

Postscript: My Disillusionment with Heidegger

Being and Time appeared during the phase of the Weimar Republic's final collapse: the impending catastrophe—the advent of the Nazi regime—was generally sensed. But the dominant philosophical trends didn't reflect this situation. To me and my friends, Heidegger's work appeared as a new beginning: we experienced his book (and his lectures, whose transcripts we obtained) as, at long last, a *concrete* philosophy: here there was talk of existence [*Existenz*], of *our* existence, of fear [*Angst*] and care and boredom, and so forth. We also experienced an “academic” emancipation: Heidegger's interpretation of Greek philosophy and of German idealism, which offered us new insights into antiquated, fossilized texts.

Only gradually did we begin to observe that the concreteness of Heidegger's philosophy was to a large extent deceptive—that we were once again confronted with a variant of transcendental philosophy (on a higher plane), in which existential categories had lost their sharpness, been neutralized, and in the end were dissipated amid greater abstractions. That remained the case later on when the “question of Being” was replaced by the “question of technology”: merely another instance in which apparent concreteness was subsumed by abstraction—bad abstraction, in which the concrete was not genuinely superseded but instead merely squandered.

I left Freiburg in January 1933. Prior to 1933 neither I nor my friends had observed or known anything about Heidegger's connection to Nazism. Only later did we attempt to reconstruct the affinity between his philosophy and his politics. Today it seems inexcusable to me to dismiss Heidegger's support of the Hitler regime as a (brief) mistake or error. I believe that a philosopher cannot make such a “mistake” without thereby disavowing his own, authentic philosophy.