his little house. We had a talk which was not exactly very friendly and very positive, there was an exchange of letters, and since that time there has not been any communication between us.

**OLAFSON** Would it be fair to say that during the time you were in Freiburg you accepted the principle theses of *Being and Time* and that you were, in some sense, at that time, a Heideggerian? Or were there major qualifications and reservations even then?

**MARCUSE** I must say frankly that during this time, let's say from 1928 to 1932, there were relatively few reservations and relatively few criticisms on my part. I would rather say on *our* part, because Heidegger at that time was not a personal problem, not even philosophically, but a problem of a large part of the generation that studied in Germany after the first World War. We saw in Heidegger what we had first seen in Husserl, a new beginning, the first radical attempt to put philosophy on really concrete foundations—philosophy concerned with the human existence, the human condition, and not with merely abstract ideas and principles. That certainly I shared with a relatively large number of my generation, and needless to say, the disappointment with this philosophy eventually came—I think it began in the early thirties. But we re-examined Heidegger thoroughly only after his association with Nazism had become known.

**OLAFSON** What did you make at that stage of the social aspect of Heidegger's philosophy—its implications for political and social life and action? Were you yourself interested in those at that stage, did you perceive them in Heidegger's thought?

**MARCUSE** I was very much interested in it during that stage, at the same time I wrote articles of Marxist analysis for the then theoretical organ of the German Socialists, *Die Gesellschaft*. So I certainly was interested, and I first, like all the others, believed there could be some combination between existentialism and Marxism, precisely because of their insistence on concrete analysis of the actual human existence, human beings and their world. But I soon realized that Heidegger's concreteness was to a great extent a phony, a false concreteness, and that in fact his philosophy was just as abstract and just as removed from reality, even avoiding reality, as the philosophies which at that time had dominated German universities, namely a rather dry brand of neo-Kantianism, neo-Hegelianism, neo-Idealism, but also positivism.

**OLAFSON** How did he respond to the hopes that you had for some kind of fruitful integration of his philosophy with, let us say, a Marxist social philosophy?

**MARCUSE** He didn't respond. You know as far as I can say, it is today still open to question whether Heidegger ever really read Marx, whether Heidegger ever read Lukács, as Lucien Goldman maintains. I tend not to believe it. He may have had a look at Marx after or during the Second World War, but I don't think that he in any way studied Marx.

**OLAFSON** There are some positive remarks about Marx in Heidegger's writing, indicating that he was not at all . . .

**MARCUSE** That's interesting. I know of only one: the *Letter on Humanism*.

**OLAFSON** Yes.

**MARCUSE** Where he says that Marx's view of history excels all other history. That is the only remark. I know the *Letter* was written under the French occupation after the World War, one didn't know yet how things would go, so I don't give much weight to this remark.

**OLAFSON** More generally, how do you view the importance of phenomenological and ontological analyses of the kind that Heidegger offered in *Being and Time*, their importance I mean, for purposes of social analysis? You've made it clear that Heidegger himself was not interested in developing them in that direction. Do you think that they might have had uses beyond those that he was interested in?

**MARCUSE** In my first article ("Contribution to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism," 1928), I myself tried to combine existentialism and Marxism. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is such an attempt on a much larger scale. But to the degree to which Sartre turned to Marxism, he surpassed his existentialist writings and finally dissociated himself from them. Even he did not succeed in reconciling Marx and Heidegger. As to Heidegger himself, he seems to use his existential analysis to get away from the social reality rather than into it.

**OLAFSON** You see these pretty much dropping out of the work of people who have perhaps begun with ontology and phenomenology, but have gone on to . . .

**MARCUSE** Yes.

**OLAFSON** To Marxism. You don't see a continuing role for that kind of . . .

**MARCUSE** I don't think so. You see, I said at the beginning, I spoke about the false concreteness of Heidegger. If you look at his principal concepts (I will use German terms because I am still not familiar with the English translation) *Dasein*, *das Man*, *Sein*, *Seiendes*, *Existenz*, they are "bad" abstracts in the sense that they are not conceptual vehicles to comprehend the real concreteness in the apparent one. They lead away. For example, *Dasein* is for Heidegger a sociologically and even biologically "neutral" category (sex differences don't exist!); the *Frage nach dem Sein* remains the ever unanswered but ever repeated question; the distinction between fear and anxiety tends to transform very real fear into pervasive and vague anxiety. Even his at first glance most concrete existential category, death, is recognized as the most inexorable brute fact only to be made into an unsurpassable *possibility*. Heidegger's existentialism is indeed a transcendental idealism com-

pared with which Husserl's last writings (and even his *Logical Investigations*) seem saturated with historical concreteness.

**OLAFSON** Does that leave social theorists then with materialism or behaviorism as some kind of working theory of human nature? I take it that both Heidegger and Sartre have been attempting to resist philosophies of that kind. Does the dropping out of phenomenological and ontological elements in social theory mean an acceptance, *de facto*, of behaviorism?

**MARCUSE** No, it does not. It depends entirely on what is meant by ontology. If there is an ontology which, in spite of its stress on historicity, neglects history, throws out history and returns to static transcendental concepts, I would say this philosophy cannot provide a conceptual basis for social and political theory.

**OLAFSON** Let me take you up on that reference to history. This is one of the things that Heidegger interested himself in quite considerably and there are at least two chapters in *Being and Time* that deal with history. Here of course the treatment is in terms of what Heidegger called historicity, or historicality, which means that the theme is treated in terms of a certain structure of individual (primarily individual) human existence, that is to say the individual's relationship to his own past, the way he places himself in a tradition, the way he modifies that tradition at the same time as he takes it over. Does that work seem to you to have a lasting value, to have an element of concreteness?

**MARCUSE** I would see in his concept of historicity the same false or fake concreteness because actually none of the concrete material and cultural, none of the concrete social and political conditions which make history, have any place in *Being and Time*. History too is subjected to neutralization. He makes it into an existential category which is rather immune against the specific material and mental conditions which make up the course of history. There may be one exception: Heidegger's late concern (one might say: preoccupation) with technology and technics. The *Frage nach dem Sein* recedes before the *Frage nach der Technik*. I admit that much of these writings I do not understand. More than before, it sounds as if our world can only be comprehended in the German language (though a strange and torturous one).

I have the impression that Heidegger's concepts of technology and technics are the last in the long series of neutralizations: they are treated as "forces in-themselves," removed from the context of power relations in which they are constituted and which determine their use and their function. They are reified, hypostatized as Fate.

**OLAFSON** Might he not have used the notion of historicity as a structure of personal existence in a different way? Isn't it important for a social theory to show how an individual situates himself in a certain society, in a certain tradition? Isn't it important that there be a characterization of that situation that is not just given at the level of relatively impersonal forces and tendencies, but that shows how the individual ties into those forces and tendencies?

**MARCUSE** There most certainly is a need for such an analysis, but that is precisely where the concrete conditions of history come in. How does the individual situate himself and see himself in capitalism—at a certain stage of capitalism, under socialism, as a member of this or that class, and so on? This entire dimension is absent. To be sure, *Dasein* is constituted in historicity, but Heidegger focuses on individuals purged of the hidden and not so hidden injuries of their class, their work, their recreation, purged of the injuries they suffer from their society. There is no trace of the daily rebellion, of the striving for liberation. The *Man* (the Anonymous Anyone) is no substitute for the social reality.

**OLAFSON** Heidegger sees individual human beings as concerned above all with the prospect of their individual death, and this supercedes all the kinds of concrete social considerations that you have mentioned. Do you think that that emphasis and that lack of interest in the concrete and the social comes out of his theological training or bent of mind?

**MARCUSE** It may well be that his very thorough theological training has something to do with it. In any case, it is very good that you bring up the tremendous importance the notion of death has in his philosophy, because I believe that is a very good starting point for at least briefly discussing the famous question of whether Heidegger's Nazism was already noticeable in his philosophy prior to 1933. Now, from personal experience I can tell you that neither in his lectures, nor in his seminars,

nor personally, was there any hint of his sympathies for Nazism. In fact, politics were never discussed—and to the very end he spoke very highly of the two Jews to whom he dedicated his books, Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler. So his openly declared Nazism came as a complete surprise to us. From that point on, of course, we asked ourselves the question; did we overlook indications and anticipations in *Being and Time* and the related writings? And we made one interesting observation, *ex-post* (I want to stress that, *ex-post*, it is easy to make this observation): If you look at his view of the human existence, of being-in-the-world, you will find a highly repressive, highly oppressive interpretation. I have just today gone again through the table of contents of *Being and Time*, and had a look at the main categories in which he sees the essential characteristics of existence or *Dasein*. I can just read them to you and you will see what I mean: "idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, falling and being-thrown-into, concern, being toward death, anxiety, dread, boredom" and so on. Now this gives a picture which plays well on the fears and frustrations of men and women in a repressive society—a joyless existence: overshadowed by death and anxiety; human material for the authoritarian personality. It is for example highly characteristic that love is absent from *Being and Time*—the only place where it appears is in a footnote in a theological context together with faith, sin, and remorse. I see now in this philosophy, *ex-post*, a very powerful devaluation of life, a derogation of joy, of sensuousness, fulfillment. And we may have had the feeling of it at that time, but it became clear only after Heidegger's association to Nazism became known.

**OLAFSON** Do you think that Heidegger as a man was simply politically naive? Do you think he understood the implications of his collaboration with the Nazi Party as Rector of the University of Freiburg?

**MARCUSE** Well, I can speak rather authoritatively because I discussed it with him after the war. In order to prepare my answer, let me first read the statement which he made, I quote literally: "Let not principles and ideas rule your being. Today, and in the future, only the *Führer* himself is German reality and its law." These were Heidegger's own words in November 1933. This is a man who professed that he was the heir of the great tradition of Western philosophy of Kant, Hegel, and so on—all this is now discarded, norms, principles, ideas are obsolete when the

*Führer* lays down the law and defines reality—the German reality. I talked with him about that several times and he admitted it was an “error”; he misjudged Hitler and Nazism—to which I want to add two things, first, that is one of the errors a philosopher is not allowed to commit. He certainly can and does commit many, many mistakes but this is not an error and this is not a mistake, this is actually the betrayal of philosophy as such, and of everything philosophy stands for. Secondly, he admitted, as I said, it was a mistake—but there he left the matter. He refused (and I think that somehow I find this rather sympathetic), he refused any attempt to deny it or to declare it an aberration, or I don’t know what, because he did not want to be in the same category, as he said, with all those of his colleagues who suddenly didn’t remember anymore that they taught under the Nazis, that they ever supported the Nazis, and declared that actually they had always been non-Nazi. Now, in the case of Heidegger, as far as I know, he gave up any open identification with Nazism I think in 1935 or 1936. He was not Rector of the University anymore. In other words, from that time on he withdrew, but to me this in no way simply cancels the statement he made. In my view, it is irrelevant when and why he withdrew his enthusiastic support of the Nazi regime—decisive and relevant is the brute fact that he made the statement just quoted, that he idolized Hitler, and that he exhorted his students to do the same. If, “today and in the future,” only the *Führer* himself is “German reality and its law,” then the only philosophy that remains is the philosophy of abdication, surrender.

**OLAFSON** In his discussions with you did he give any indication of his reasons for withdrawing, or what he believed the “mistake” of Nazism to be? I’m wondering in particular if it was motivated by anything that one would call a moral consideration, or . . .

**MARCUSE** In fact, I remember he never did. No, he never did. It certainly wasn’t anti-Semitism. That I remember. But he never did, you are quite right. I think I do understand now why he turned against the pre-Hitler democracy of the Weimar Republic—because life under the Weimar Republic certainly in no way conformed to his existential categories: the struggle between capitalism and socialism, waged almost daily on the streets, at the work place, with violence and with the intellect, the outburst of a radically rebellious literature and art—this entire world, “existential” throughout, lies outside his existentialism.

**OLAFSON** There’s one important concept in *Being and Time* which we haven’t alluded to, and that is the concept of authenticity or *Eigentlichkeit*, a concept that has known a wide popularity, I guess, both before and after Heidegger, implying a certain false relationship to oneself, and thereby a certain false relationship to one’s fellow men and I suppose to one’s society. Does this strike you as a concept, in Heidegger’s development of it, that has any continuing utility?

**MARCUSE** It is an interesting concept. Again, if I remember how he actually defines authenticity, the same categories come to my mind, which I would call rather oppressive and repressive categories. What is authenticity? Mainly, if I remember correctly, and please correct me if I don’t, the withdrawal from the entire world of the others, *Das Man*, I don’t know what the English translation is . . .

**OLAFSON** The anonymous anyone.

**MARCUSE** Authenticity would then mean the return to oneself, to one’s innermost freedom, and, out of this inwardness, to decide, to determine every phase, every situation, every moment of one’s existence. And the very real obstacles to this autonomy? The content, the aim, the What of the decision? Here too, the methodical “neutralization”: the social, empirical context of the decision and of its consequences is “bracketed.” The main thing is to decide and to act according to your decision. Whether or not the decision is in itself, and in its goals morally and humanly positive or not, is of minor importance.

**OLAFSON** There is another side to the concept—I agree with what you have been saying about this side of it—but there’s another side in which Heidegger treats inauthenticity as a kind of deep attempt that human beings make to present themselves to themselves in a form that suppresses or blocks out the element of decision, the element of responsibility for themselves, that incorporates them into some kind of larger, whether it be physical or social, entity, and thus relieves them of the necessity for decision. Now that bears (it seems to me, perhaps I am wrong) some analogy to things that you have had to say about tendencies in modern technological society.

**MARCUSE** Yes, I certainly wouldn’t deny that authenticity, in a less oppressive sense, is becoming increasingly difficult in the advanced so-

ciety of today, but it seems to me that even in the positive sense, authenticity is overshadowed by death, by the entire interpretation of existence as being toward death, and the incorporation of death into every hour and every minute of your life. This again I see as a highly oppressive notion, which somehow serves well to justify the emphasis of fascism and Nazism on sacrifice, sacrifice *per se*, as an end-in-itself. I think there is a famous phrase by Ernst Jünger, the Nazi writer, who speaks of the necessity of sacrifice “*am Rande des Nichts oder am Rande des Abgrunds*” — “on the edge of the abyss, or on the edge of nothingness.” In other words a sacrifice that is good because it is a sacrifice, and because it is freely chosen, or allegedly freely chosen, by the individual. Heidegger’s notion recalls the battle cry of the fascist Futurists: *Eviva la Muerte*.

**OLAFSON** You mentioned Sartre’s name a while ago, and I’d like to turn now, if I may, to the relationship between Heidegger and Sartre. As you yourself have pointed out, I think, on occasion — Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* is very heavily dependent upon Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as, of course, it is upon other works in the German tradition, like *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Heidegger, on the other hand, has from the standpoint of his latter thought, repudiated any suggestion of common ground between these two philosophies, or these two statements. And that, of course, has been contested by others. How do you see this problem of the relationship between Heidegger and Sartre, and the relationship of Heidegger to the whole wider phenomenon of existentialism in the post-war period?

**MARCUSE** Well, it is a large question and I can only answer a small part of it. I believe there is a common ground between Sartre’s early work and Heidegger, namely the existential analysis, but there the common ground ends. I would do injustice to Sartre if I would prolong it beyond that point. Even *L’Être et le Néant* is already much more concrete than Heidegger ever was. Erotic relationships, love, hatred, all this — the body, not simply as abstract phenomenological object but the body as it is sensuously experienced, plays a considerable role in Sartre — all this is miles away from Heidegger’s own analysis, and, as Sartre developed his philosophy, he surpassed the elements that still linked him to existentialism and worked out a Marxist philosophy and analysis.

**OLAFSON** Doesn’t the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* still strike you as a very idiosyncratic version of Marxism still marked importantly by the earlier thought?

**MARCUSE** It is important, and again it contains elements of truth, but I don’t know whether you can really incorporate them into his earlier work, and his later work I just haven’t followed adequately, so I wouldn’t know.

**OLAFSON** The interesting question that arises of course in connection with that is what Heidegger’s place would be in the history of Western philosophy so conceived, because it has seemed, as you were saying, to many that *Being and Time* was a final turn on the transcendental screw, as it were, and that he would stand then in the same tradition as the people that he seems to be criticizing so trenchantly.

**MARCUSE** In the specific context of the history of philosophy, this may be true. In the larger political context, one may say that German Idealism comes to an end with the construction of the Nazi state. To quote Carl Schmitt: “On January 30, 1933, Hegel died.”

**OLAFSON** And yet Heidegger’s philosophy enjoyed enormous prestige in Germany in the post-war period. I think that is beginning to slack off a bit . . .

**MARCUSE** True.

**OLAFSON** . . . or has been for the last decade, and I suppose it was more the later philosophy than the philosophy of *Being and Time* that formed the basis for that renaissance of interest in Heidegger. Do you have any impressions of his influence on German intellectual life in the post-war period?

**MARCUSE** I only know, as you said, that by now it has been reduced considerably. There was a great interest in Heidegger for quite some time after the war, and I think you are right, it was mainly the late work and not the early work.

**OLAFSON** Theodor Adorno, a former colleague of yours, has characterized that influence in highly critical terms.

**MARCUSE** Yes.

**OLAFSON** As a glorification of the principle of heteronomy, which I take to mean essentially the principle of external authority of some kind. If that is true then there is a kind of paradox in the fact that a philosophy of will and self-assertion, of authenticity, has turned around into an ideological basis for an essentially heteronomous and authoritarian social orientation.

**MARCUSE** Yes, but as we discussed, I think the roots of this authoritarianism you can find (again *ex-post*) in *Being and Time*, and the heteronomy may not only be that of outside authorities and powers, but also, for example, the heteronomy exercised by death over life. I think that Adorno has this too in mind when he speaks of it.

**OLAFSON** Do you think that Hegel is dead, that classical German philosophy is effectively at an end? Can there be continuators, more successful, perhaps, than Heidegger?

**MARCUSE** You mean the tradition of German Idealism?

**OLAFSON** I mean, is it still possible for living philosophies to be built on the great classical authors, Hegel and Kant, whether through revision, or however? Are these still living sources of philosophical inspiration?

**MARCUSE** I would definitely say yes. And I would definitely say that one of the proofs is the continued existence and development of Marxist theory. Because Marx and Engels themselves never failed to emphasize to what extent they considered themselves as the heirs of German Idealism. It is, of course, a greatly modified idealism, but elements of it remain in social and political theory.

**OLAFSON** I think you've already characterized, in general terms, what permanent effect Heidegger's philosophy, his teaching, had upon your own thought, upon your own philosophical work. Is there anything that you want to add to that? On balance, does the encounter with Heidegger seem to you to have enriched your own philosophical thinking, or is it something that you essentially had to see through and overcome?

**MARCUSE** I would say more. There was, as I said, the mere fact that at least a certain type and kind of thinking I learned from him, and at least the fact—which again today should be stressed in the age of structuralism—that after all the text has an authority of its own and even if you violate the text, you have to do justice to it. These are elements which I think continue to be valid to this very day.

**OLAFSON** The analysis of the situation of the individual human being, the conscious human being—is this susceptible, do you think, of continuing treatment?

**MARCUSE** No. As far as I am concerned, the existential analysis *à la* Heidegger today, I don't think there is anything in it I could say yes to, except in a very different social and intellectual context.

**OLAFSON** Could you give us any indication of what the nature of that context might be?

**MARCUSE** That is very difficult. It would open up a completely new topic. The entire dimension that has been neglected in Marxian theory, for example, how social institutions reproduce themselves in the individuals, and how the individuals, by virtue of their reproducing their own society act on it. There is room for what may be called an existential analysis, but only within this framework.

**OLAFSON** Well, thank you very much.

**MARCUSE** You're welcome.