

TRANSLATION

THE SELF-ASSERTION OF THE GERMAN UNIVERSITY:
ADDRESS, DELIVERED ON THE SOLEMN ASSUMPTION
OF THE RECTORATE OF THE UNIVERSITY FREIBURG
THE RECTORATE 1933/34: FACTS AND THOUGHTS

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

**TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
KARSTEN HARRIES**

THE following is a translation of Martin Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität. Rede, gehalten bei der feierlichen Übernahme des Rektorats der Universität Freiburg i. Br. am 27. 5. 1933* and *Das Rektorat 1933/34. Tatsachen und Gedanken*. The former was first published by Korn Verlag, Breslau, in 1933. It was republished in 1983, together with Heidegger's later remarks on his rectorate, by Vittorio Klostermann in Frankfurt am Main.

Martin Heidegger wanted his writings to speak for themselves. His son, Hermann Heidegger, and his publisher have reaffirmed this wish. Such reaffirmation seems particularly important in this case, which by its nature invites emotional responses and demands thoughtful discussion.

Heidegger's thinking is a thinking "on the way." To understand this way we have to understand its stages. The texts that have here been translated help to illuminate a particularly crucial stage, which decisively shaped the subsequent development of Heidegger's thought.

To help the reader, I have added a number of footnotes. Some of these call attention to places where my translation left me dissatisfied; others explain references to persons and events that without such explanation are likely to mean little to readers unfamiliar with the situation to which Heidegger's rectorate responded; still others locate works referred to in these texts.

Gratitude is expressed to Hermann Heidegger and the publisher, Vittorio Klostermann, who gave their permission to publish these translations and to preface them with a translation of Hermann Heidegger's brief *Vorwort* to the German edition.—K. H.

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PREFACE

FIFTY years after Martin Heidegger's Rectoral Address, "The Self-Assertion¹ of the German University," it seems necessary to make this text once again available to the general public, a text about which many speak, some even write, without having read it. Six old misprints were corrected; two minor terminological corrections made by Martin Heidegger in his own copy inserted. Otherwise the text is an unchanged reprint of the edition of 1933.

At the request of the NSDAP, the address was withdrawn from trade soon after Heidegger resigned in protest towards the end of February, 1934—he had refused to dismiss deans he had appointed, but who were not National Socialists—and shortly after the appearance of the second edition.

Much has been said about the content of the speech that is false and untrue. From 1945 on down to the most recent past, even university professors have cited in their publications what were supposed to be statements from the Rectoral Address, which are not found there. The words 'National Socialism' and 'National Socialist' do not occur in this address; the 'Führer', the 'Chancellor of the *Reich*', or 'Hitler' are not mentioned.

At the time, the title of the address alone made people listen more attentively. No doubt, Martin Heidegger was caught up in the mood that seemed to promise a fresh start for the nation, as were also many of those who later became resistance fighters. He never denied his entanglements in the movement of the time. And to be sure, he made mistakes while rector. He did not deny his own inadequacies. But he was neither an uncritical fellow traveller, nor an active party member. From the very beginning he kept a clear distance from the party leadership. This showed itself, for example, in his prohibition of book burnings and of the posting of the "Jew Notice"² in the university; in his appointment

¹ *Selbstbehauptung* means not just "self-assertion," but a defense of one's proper place against attempts by others to usurp it.

² "Judenplakat." In the spring of 1933 Joseph Goebbels's newly established *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda* directed the *Deutsche Studentenbund*, the National Socialist student orga-

of deans, not one of whom was a National Socialist; and in that as long as he remained rector, he was able to keep the Jewish professors von Hevesy³ and Thannhauser⁴ at the University.

Shortly after the collapse of the National Socialist regime in 1945, Martin Heidegger wrote a retrospective essay: "The Rectorate 1933/34—Facts and Thoughts." He gave the handwritten manuscript to the undersigned later, asking him to publish it at the proper time. The necessary new edition of the Rectoral Address, which appeared in France in 1982 in a bilingual edition,⁵ seems to be the right moment for the first publication of this essay, which covers some of the same ground as the *Spiegel* interview, given in September 1966.⁶

Hermann Heidegger
Attental, January 1983

nization, to engage in a campaign "Against the un-German [i.e., Jewish] spirit." Starting on April 12 (Heidegger was elected rector of the University of Freiburg on April 21), twelve theses were to be posted in every university. At the same time students were asked to "cleanse" not only their own libraries, but those of their friends, and even public libraries that did not have primarily a research function, of *zersetzendes Schrifttum*, of literature that was thought to pose a threat to the integrity and purity of the German spirit. The burning of these books on May 10 represented the culmination of this campaign.

³ Georg von Hevesy, winner of the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1943, fled to Stockholm in 1943, to return to Freiburg after the war.

⁴ Siegfried Thannhauser, professor of internal medicine, was forced to retire from the university in 1934 and left to assume a visiting professorship at Tufts.

⁵ A bilingual edition, the translation by Gérard Granel, appeared in the *Editions Trans-Europ-Repress*, 1982. This translation had been preceded by an earlier version, also by Granel, published under the same title, "*L'Auto-affirmation de l'université allemande*," in *Phi*, supplement to *Annales de l'Université de Toulouse Le Mirail*, 1976. A translation by François Fédier of both the retrospective remarks of 1945 and the Rectoral Address appeared in *Le Débat*, no. 27, November 1983, under the titles "Le rectorat 1933-34" and "L'Université allemande envers et contre tout elle-même."

⁶ "Nur ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel*, 23 (1976). "Only a God Can Save Us," translated by Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1976): 267-284.

THE SELF-ASSERTION OF THE GERMAN UNIVERSITY

THE assumption of the rectorate is the commitment to the *spiritual* leadership of this institution of higher learning.¹ The following² of teachers and students awakens and grows strong only from a true and joint rootedness in the essence of the German university. This essence, however, gains clarity, rank, and power only when first of all and at all times the leaders are themselves led—led by that unyielding spiritual mission that forces the fate of the German people to bear the stamp of its history.

Do we know about this spiritual mission? Whether we do or not, the question must be faced: *are* we, the body of teachers and students of this “high” school, truly and jointly rooted in the essence of the German university? Does this essence have genuine strength to stamp our being (*Dasein*)? No doubt, only if we most deeply *will* this essence. But who would doubt this? “Self-governance” is commonly seen as the dominant characteristic of the university’s essence; it is to be preserved. However—have we considered fully what this claim to self-governance demands of us?

Surely, self-governance means: to set our own task, to determine ourselves the way and manner in which it is to be realized, so that thus we shall be what we ought to be. But do we know *who we ourselves are*, this body of teachers and students of the highest school of the German people? *Can* we even know this without the most constant and unsparing *self-examination*?

Neither an awareness of the present conditions of the university, nor an acquaintance with its earlier history are enough to guarantee a sufficient knowledge of its essence—unless we first delimit what this essence is to be, clearly and unsparingly; and

¹ Like the more usual *Hochschule*, *hohe Schule* means first of all “institution of higher learning.” *Hohe Schule*, however, carries a special aura. To preserve at least a trace of this aura, I have translated the term below as “‘high’ school.”

² ‘Followers’ would be the more natural translation of *Gefolgschaft*, but the term suggests followers gathered together in one body. The word belongs with *Lehrerschaft* and *Studentenschaft*, which I have translated as ‘body of teachers’ and ‘student body’, respectively.

having thus delimited it, *will* it, and in such willing, *assert* ourselves.

Self-governance must be grounded in self-examination. Self-examination, however, presupposes that the German university possesses the strength to *self-assertion*. Will we enact it? And how?

The self-assertion of the German university is the primordial, shared will to its essence. We understand the German university as the “high” school that, grounded in science, by means of science educates and disciplines the leaders and guardians of the fate of the German people. The will to the essence of the German university is the will to science as will to the historical mission of the German people as a people that knows itself in its state. *Together*, science and German fate must come to power in this will to essence. And they will do so if, and *only* if, we—this body of teachers and students—*on the one hand* expose science to its innermost necessity and, *on the other hand*, are equal to the German fate in its most extreme distress.

To be sure, as long as—talking about “the new concept of science”—we contest the self-sufficiency and lack of presuppositions of an all too up-to-date science, we will not experience the essence of science in its innermost necessity. Such doing is merely negative; looking back hardly beyond the last decades, it has turned by now into a mere semblance of a true struggle for the essence of science.

If we want to grasp the essence of science, we must first face up to this decisive question: should there still *be* science for us in the future, or should we let it drift toward a quick end? That there should be science at all, is never unconditionally necessary. But if there is to be science, and if it is to be *for* us and *through* us, under what conditions can it then truly exist?

Only if we again place ourselves under the power of the *beginning* of our spiritual-historical being (*Dasein*). This beginning is the setting out³ of Greek philosophy. Here, for the first time, western man raises himself up from a popular base and, by virtue of his language, stands up to the *totality of what is*,⁴ which he

³ *Aufbruch* suggests that this “setting out” is also a “breaking open.”

⁴ “Darin [in this setting out] steht der abendländische Mensch aus seinem Volkstum kraft seiner Sprache erstmals auf gegen das *Seiende im Ganzen*. . . .” *Aufstehen* suggests here a standing up that raises

questions and conceives as the being that it is. All science is philosophy, whether it knows and wills it—or not. All science remains bound to that beginning of philosophy. From it it draws the strength of its essence, supposing that it still remains equal to this beginning.

Here we want to regain for *our* being (*Dasein*) two distinguishing properties of the original Greek essence of science.

Among the Greeks an old story went around that Prometheus had been the first philosopher. Aeschylus has this Prometheus utter a saying that expresses the essence of knowing.

τέχνη δ'ανάγκης ασθενεστερα μακρῶ (Prom. 514 ed. Wil).

“Knowing, however, is far weaker than necessity.” This is to say: all knowing about things has always already been delivered up to overpowering fate and fails before it.

Just because of this, knowing must develop its highest defiance; called forth by such defiance, all the power of the hiddenness of what is must first arise for knowing really to fail. Just in this way, what is opens itself in its unfathomable inalterability and lends knowing its truth. Encountering this Greek saying about the creative impotence of knowing, one likes to find here all too readily the prototype of a knowing based purely on itself, while in fact such knowing has forgotten its own essence; this knowing is interpreted for us as the “theoretical” attitude—but what do the Greeks mean by *θεωρία*? One says: pure contemplation, which remains bound only to the thing in question and to all it is and demands. This contemplative behavior—and here one appeals to the Greeks—is said to be pursued for its own sake. But this appeal is mistaken. For one thing, “theory” is not pursued for its own sake, but only in the passion to remain close to and hard pressed by what is as such. But, for another, the Greeks struggled precisely to conceive and to enact this contemplative questioning as one, indeed as the highest mode of *ἐνέργεια*, of man’s “being-at-work.” They were not concerned to assimilate practice to

man beyond his rootedness in the people, but also a “revolt” (*Aufstand*) against all entities. “People” does not preserve the aura carried by such words as *Volk*, *Volkstum*, and *völklich*, which figure so prominently in the address. Nor can we capture it by casting a quick glance at the *völkische* rhetoric of National Socialism. Only careful consideration of the history of their use prevents misunderstanding.

theory; quite the reverse: theory was to be understood as itself the highest realization of genuine practice. For the Greeks science is not a “cultural good,” but the innermost determining center of all that binds human being to people and state.⁵ Science, for them, is also not a mere means of bringing the unconscious to consciousness, but the power that hones and embraces being-there (*Dasein*) in its entirety.

Science is the questioning holding of one’s ground in the midst of the ever self-concealing totality of what is. This active perseverance knows, as it perseveres, about its impotence before fate.

This is the original essence of science. But doesn’t this beginning by now lie two and a half millennia behind us? Hasn’t human progress changed science as well? Certainly! The Christian-theological interpretation of the world that followed, as well as the later mathematical-technological thinking of the modern age, have separated science both in time and in its concerns from its beginning. But this does not mean that the beginning has been overcome, let alone brought to nought. For if indeed this primordial Greek science is something great, then the *beginning* of this great thing remains what is *greatest* about it. The essence of science could not even be emptied out and used up, as is happening today despite all its results and “international organizations,” if the greatness of the beginning did not *still* endure. The beginning *still is*. It does not lie *behind us*, as something that was long ago, but stands *before us*. As what is greatest, the beginning has passed in advance beyond all that is to come and thus also beyond us. The beginning has invaded our future. There it awaits us, a distant command bidding us catch up with its greatness.

Only if we resolutely submit to this distant command to recapture the greatness of the beginning, will science become the innermost necessity of our being (*Dasein*). Otherwise it remains

⁵ “. . . des ganzen volklich-staatlichen Daseins.” I considered retaining *Dasein* as a by now well established, untranslatable technical term. But the reader should not assume that in the Rectoral Address *Dasein* means just what it does in *Being and Time*. Heidegger, e.g., speaks of the *Dasein eines Volkes*. *Volklich-staatlich*, too, poses a problem: thus the translation cannot capture the intimate union of *Volk* and *Staat* suggested by the hyphenated adjective.

an accident we fall into or the settled comfort of a safe occupation, serving to further a mere progress of information.

But if we submit to the distant command of the beginning, science must become the fundamental happening of our spiritual being as part of a people.⁶

And if, indeed, our ownmost being (*Dasein*) itself stands before a great transformation, if what that passionate seeker of God and the last German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, said is true: "God is dead"—and if we have to face up to the forsakenness of modern man in the midst of what is, what then is the situation of science?

What was in the beginning the awed perseverance of the Greeks in the face of what is, transforms itself then into the completely unguarded exposure to the hidden and uncertain, i.e., the questionable. Questioning is then no longer a preliminary step, to give way to the answer and thus to knowledge, but questioning becomes itself the highest form of knowing. Questioning then unfolds its ownmost strength to unlock in all things what is essential. Questioning then forces our vision into the most simple focus on the inescapable.

Such questioning shatters the division of the sciences into rigidly separated specialties, carries them back from their endless and aimless dispersal into isolated fields and corners, and exposes science once again to the fertility and the blessing bestowed by all the world-shaping powers of human-historical being (*Dasein*), such as: nature, history, language; people, custom, state; poetry, thought, faith; disease, madness, death; law, economy, technology.

If we will the essence of science understood as the *questioning, unguarded holding of one's ground in the midst of the uncertainty of the totality of what-is*, this will to essence will create for our people its world, a world of the innermost and most extreme danger, i.e., its truly *spiritual* world. For "spirit" is neither empty cleverness, nor the noncommittal play of wit, nor the endless drift of rational distinctions, and especially not world reason; spirit is primordially attuned, knowing resoluteness toward the essence of Being. And the *spiritual world* of a people is not the superstructure of a culture, no more than it is an armory stuffed with useful

⁶ ". . . unseres geistig-volklichen Daseins." This suggests that *Geist* and *Volk* codetermine our *Dasein*.

facts and values; it is the power that most deeply preserves the people's strengths, which are tied to earth and blood;⁷ and as such it is the power that most deeply moves and most profoundly shakes its being (*Dasein*). Only a spiritual world gives the people the assurance of greatness. For it necessitates that the constant decision between the will to greatness and a letting things happen that means decline, will be the law presiding over the march that our people has begun into its future history.

If we will this essence of science, the body of teachers of this university must really step forward into the most dangerous post, threatened by constant uncertainty about the world. If it holds this ground, that is to say, if from such steadfastness—in essential nearness to the hard-pressing insistence of all things—arises a common questioning and a communally tuned saying, then it will gain the strength to lead. For what is decisive if one is to lead is not just that one walk ahead of others, but that one have the strength to be able to walk alone, not out of obstinacy and a craving for power, but empowered by the deepest vocation and broadest obligation. Such strength binds to what is essential, selects the best, and awakens the genuine following (*Gefolgschaft*) of those who are of a new mind. But there is no need to first awaken this following. Germany's student body is on the march. And *whom* it seeks are those leaders through whom it wills to so elevate its own vocation that it becomes a grounded, knowing truth, and to place it into the clarity of interpretive and effective word and work.

Out of the resoluteness of the German student body to be equal to the German fate in its most extreme distress, comes a will to the essence of the university. This will is a true will in that the German student body, through the new Student Law,⁸ places itself under the law of its own essence and in this way for the first time determines that essence. To give the law to oneself is the highest freedom. The much celebrated "academic freedom" is being banished from the German university; for this freedom

⁷ ". . . sondern sie ist die Macht der tiefsten Bewahrung der erd- und bluthaften Kräfte als Macht der innersten Erregung und weitesten Erschütterung seines Daseins."

⁸ Proclaimed on May 1, 1933, the *neue Studentenrecht* sought to organize students according to the *Führerprinzip* in an effort to integrate the universities into the National Socialist state.

was not genuine, since it was only negative. It meant primarily freedom from concern, arbitrariness of intentions and inclinations, lack of restraint in what was done and left undone. The concept of the freedom of the German student is now brought back to its truth. Henceforth the bond and service of the German student will unfold from this truth.

The first bond binds into the community of the people. It obligates to help carry the burden and to participate actively in the troubles, endeavors, and skills of all its estates (*Stände*) and members. From now on this bond will be fixed and rooted in the being (*Dasein*) of the German student by means of the *Labor Service (Arbeitsdienst)*.⁹

The *second* bond binds to the honor and destiny of the nation in the midst of other peoples. It demands the readiness, secured by knowledge and skill, and tightened by discipline, to give all. In the future this bond will encompass and penetrate the entire being (*Dasein*) of the student as *Armed Service (Wehrdienst)*.

The *third* bond of the student body binds it to the spiritual mission of the German people. This people shapes its fate by placing its history into the openness of the overwhelming power of all the world-shaping powers of human being (*Dasein*) and by ever renewing the battle for its spiritual world. Thus exposed to the most extreme questionableness of its own being (*Dasein*), this people wills to be a spiritual people. It demands of itself and for itself that its leaders and guardians possess the strictest clarity of the highest, widest, and richest knowledge. Still youthful students, who at an early age have dared to act as men and who extend their willing to the future destiny of the nation, force

⁹ Following the First World War, the *Arbeitsdienst* emerged, in good part as a response to the unemployment problem. On July 23, 1931 the government of the conservative Heinrich Brüning made this voluntary *Arbeitsdienst* part of its attempt to deal with unemployment. The National Socialist state was quick to recognize, not only its economic importance, but the pedagogical possibilities of such service, which was to be *eine Schule der Volksgemeinschaft*, a school that would join members of different classes in genuine community. The law of June 26, 1935, made six months of such service mandatory for every young German.

But if Heidegger's discussion of the three Services refers the reader to the political situation of the time, it also refers him to Plato's *Republic*. Such ambiguities make the Rectoral Address particularly difficult to translate.

themselves, from the very ground of their being, to serve this knowledge. They will no longer permit *Knowledge Service* (*Wissensdienst*) to be the dull and quick training for a “distinguished” profession. Because the statesman and the teacher, the doctor and the judge, the minister and the architect, lead the being (*Dasein*) of people and state, because they watch over it and keep it honed in its fundamental relations to the world-shaping powers of human being, these professions and the training for them have been entrusted to the Knowledge Service. Knowledge does not serve the professions, quite the reverse: the professions effect and administer that highest and essential knowledge of the people concerning its entire being (*Dasein*). But for us this knowledge is not the settled taking note of essences and values in themselves; it is the most severe endangerment of human being (*Dasein*) in the midst of the overwhelming power of what is. The very questionableness of Being, indeed, compels the people to work and fight and forces it into its state (*Staat*), to which the professions belong.

The three bonds—*by* the people, *to* the destiny of the state, *in* a spiritual mission—are *equally primordial* to the German essence. The three services that stem from it—Labor Service, Armed Service, and Knowledge Service—are equally necessary and of equal rank.

Only engaged knowledge about the people and knowledge about the destiny of the state that keeps itself in readiness, only these create, at one with knowledge about the spiritual mission, the primordial and full essence of science, whose realization is our task—supposing that we submit to the distant command of the beginning of our spiritual-historical being (*Dasein*).

This science is meant when the essence of the German university is delimited as the “high” school that, grounded in science, by means of science educates and disciplines the leaders and guardians of the fate of the German people.

This primordial concept of science obligates us not only to “objectivity” (“*Sachlichkeit*”), but, first of all, to make our questioning in the midst of the historical-spiritual world of the people simple and essential. Indeed—only in such questioning can objectivity truly ground itself, i.e., discover its nature and limit.

Science, in this sense, must become the power that shapes the body of the German university. This implies a twofold task: For

one, the body of teachers and the student body, each in its own way, must be *seized* and *remain* seized by the concept of science. At the same time, however, this concept of science must intervene in and transform the basic patterns in which teachers and students join to act as members of a scientific community: the *faculties* and *specialties*.¹⁰

The faculty is a faculty only if, rooted in the essence of its science, it develops into a faculty for spiritual legislation, able to shape those powers of human being (*Dasein*) that press *it* hard into the *one* spiritual world of the people.

The speciality is a speciality only if, from the very outset, it places itself in the realm of this spiritual legislation and thus tears down departmental barriers and overcomes what lets professional training lose itself in what is stale and counterfeit.

At the moment when faculties and specialties begin to raise the essential and simple questions of their science, both teachers and students are already encompassed by the *same* final necessities and pressing concerns, inseparable from the being (*Dasein*) of people and state.

The unfolding of the primordial essence of science, however, demands such a degree of rigor, responsibility, and superior patience that, in comparison, matters like conscientious adherence to or eager tinkering with established procedures hardly carry any weight.

But if the Greeks took three centuries just to put the *question* of what knowledge is upon the right basis and on a secure path, *we* have no right to presume that the elucidation and unfolding of the essence of the German university could take place in the current or in the coming semester.

One thing, however, we do know from the indicated essence of science; we do know that the German university will only take shape and come to power when the three services—Labor Service, Armed Service, and Knowledge Service—primordially coalesce and become *one* formative force. That is to say:

The teaching body's will to essence must awaken and strengthen and thus gain the simplicity and breadth necessary to

¹⁰ *Fachschaften*. I have translated both *Fachschaft* and *Fach* as specialty. *Fach* also means compartment, suggesting the compartmentalization that has attended specialization in the sciences.

knowledge about the essence of science. The student body's will to essence must force itself to rise to the highest clarity and discipline of knowing and, demanding and determining, integrate its engaged understanding of the people and its state, which is itself a kind of science, into the essence of science.¹¹ The two wills must confront one another, ready for *battle*. All faculties of will and thought, all strengths of the heart and all skills of the body, must be unfolded *through* battle, heightened *in* battle, and preserved *as* battle.

We choose the knowing battle of those who question and profess with Carl von Clausewitz:¹² "I take leave of the frivolous hope of salvation by the hand of accident."

This battle community of teachers and students, however, will only transform the German university into a place of spiritual legislation and establish in it the center of the most disciplined and focused preparation for the highest service to the people in its state, when teachers and students arrange their being (*Dasein*) more simply, more unsparingly, and more frugally than all their fellow Germans. All leading must grant the body of followers its own strength. All following, however, bears resistance within itself. This essential opposition of leading and following must not be obscured, let alone eliminated.

Battle alone keeps this opposition open and implants in the entire body of teachers and students that basic mood which lets self-limiting self-assertion empower resolute self-examination to genuine self-governance.

Do we, or do we not, will the essence of the German university? It is up to us whether, and to what extent, we concern ourselves with self-examination and self-assertion not just casually, but penetrating to their very foundations, or whether—with the best of intentions—we only change old arrangements and add new ones. No one will keep us from doing this.

But no one will even ask us whether we do or do not will, when the spiritual strength of the West fails and the joints of the

¹¹ I have translated *Mitwissenschaft* as "engaged understanding . . . which is itself a kind of science." In its context, *Mitwissenschaft* points both to *Wissenschaft* (science) and to *mitwissen*, a knowing that actively participates in the knowledge of others.

¹² Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831), for many years head of the Prussian War College and author of the influential *Vom Krieg* (*On War*).

world no longer hold, when this moribund semblance of a culture caves in and drags all that remains strong into confusion and lets it suffocate in madness.

Whether this will happen or not depends alone on whether or not we, as a historical-spiritual people, still and once again will ourselves. Every individual *participates* in this decision, even he, and indeed especially he, who evades it.

But we do will that our people fulfill its historical mission.

We do will ourselves. For the young and the youngest strength of the people, which already reaches beyond us, *has* by now *decided* the matter.

But we fully understand the splendor and the greatness of this setting out only when we carry within ourselves that profound and far-reaching thoughtfulness that gave ancient Greek wisdom the word:

τὰ . . . μεγάλα πάντα ἐπισφαλῆ . . .

“All that is great stands in the storm . . .”

(Plato, *Republic*, 497 d, 9).¹³

¹³ B. Jowett translates the passage from which this saying is taken as follows:

“What is there remaining?”

“The question of how the study of philosophy may be so ordered as not to be the ruin of the State: All great attempts are attended with risk; ‘hard is the good,’ as men say.”

THE RECTORATE 1933/34: FACTS AND THOUGHTS

I

IN April 1933 I was elected rector by the unanimous vote of the plenum of the university. My predecessor in office, von Möllendorf,¹ had been forced to resign after only a brief tenure. Von Möllendorf himself, with whom on a number of different occasions I discussed the succession in detail, wanted me to assume the rectorate. Similarly his predecessor, Sauer,² tried to persuade me to assume the office in the interest of the university. I hesitated as late as the day of the election and wanted to withdraw my candidacy. I had no contact with the relevant government and party agencies, was myself neither a member of the party, nor had I been active politically in any way. Thus it was uncertain whether those at the center of political power would listen to me and to what seemed to me necessity and task. But just as uncertain was the extent to which the university would actively join me to discover and to shape its own essence in a more primordial manner. Already in my Inaugural Address,³ delivered in the summer of 1929, I had presented this task to the public.

The introductory sentences of the Inaugural Address, "What is Metaphysics," state the following: "*We question, here and now, for ourselves. Our being (Dasein)—as members of a community of scientists, teachers, and students—is determined by science. What essential thing is happening to us from the very bottom of our being (Dasein), when science has become our passion? The fields of science lie far apart. They approach their subject matter*

¹ Wilhelm von Möllendorf, a distinguished anatomist, was to have served as rector for the academic year 1933/34, but his political convictions (von Möllendorf was a Social Democrat) made him unacceptable to the new regime and he was forced out of office almost immediately.

² Canon Joseph Sauer, a church historian, known especially for his work in Christian archeology and the history of Christian art, served as rector for the academic year 1932/33.

³ *Was ist Metaphysik* (Bonn: Cohen, 1929), now available in *Wegmarken*, vol. 9 of the *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976); "What is Metaphysics," translated by R. F. C. Hull and Allan Crick in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock (Chicago: Regnery, 1967) and again by David Krell in *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

in fundamentally different ways. Today this fragmented multiplicity of disciplines is held together only by the technical organization of universities and faculties, and retains some importance only because of the practical aims pursued by the different specialties. But the roots of the sciences in their essential ground have withered." By the year 1933 this address had already been translated into French, Italian, Spanish, and Japanese.

Everyone was in a position to know what I thought about the German university and what I considered its most pressing concern. It was to renew itself by returning to its essential ground, which is also the essential ground of the sciences; that is to say, by returning to the essence of truth itself instead of persisting in a technical organization-institutional pseudo-unity, it was to recover the primordial living unity that joins those who question and those who know.

In 1930 I spoke on the essence of truth. I repeated the lecture in a number of different German towns until 1932 and it was known through copies that were circulating. The lecture was published only in 1943.⁴ At the time of the lecture I also gave a two hour lecture course on the Greek concept of truth, approaching the topic with an interpretation of the Platonic allegory of the cave. This lecture course was repeated during my rectorate in the winter semester 1933/34 and supplemented with a well attended seminar on "People and Science." The interpretation of the allegory of the cave appeared in print in 1942 in the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Überlieferung II* under the title "*Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*" ("Plato's Doctrine of Truth").⁵ The party officially prohibited mention and review of this essay; the making of reprints and their distribution by the book trade were similarly prohibited.

What let me hesitate until the very last day to assume the rectorate was the knowledge that with what I intended I would necessarily run into a twofold conflict with both the "new" and

⁴ *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1943), now in *Wegmarken*; "On the Essence of Truth," translated by R. F. C. Hull and Allan Crick in *Existence and Being*, and by J. Glenn Gray in *Basic Writings*.

⁵ Now available in *Wegmarken*. Translated by John Barlow in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 3, eds. William Barrett and Henry D. Aiken (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

the "old." The "new" meanwhile had appeared in the form of "political science,"⁶ the very idea of which rests on a falsification of the essence of truth. The "old" was the effort to remain responsible to one's "specialty," to help advance it and to utilize such advance in instruction, to reject all reflection on the foundations of science as abstract-philosophical speculation or at most to admit it as an unnecessary decoration; but not to engage in reflection and, *thus engaged*, to think and to belong to the university.

There was thus danger that both the "new" and the "old," opposed as they were to one another, would equally fight my attempt and make it impossible. What I did *not yet* see and could not expect, however, when I assumed the rectorate, is what happened in the course of the first semester: the old and the new finally joined, at one in their desire to paralyze my efforts and to finally get rid of me.

Despite this twofold threat to my plan of founding the essence of the university in a primordial manner, I finally resolved to assume the rectorate, moved by the urging of many colleagues at the university, especially of the deposed rector von Möllendorf and of his predecessor, and then vice-rector, Sauer. What moved me especially was the possibility, pointed out by canon Sauer, that, should I refuse, outsiders would impose a rector.

All things considered, a threefold consideration determined me to assume the rectorate:

(1) I saw in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical vocation in the Western world. I believed that, renewing itself, the university might also be called to contribute to this inner self-collection of the people, providing it with a measure.

⁶ "*Politische Wissenschaft*." "Political" here means "politicized." Truth was to be given a basis in the *Volk*. This led to attempts to create a "German mathematics," a "German physics," etc. Two Nobel Prize winning physicists were associated with such attempts, Philipp Lenard (1862-1947) and Johannes Stark (1874-1957). The theory of relativity and quantum theory were attacked as un-German. See Philipp Lenard, *Deutsche Physik*, 4 vols. (München: Lehmann, 1936-37) and Johannes Stark, *Nationalsozialismus und Wissenschaft* (München: Eher, 1934). Also Ernst Brüche, "'Deutsche Physik' und die deutschen Physiker," *Physikalische Blätter*, 2 (1947): 232-236.

(2) For this reason I saw in the rectorate an opportunity to lead all capable forces—regardless of party membership and party doctrine—back to this process of reflection and renewal and to strengthen and to secure the influence of these forces.

(3) In this manner I hoped to counter the advance of unsuited persons and the threatening hegemony of party apparatus and party doctrine.

The fact is that even then much that was inferior and lacking in ability, much that was self-centered and envious, carried on its destructive business. But in view of the general situation of our people, I thought this just one more reason to bring into play the capable forces and essential goals. Certainly, it was more comfortable to stay on the sidelines, to turn up one's nose at these "impossible people," and to sing the praises of what had been, without a glance at the historical situation of the Western world. A pointer may suggest how I saw the historical situation even then. In the year 1930 Ernst Jünger's article on "Total Mobilisation" ("*Die totale Mobilmachung*") had appeared; in this article the basic features of his book *The Worker (Der Arbeiter)*, which appeared in 1932, announced themselves.⁷ Together with my assistant Brock,⁸ I discussed these writings in a small circle and 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. At the time many others also read these writings; but together with many other interesting things that one also read, one laid them aside without comprehending their far-reaching import. Later, in

⁷ The paths of Ernst Jünger, the German essayist and writer, and those of Martin Heidegger continued to touch. See e.g., *Zur Seinsfrage*, now available in *Wegmarken*, and translated as "The Question of Being" by William Kluback and Jean T. Wilde (Boston: Twayne, 1958), a response to Jünger's *Über die Linie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1958). Both essays were originally written to honor the other on his sixtieth birthday.

⁸ Werner Brock was Heidegger's assistant from 1931 to 1933. In 1934 he went to Cambridge on a research fellowship.

the winter 1939/40, I discussed part of Jünger's book *The Worker* once more with a circle of colleagues; I learned how even then these thoughts still seemed strange and put people off, 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.

From the vantage point of this reality of the will to power I saw even then what *is*. This reality of the will to power can be expressed, with Nietzsche, in the proposition: "God is dead." Essential considerations led me to cite this proposition in my Rectoral Address. The proposition has nothing to do with the assertion of an ordinary atheism. It means: The supersensible world, more especially the world of the Christian God, has lost its effective force in history. (See my lecture, 1943, on Nietzsche's word "God is Dead.")⁹ Had things been different, would the First World War have been possible? And even more, had things been different, would the Second World War have become possible?

Was there not enough reason and essential distress to think in primordial reflection towards a surpassing of the metaphysics of the will to power and that is to say, to begin a confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Western thought by returning to its beginning? Was there not enough reason and essential distress, for the sake of such reflection on the spirit of the Western world, to awaken and to lead into battle that place which was considered the seat of the cultivation of knowledge and insight—the German university?

To be sure, confronted with the course of history, an argument that begins with the words, "What would have happened, if . . . , and if not . . . ," is always risky. Yet the question may yet be asked: What would have happened and what would have been prevented, had, around 1933, all capable forces aroused themselves

⁹ In *Holzwege*, now *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977). "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead,'" translated by William Lovitt in *The Question Concerning Technology: Heidegger's Critique of the Modern Age* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

and joined in secret in order to gradually purify and moderate the “movement” that had come to power?

To be sure—when human beings reckon up and charge guilt to other human beings, such reckoning is always a presumption. But if indeed one wants to look for those who are guilty and judge them by their guilt: is there not also a guilt incurred by failing to do what is essential? Those who even then were so endowed with the gift of prophecy that they foresaw all that came, as it came—I was not so wise—why did they wait almost ten years before opposing the threatening disaster? Why did not those who in 1933 thought they possessed such wisdom, why did not they, especially, then arouse themselves to turn everything, from the very bottom, towards the good?

To be sure—it would have been difficult to gather all capable forces; difficult, too, to gradually gain influence on the movement in its entirety and its position of power—but not more difficult than the burden that we were later forced to bear.

With the assumption of the rectorate I had made the attempt to save, purify, and to strengthen what was positive.

It was never my intention to realize only party doctrines and to act in accord with the “idea” of a “political science.” But I was equally unwilling to defend only what had been established and, by merely mediating and smoothing disagreements, to level everything and to keep it in mediocrity. The things at stake mattered too much, reaching far beyond all that concerned the university. That was my clear conviction.

But it was also clear to me that first of all the positive possibilities that I then saw in the movement had to be underscored and affirmed in order to prepare for a gathering of all capable forces in a manner that would be grounded not only in the facts, but in what mattered. Immediate and mere opposition would neither have been in keeping with what was then my conviction (which was never blind faith in the party), nor would it have been prudent.

To characterize my basic attitude while I was rector, let the following be noted:

(1) Never did any party agency call on me for any kind of political consultation; nor did I ever seek such participation.

(2) In other ways, too, I never maintained any personal or political relations with party functionaries.

II

To be sure, in this case, as is the case with every spoken word, everything depends on the readiness to enter into what is essential and to first get it into view. The heart of the Rectoral Address, apparent even by the space given to it, is the exposition of the essence of knowing and science; the university is to be grounded on that essence; and on that ground it is to assert itself as German university. Knowledge Service is named in third place, after Labor Service and Armed Service, not because it is subordinated to the former, but because knowing is what is authentic and highest, that unto which the essence of the university and therefore reflection gathers itself. As far as Labor Service, named in second place, is concerned, it may be permitted to remind the reader that long before 1933 this "service" grew out of the distress of the time and the will of the young, which gave it its shape. "Armed Service," however, I mentioned neither in a militaristic, nor in an aggressive sense, but understood it as defense in self-defense.¹⁰

The heart of the address serves the interpretation of the essence of knowing, science, and profession that is based on training in science. As far as the content is concerned, four points should be singled out:

(1) The grounding of the sciences in the experience of the essential region of their subject matter.

(2) The essence of truth as the letting be of what is, as it is.

(3) Preservation of the tradition that has handed down to us the beginning of our Western way of knowing in the Greek world. (Compare my two hour lecture course of the summer semester 1932: The Beginning of Western Philosophy.)

(4) In keeping with this, our responsibility as part of the Western world.¹¹

¹⁰ I considered translating *Wehrdienst* as "Defense Service." But although *Wehr* does mean first of all "defense," "Armed Service" is more in keeping with the usual meaning of the term.

¹¹ *Abendländische Verantwortung* suggests responsibility that the *Abendland* should assume, but also responsibility for the fate of the *Abendland*. "Western world," of course, fails to capture the aura of *Abendland*, which means the land of evening, of the setting sun: the occident.

All this implies the decisive rejection of the idea of that “political science” proclaimed by National Socialism as a cruder version of Nietzsche’s understanding of the essence of truth and knowledge. But beyond this, the Rectoral Address states clearly the rejection of this idea of “political science.”

The attitude that governs its reflection and questioning is oriented towards “battle.” But what does “battle” mean in the address? If what is essential in this reflection returns to the Greek *ἐπιστήμη*, and that is to say, to *ἀλήθεια*, one has a right to conjecture that “battle,” too, is understood here in not just any way. “Battle” is thought in the sense of Heraclitus, fragment 53. But to understand this often cited and equally often misunderstood saying, two points first have to be heeded, as I mentioned often enough in my lectures and seminars:

(1) The word *πόλεμος*, with which the fragment begins, does not mean “war,” but what is meant by the word *ἔρις*, which Heraclitus uses in the same sense. But that means “strife”—strife, however, understood not as dispute and squabbling and mere disagreement, and certainly not as use of force and beating down the opponent—but as confrontation that sets those who confront one another apart,¹² so that in such setting-apart the essential being of those who thus confront one another exposes itself, one to the other, and thus shows itself and comes to appearance, and that is to say, thinking appearance in a Greek manner: enters into what is unconcealed and true. Because battle is reciprocal recognition that exposes itself to what is essential, the address, which orients this questioning and meditating towards “battle,” keeps speaking of “being-exposed” (*Ausgesetztheit*). That what is said here lies in the direction of the Heraclitean saying is shown with the greatest clarity by that saying itself. One only has to heed a second point.

(2) Not only should we not think *πόλεμος* as war and, furthermore, appeal to the supposedly Heraclitean proposition “War is the father of all things” to proclaim war and battle as the highest

¹² Heidegger’s translation of the Heraclitus fragment offers a key to his use of the difficult-to-translate *Auseinandersetzung*, which means “confrontation,” but a confrontation that is a setting apart that lets those who are thus set apart reveal themselves. By hyphenating a commonly used word (*Aus-einander-setzung*) Heidegger lets its roots speak more strongly.

principle of all being and thus to offer a philosophical justification of the warlike.

First of all and at the same time we have to note that—cited in the usual manner—the saying of Heraclitus falsifies everything, because the saying in its entirety is thus suppressed and with it what is essential. The entire saying says:

“Setting-apart is indeed the sowing of all, but also (and above all) it is of all what is highest—what preserves—and this because it lets the ones show themselves as gods, the others, however, as humans, because it lets the ones step into the open as bondsmen, the others as free beings.”

The essence of πόλεμος lies in the δεικνύναι, to show, and in ποιεῖν, to produce, as the Greeks say, to make-it-stand-out in open view. This is the sense of “battle” thought philosophically, and what is said in the address is only thought philosophically.

Such reflection on the realm to which science belongs by its essence, reflection that also confronts that essence, must take place in every science if that “science” is not to be without knowing.¹³ From out of such reflection on the totality of the sciences, the university carries itself, by its own strength, unto its essential ground, a ground accessible only to the knowing that it cultivates. Its essence can therefore not be determined from some other place, from the standpoint of “politics” or of some other established goals.

In keeping with this fundamental conception and attitude the address bears the title: “The Self-Assertion of the German University.” Only a very few understood clearly what this title alone, taken by itself, meant in the year 1933, because only a few of those whom it concerned took the trouble to think through what is said, to do so clearly and without mystification, cutting through idle talk.

To be sure, another response is possible. One can excuse oneself from reflection and hold onto the seemingly obvious thought that here, a short time after National Socialism had seized power, a newly elected rector gives an address on the university, an

¹³ “. . . sich auseinandersetzen Besinnung auf den Wesensbereich muss sich in jeder Wissenschaft vollziehen, sonst bleibt sie ‘Wissenschaft’ ohne Wissen.” The translation fails to preserve the link between *Wissenschaft* (science) and *Wissen* (knowing), important in both the Rectoral Address and in these retrospective remarks.

address that “represents” “National Socialism” and that is to say proclaims the idea of “the political character of science,” which, crudely thought, means: “True is what is good for the people.” From this one concludes, and indeed rightly, that this betrays the essence of the German university in its very core and actively contributes to its destruction; for this reason the title should rather be: “The Self-Decapitation of the German University.”¹⁴ One *can* proceed in this manner, if one is sufficiently ignorant and incapable of reflection, if one is lazy enough and ready to seek refuge in idle talk, if one only musters a sufficient degree of malevolence.

One *can* proceed in so irresponsible a manner when interpreting the address; but then one has no right to present oneself as someone who knows himself responsible for the spirit and the welfare of the German university. For to think so superficially and to chatter so superficially into the day may be in keeping with political methods, but contradicts the innermost spirit of thinking that remains open to the matter to be thought, and just that spirit one pretended to have to save.

The address was not understood by those whom it concerned; neither was its content understood, nor was it understood in this respect: that it states what during the time I was in office gave me the guiding thread for distinguishing what was essential from what was less essential and only external.

To be sure, the address and with it my attitude were grasped even less by the party and the relevant agencies, yet it was “understood” in as much as one sensed immediately the opposition. Minister Wacker¹⁵ gave me his “opinion” of the address he had just heard on the very same day, after the official banquet in the “Kopf.”

(1) That this was a kind of “private National Socialism,” which circumvented the perspectives of the party program.

(2) Most importantly, that the whole had not been based on the concept of race.

(3) That he could not accept the rejection of the idea of “political science,” even if he would be willing to admit that as yet this idea had not been given a sufficient foundation.

¹⁴ The translation fails to preserve the word play that links *Selbsten-thauptung* and *Selbstbehauptung*.

¹⁵ Otto Wacker, *Staatsminister für Unterricht und Kultus* in Baden.

The opinion of the Minister mattered in as much as it was immediately communicated to friends in the party, to Scheel, then Leader of the Students of the District,¹⁶ to Dr. Stein, lecturer in medicine, and to Krieck in Frankfurt.¹⁷ These three, by the way, dominated, from the very beginning, the Ministry of Education in Karlsruhe. Fehrle, the Ministerial Counsellor responsible for the universities, while harmless and good-natured, was completely in their hand.¹⁸

When I visited the Ministry shortly after the inaugural celebration, I was given to understand the following: (1) that in the future the presence of the archbishop at celebrations of this sort was no longer wanted; (2) that the speech I gave at the banquet that followed the inaugural celebration was inappropriate in that I had unnecessarily singled out colleague Sauer of the theological faculty and emphasized what I owed him for my own scholarly education.

That such issues were raised in the Ministry at all characterized not only the Minister's own standpoint, but it demonstrated that one was not at all willing to consider what I, disregarding all infighting and disagreement, was seeking to accomplish for the sake of the inner renewal of the university.

By then I had already been in office for a few weeks. My first official action, on the second day of my rectorate, was to prohibit the posting of the "Jew Notice" in any rooms that belonged to the university. The notice had already been posted in all German universities. I explained to the Student Leader that as long as I was rector, this notice would find no place in this university. Thereupon he and his two companions left with the comment that they would report this prohibition to the *Reich* Student Leadership.

¹⁶ *Gaustudentenführer* Gustav Adolf Scheel had made a name for himself as student leader at the University of Heidelberg. As Heidegger's remarks suggest, he soon rose to more important positions, becoming leader of the students of the district (*Gau*) of Baden, and finally of all the students in the *Reich*.

¹⁷ Long a committed National Socialist, Ernst Krieck (1882-1947) was made a full professor in Frankfurt in 1933, at the University of Heidelberg in 1934. A leading ideologue, Krieck protested in his journal *Volk im Werden* against the non-German character of Heidegger's thinking, which, he wrote, derived from Thomas Aquinas and Husserl, and accused Heidegger of writing "remarkably poor German, because he is incapable of thinking in German."

¹⁸ *Ministerialrat* Eugen Fehrle, classicist and folklorist, since 1934 professor in Heidelberg.

About eight days later I received a telephone call from a Dr. Baumann, an SA Group Leader, speaking on behalf of the SA University Office of the SA leadership. He demanded that the "Jew Notice" be posted. Were I to refuse, I should count on my removal from office, or even with the closing of the university. I stuck to my refusal. Minister Wacker declared that he could not do anything opposing the SA, which then played a role that was later taken over by the SS.

The just named events were merely the first sign of a state of affairs that in the course of my year as rector became ever more apparent: the most diverse political power constellations and interest groups intervened in the university with their claims and demands; the Ministry played often a minor role and beyond that was busy securing a certain autonomy against Berlin. Struggles for power went on everywhere; those who participated in these struggles took an interest in the university only to the extent that, as an institution, as the body of students and teachers, it entered into the power equation. Furthermore, the professional associations of doctors, judges, and teachers announced their political claims and demanded the elimination of professors they found troublesome and suspect.

This atmosphere of confusion, which dominated everything, offered no possibility to cultivate or even to acquaint others with those efforts that were my sole concern and that had moved me to assume the office: reflection on the ethos that should govern the pursuit of knowledge and on the essence of teaching. The summer semester went by and was wasted with discussion of personnel and institutional questions.

The only productive thing, although productive only in a negative sense, was that I was able to prevent injustices and damage to the university and to colleagues in the "Clean Up Drive,"¹⁹ which often threatened to exceed its goals and limits.

This merely preventive work did not call itself to public attention, nor was it necessary that colleagues should learn of it. Respected and meritorious colleagues of the faculties of law, medicine, and natural science would be surprised if they heard what then had been planned for them.

During my first weeks in office, it was called to my attention that the Minister thought it important that rectors belong to the

¹⁹ "Säuberungsaktion."

party. One day Dr. Kerber, then the County Leader, the Deputy County Leader, and a third member of the County Leadership appeared in my office to invite me to join the party. Only in the interest of the university, which did not figure in the play of political forces, did I, who had never belonged to a political party, accept the invitation, but this, too, only on the expressly acknowledged condition that I would never take on a party office or engage in any party activity, especially not in my capacity as rector. I kept to this condition, which was indeed not very difficult, for since my resignation from the rectorate in the spring of 1934 (see below) I was considered politically unreliable and was watched more and more with each passing year.

My entry into the party remained only a matter of form in so far as the party leadership did not have the slightest intention of involving me in any deliberations concerning questions that pertained to the university, culture, and education. During the entire time of my rectorate I did not take part in any deliberation or in discussions, let alone in the decision-making of the party leadership and of the different party organs. The university remained suspect, but at the same time one wanted to use it for purposes of cultural propaganda.

With every passing day I found myself ever more occupied with matters that, given my real concern, I had to consider unimportant. Not only was I uninterested in the routine of taking care of such empty official business, but at the same time I was also inexperienced, since up to this point I had refused every academic office and was thus a novice. The unfortunate circumstance that the head of the Secretariate had also been in office for only a short time and was similarly inexperienced in university affairs made matters worse. Thus much happened that was inadequate, mistaken, and careless. This, it seemed, totally occupied my colleagues. The Rectoral Address had been spoken into the wind and was forgotten the day after the inaugural celebration. While I was rector not one of my colleagues approached me to discuss the address in any way. They moved, as they had for decades, in the well-trodden paths of faculty politics.

I could have borne all this confusion and the predominance of what was inessential, had it not been for two dangers to the university that announced themselves ever more distinctly in the course of the summer semester of 1933.

On the occasion of a lecture I gave at the University of

Heidelberg on the essence of science, I learned from Dr. Stein and from Scheel of plans to replace the present occupants of several chairs in Freiburg. The University was to be laced with reliable party members; this was to make it possible to appoint party members, first of all to the deanships. There was an insistence that what mattered, at least for the time being, in making such appointments, was not so much the significance of an individual's scholarship or his teaching ability as his political reliability and activist decisiveness. These remarks and plans showed once more that the influence of Krieck was spreading from Frankfurt and growing stronger in Heidelberg and Karlsruhe. In Karlsruhe I was given to understand that to leave the present deans in their offices was unacceptable. The faculties needed a National Socialist leadership. I thus faced the task of acting in a way that would forestall this threat to the real essence of the university.

The second danger threatened from without, as became apparent at the conference of rectors held in the summer semester in Erfurt. It consisted in efforts to let the entire teaching activity of the faculties be determined by the medical, legal, and teaching professions and by their demands and needs, efforts that would split up the university, once and for all, into professional schools. Not only the inner unity of the university was thus threatened, but also the basic mode of academic training, that is to say, that which I was trying to save by means of a renewal and which alone had led me to assume the rectorate.

I tried to meet the two dangers that were threatening the university from Heidelberg and from the tendency towards professional schools, with the proposal of a change in the university's constitution. It was to make it possible to make decanal appointments in such a way that the essence of the faculties and the unity of the university could be saved. The motive for this constitutional change was not at all revolutionary fervor eager for innovation, but insight into the just named dangers, which, in view of the distribution and nature of the political forces, was not all merely imagined.

Within the university, where one stared ever more onesidedly at what had been, this constitutional change was considered only from an institutional and a legalistic point of view; similarly, new decanal appointments were judged only from the point of view of personal favor or slight.

For the winter semester 1933/34 I appointed as deans col-

leagues who, not only in my personal opinion, but also in the general judgment of the scholarly world, had a name in their field and who, at the same time, assured that, in his own way, each would place the spirit of science at the center of his work with the faculty. Not one of these deans was a member of the party. The influence of party functionaries had been eliminated. There was hope that in the faculties a tradition of the scientific spirit might be preserved and given new life.

But this is not what happened. All hopes were dashed. Every effort on behalf of what really mattered was in vain.

The "Todtnauberg Camp" became a strange omen for the winter semester 1933/34. That camp was to prepare teachers and students for the real work of the semester and to clarify what I took to be the essence of science and of scientific work and, at the same time, to present it for consideration and discussion.

The selection of the participants in the camp was made *without* regard for party membership or National Socialist engagement. After the plan for the camp had become known in Karlsruhe, an insistent request soon arrived from Heidelberg, that one also be allowed to send some participants; in the same vein Heidelberg communicated with Kiel.

With a lecture about university and science I attempted to clarify the core section of the Rectoral Address and, with reference to the above-named dangers, to present the task of the university more forcefully. Productive conversations in the separate groups were the immediate result, conversations about knowledge and faith, faith and *Weltanschauung*. On the morning of the second day District Student Leader Scheel and Dr. Stein appeared suddenly, unannounced and by car, and conversed eagerly with the Heidelberg participants in the camp. Their "function" gradually became apparent. Dr. Stein asked to be permitted to give an address. He spoke on race and the principle of race. The participants in the camp took note of the address, but did not discuss it further. The Heidelberg group had the task of sabotaging the camp. But what really mattered was not the camp, but the university in Freiburg, whose faculties were not to be led by party members. Unpleasant occurrences, some of them painful, followed. I had to swallow them, however, if I did not want to let the entire winter semester be wrecked even before it had begun. Perhaps it would have been more correct to have resigned from office already at this time. But I had not yet counted with what soon became

clear. That was the increasing opposition with which I met not only from the minister and the Heidelberg group that controlled him, but also from my colleagues.

Although formally the minister agreed with the new decanal appointments, he yet thought it strange, not only that no party members occupied these positions, but even more that I had dared to appoint as dean of the faculty of medicine just the man whom half a year earlier the minister could not support as rector and had forced out of office. Furthermore the ministry expressed ever more clearly the desire that the idea of "political science" be taken far more seriously at the University of Freiburg than had so far happened.

Striking under these circumstances was the fact that in the course of the winter semester suggestions from members of the faculty of medicine as well as from members of the faculty of law reached me repeatedly, urging me to make new decanal appointments and replace the colleagues von Möllendorf and Wolf.²⁰ I attributed such wishes to infighting and rivalry within the two faculties and did not give them much further thought. Until, late in the winter, towards the end of the semester 1933/34, I was asked to Karlsruhe, where Fehrle, the Ministerial Counsellor, informed me in the presence of District Student Leader Scheel, that it was the minister's wish that I relieve these deans, von Möllendorf and Wolf, of their posts.

I declared immediately that I would do so under no circumstance and that I could not justify such a restaffing either personally or objectively. If the minister were to insist on his desire, I would have no alternative, but to resign from office under protest against this imposition. Mr. Fehrle then told me that as far as colleague Wolf was concerned, the faculty of law, too, wanted a different decanal appointment. Thereupon I declared that I was resigning from office and asked for a meeting with the minister. While I made this declaration, a grin passed over the face of District Student Leader Scheel. In this way one had gotten what one wanted. But what had become unambiguously clear was that circles of the university that were outraged by anything that looked like National Socialism did not hesitate to conspire with

²⁰ Erik Wolf, an authority on legal history, with special emphasis on the Greeks. See *Griechisches Rechtsdenken*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950-70).

the ministry and with the group that determined it to push me out of office.

In my meeting with the minister, who immediately accepted my resignation, it became clear that a rift separated the National Socialist conception of university and science from my own, which could not be bridged. The minister declared that he did not want this opposition, which presumably rested on the incompatibility of my philosophy with the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, to reach the public as a conflict between the University of Freiburg and the ministry. I responded that I could have no interest in creating such an impression, since the university was agreeing with the ministry and I did not care to have a conflict bring me notoriety. The minister replied that, after I had resigned the rectorate without attracting further attention, I would be free to act as I thought necessary.

And I did act in that I refused to participate in the handing over of the rectorate as the departing rector and to give my report, as had been the tradition. And in the university one understood this refusal and, of course, one did not call on me, as the departing rector, and ask me to join in further deliberations, as has been the custom, before and since. Nor did I expect anything of the sort.

Beginning in April 1934, I lived outside the university in as much as I paid no attention to "what went on," but tried to do only what was absolutely necessary to meet my teaching duties to the best of my ability. But in the following years teaching, too, became more a conversation of essential thinking with itself. Perhaps, here and there, it struck and awakened human beings, but it did not shape itself into a developing structure of a definite conduct, which in turn might have given rise to something primordial.

Unimportant as it is in itself, the case of the rectorate 1933/34 would seem to be a sign of the metaphysical state of the essence of science, a science that can no longer be influenced by attempts at its renewal, nor delayed in its essential transformation into pure technology.²¹ This I came to recognize only in the

²¹ 'Technology' does not quite capture the meaning of *Technik*, which also means a particular technique. *Wissenschaft* transformed into *reine Technik* suggests science that no longer questions its method and is dominated by it, science that no longer thinks.

following years (see “The Foundation of the Modern World View Through Metaphysics”).²² The rectorate was an attempt to see in the “movement” that had come to power, beyond all its failings and crudities, something that reached much farther and that might some day bring about a gathering of what is German unto the historical essence of the West. In no way shall it be denied that at the time I believed in such possibilities and for this reason renounced the thinker’s most proper vocation in order to help realize them in an official capacity. In no way shall what was caused by my own inadequacy in office be attenuated. But such perspectives don’t allow one to see what is essential and moved me to assume the rectorate. The different evaluations of this rectorate that place it against the horizon of academic business as usual may be correct in their way and justified; but they never hit on what is essential. And it is even less possible today to open the horizon of what here is essential to deluded eyes.

What is essential is that we are caught up in the consummation of nihilism, that God is “dead,” and every time-space for the godhead covered up. The surmounting of nihilism nevertheless announces itself in German poetic thinking and singing.²³ Of this poetry, however, the Germans still have had the least understanding, because they are concerned to adapt to the measures of the nihilism that surrounds them and thus to misunderstand the essence of a historical self-affirmation.

III

Let the following be told for the benefit of those, and only of those, who take pleasure in staring at what in their judgment were the mistakes of my rectorate. Taken by itself, it is as unimportant as the barren rooting in past attempts and measures taken, which in the context of the entire movement of the planetary

²² The lecture was given on June 9, 1938 and published under the title “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege*, now vol. 5 of the *Gesamtausgabe*. Translated as “The Age of the World View,” by Marjorie Grene, in *Boundary 2*, vol. 4, 1976; also “The Age of the World Picture,” by William Lovitt in *The Question of Technology*.

²³ “. . . im dichtenden Denken und Singen des Deutschen.” See *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein,”* a lecture course given in the winter semester 1934/35, now available as *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 39 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1980).

will to power are so insignificant that they may not even be called tiny.

I had no illusions about the possible consequences of my resignation from office in the spring of 1934; after June 30 of the same year, these consequences became completely clear.²⁴ Anyone who after that still assumed an administrative office in the university was in a position to know beyond the shadow of a doubt, with whom he was bargaining.

How my rectorate was then judged by the party and by the ministry, by the body of teachers and by the student body, is put down in the declaration that appeared in the press when my successor assumed office. According to this statement, only this successor could be considered the first National Socialist rector of the University of Freiburg, a man who, himself a veteran, assured a fighting-soldierly spirit and its spread at the university.

Suspicious now began to be voiced against me, which at times degenerated into public insult. In proof, it is enough to point to the annual volumes of Ernst Krieck's journal *Volk im Werden*, which was first published at that time. Hardly an issue of the journal appeared, in which open or seemingly unaware polemics did not drag down my philosophy. The fact that, until this day, I never took note of such doings and furthermore never allowed myself to be drawn into honoring them with a reply, only further enraged persons so ill endowed that I had never attacked them. In a somewhat different manner Alfred Bäumler²⁵ was busy raising the same suspicions in his education journal, which he published on behalf of Rosenberg's Office. The Hitler Youth's journal, *Wille und Macht*, led the charge. My Rectoral Address, which in the meantime had been published, became a popular target of polemics in the Camps for Teachers. (Verified by H. G. Gadamer, Gerh. Krüger, W. Bröcker.)²⁶

²⁴ The day of the bloody purge of Ernst Roehm and the S. A. leadership, along with other suspected enemies of the regime.

²⁵ Alfred Bäumler, perhaps the most prominent philosopher to identify with the National Socialist cause. Best known for works on Nietzsche and Kant, Bäumler had become professor of pedagogy and philosophy at the Technical University of Dresden in 1929, professor of political pedagogy in Berlin in 1933, where he also became head of the "Office for Science," under the auspices of Alfred Rosenberg, whom Hitler had put in charge of the ideological training of the party.

²⁶ Hans Georg Gadamer was Heidegger's student in Marburg; see *Philosophische Lehrjahre* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1977). So was Ger-

Even the lectures I gave, rarely enough after 1934 and in purely academic circles, were, each time, vilified in the local party newspaper in a disgusting manner and, each time, the university leadership pulled itself together only with difficulty to take steps against such doings. The following lectures were given: 1935, "The Origin of the Work of Art";²⁷ 1938, "The Foundation of the Modern World View Through Metaphysics"; 1941, "Hölderlin's Feast-Day Hymn";²⁸ 1943, "Hölderlin Memorial Celebration."²⁹

Gradually such hounding, which extended to my class lectures, had the desired success. In the summer semester 1937 a Dr. Hancke from Berlin appeared in a seminar; very gifted and interested, he worked with me. Soon he confessed that he could no longer conceal from me that he was working for Dr. Scheel, who was then the head of the South-West Section of the Security Service. Dr. Scheel had called to his attention that my rectorate had been the real reason for the *non*-National-Socialist appearance and the lukewarm attitude of the University of Freiburg. I do not want to count this a merit. I mention it only to suggest that the opposition that had begun in 1933 had continued and grown more vigorous.

The same Dr. Hancke also told me that in the Security Service one was of the opinion that I was collaborating with the Jesuits. It was indeed true that up to the very end members of Catholic orders (especially Jesuits and Franciscans from the Freiburg House) attended my lectures and seminars. Just like other students, these gentlemen had the possibility of working with me and of benefitting from participation in my seminars. For a number of semesters the Jesuit Fathers Prof. Lotz, Rahner, Huidobro were members of my advanced seminar; they were often in our house. One only has to read their writings to recognize

hard Krüger; Walter Bröcker, another Heidegger student, became his assistant after Brock's departure.

²⁷ "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," *Holzwege*; translated by Albert Hofstadter in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), reprinted in *Basic Writings*.

²⁸ "Wie wenn am Feiertage . . .," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1981).

²⁹ "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten," *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*; translated as "Remembrance of the Poet," by Douglas Scott in *Existence and Being*.

the influence of my thinking; this influence, furthermore, is not denied.³⁰

Later, too, the Gestapo's inquiries concerned only Catholic members of my seminar—Father Schuhmacher, Dr. Guggenberger, Dr. Bollinger (in connection with the student action Scholl in Munich; one was looking for one source of that action in Freiburg and in my lectures.)³¹

Even before that time, right after my resignation from office, there were complaints that I allowed former students (who were not Aryans) to attend my lectures.

Furthermore, it is well known that my three most capable students (Gadamer, G. Krüger, and Bröcker), all three well above the average of the rising generation in philosophy, were kept back for many years because they were Heidegger students. They were appointed to professorships only when it had become impossible not to acknowledge their qualifications and the scandal apparent.

Since 1938 it was forbidden to mention my name in newspapers and journals; similarly it was forbidden to review my writings, in so far as these could still appear in new editions. Finally new editions of *Being and Time* and the Kant book were not allowed to appear, even though the publisher had already procured the necessary paper.

Despite this complete silence at home, one tried to use my name abroad for cultural propaganda purposes and to get me to give lectures. I turned down all such lecture trips to Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, and Rumania; I also never participated in the lectures that the faculty held for the armed forces in France.

The following facts may speak for the way in which one judged and tried to eliminate my philosophical work:

³⁰ See Johannes Lotz, *Martin Heidegger und Thomas von Aquin: Mensch, Zeit, und Sein* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1975) and Karl Rahner, *Geist und Welt; zur Metaphysik der endlichen Erkenntnis bei Thomas von Aquin* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1939).

³¹ Early in 1943 Hans and Sophie Scholl led student opposition to the Nazis at the University of Munich, which became the scene of the first anti-Nazi demonstrations at any German university. The "White Rose Letters" carried their call for resistance to other universities. The reaction was swift: Hans and Sophie Scholl were executed, as was their friend and adviser, the philosopher Kurt Huber.

(1) At the International Congress of Philosophy in Prague 1935 I neither belonged to the German delegation, nor was I even invited to participate.

(2) In the same manner I was to be excluded from the Descartes Congress in Paris, 1937. In Paris this was thought so strange that Professor Bréhier of the Sorbonne asked me, on behalf of the executive committee, why I did not belong to the German delegation; the Congress wanted to invite me on its own to give a lecture. I replied that they should inquire in Berlin at the *Reich* Ministry of Education concerning this matter. Some time later an invitation reached me from Berlin, asking me to join the delegation as a supplemental member. The whole matter was handled in a way that made it impossible for me to go to Paris with the German delegation.

During the war preparations were made for the publication of accounts of the humanities in Germany. Nicolai Hartmann³² was in charge of the section "Systematic Philosophy." A three day conference was held in Berlin to plan this undertaking. Except for Jaspers and myself, all professors of philosophy were invited. One could not use us because in connection with this publication an attack on "existential philosophy" was being planned, which later was indeed carried out.³³

In this case, too, as already during the rectorate, and notwithstanding the oppositions that divided them, my opponents demonstrated a strange willingness to ally themselves against everything by which they felt spiritually threatened and put into question.

But these events, too, are only a fleeting appearance on waves of a movement of our history, of whose dimensions the Germans have as yet no inkling, even now that catastrophe has engulfed them.

³² Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950) insisted on the primacy of ontology. In this connection he attacked Heidegger's fundamental ontology for its subjectivism.

³³ See *Systematische Philosophie*, ed. Nicolai Hartmann (Stuttgart und Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1942) with contributions by Arnold Gehlen, Erich Rothacker, Nicolai Hartmann, O. F. Bollnow (who wrote the essay on existential philosophy), Hermann Wein, and Heinz Heimsoeth.