

*martin*

# HEIDEGGER

Nature, History, State

*1933-1934*

# NATURE, HISTORY, STATE

1933–1934

**Martin Heidegger**

Translated and edited by  
Gregory Fried and Richard Rolt

With essays by Robert Bernasconi, Peter E. Gordon,  
Marion Heidegger, Theodore Kisel, and Slavoj Žižek

Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers

B L O O M S B U R Y  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

## **Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3DP  
UK

1385 Broadway  
New York  
NY 10018  
USA

**www.bloomsbury.com**

**Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

"Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat": Übung aus dem Wintersemester 1933/34 (pp. 53–88) taken from *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4 – Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus I, Dokumente* edited by Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski © 2009 Verlag Karl Alber part of Verlag Herder GmbH, Freiburg im Breisgau

Marion Heinz, Volk und Führer. Untersuchungen zu Heideggers Seminar *Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat* (1933/34) (pp. 55–75) taken from *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 5 – Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus II, Interpretationen* edited by Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski © 2010 Verlag Karl Alber part of Verlag Herder GmbH, Freiburg im Breisgau

'Heidegger in the Foursome of Struggle, Historicity, Will, and *Gelassenheit*' adapted from Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 878–903. Reproduced with permission from Verso.

This English translation and editorial material  
© Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, 2013  
Individual Essays © Contributors, 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury Academic or the author.

### **British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-7638-7  
ePDF: 978-1-4411-6852-8  
ePub: 978-1-4411-3325-0

### **Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India  
Printed and bound in Great Britain

# **NATURE, HISTORY, STATE**

**ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BLOOMSBURY**

*Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Martin Heidegger

*The Concept of Time*, Martin Heidegger

*The Essence of Human Freedom*, Martin Heidegger

*The Essence of Truth*, Martin Heidegger

*Mindfulness*, Martin Heidegger

*Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*, Martin Heidegger

*Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, Martin Heidegger

# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Gregory Fried** (Suffolk University) is the author of *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* and (with Charles Fried) *Because It Is Wrong: Torture, Privacy and Presidential Power in the Age of Terror*.

**Richard Polt** (Xavier University, Cincinnati) is the author of *Heidegger: An Introduction* and *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's "Contributions to Philosophy."* Together, Fried and Polt have translated Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Being and Truth* and edited *A Companion to Heidegger's "Introduction to Metaphysics."*

**Robert Bernasconi** is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being*, *Heidegger in Question: The Art of Existing*, and *How to Read Sartre*. The topics of his published essays include Kant, Hegel, Levinas, and critical philosophy of race.

**Peter E. Gordon** is Amabel B. James Professor of History at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University. His books include *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* and *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*. He has also co-edited several books, including *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy*, *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, and *The Modernist Imagination*.

**Marion Heinz** (Universität Siegen) is the author of *Zeitlichkeit und Temporalität: die Konstitution der Existenz und die Grundlegung einer temporalen Ontologie im Frühwerk Martin Heideggers und Sensualistischer Idealismus: Untersuchungen zur Erkenntnistheorie des jungen Herder (1763–1778)*. She is the editor of volume 44 of the *Heidegger Gesamtausgabe* and has also edited and co-edited a variety of volumes on German philosophy, feminism, and gender theory.

**Theodore Kiesel** (Northern Illinois University) is the author of *The Genesis of Heidegger's "Being and Time"* and *Heidegger's Way of Thought: Critical and Interpretive Signposts*. He has translated Heidegger's *History of the Concept of Time* and published numerous articles on Heidegger.

**Slavoj Žižek** (University of Ljubljana) is the author of books on topics including Lacan, Marxism, and contemporary culture, including *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, *The Parallax View*, *Living in the End Times*, *Less Than Nothing*, and *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*.

# CONTENTS

About the Contributors vii

Editors' Introduction 1

## **PART ONE ON THE ESSENCE AND CONCEPT OF NATURE, HISTORY, AND STATE 13**

Session 1 15

Session 2 23

Session 3 27

Session 4 31

Session 5 35

Session 6 41

Session 7 45

Session 8 51

Session 9 57

Session 10 61

## **PART TWO INTERPRETIVE ESSAYS 65**

**1** *Volk and Führer* 67  
Marion Heinz

- 2** Heidegger in purgatory 85  
*Peter E. Gordon*
- 3** Who belongs? Heidegger's philosophy of  
the *Volk* in 1933–4 109  
*Robert Bernasconi*
- 4** The seminar of winter semester 1933–4 within  
Heidegger's three concepts of the political 127  
*Theodore Kisiel*
- 5** Heidegger in the foursome of struggle,  
historicity, will, and *Gelassenheit* 151  
*Slavoj Žižek*

Notes 171

Index 195

# EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Richard Polt and Gregory Fried

Martin Heidegger's support for the Nazi regime has long been a matter of public knowledge, but only recently have we gained a clearer picture of the details of his political activities and positions. Together with other documents from Heidegger's tenure as the first National Socialist rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933–4, the seminar in this volume is an essential piece of evidence for those who wish to assess the degree to which he was intellectually committed to Nazi ideology.<sup>1</sup> In the light of this text, Heidegger's postwar attempts to minimize the extent of his support for Nazism are no longer credible, and any interpretation that makes a simple distinction between his philosophy and his politics is no longer tenable—for in this seminar, Heidegger sketches a political philosophy, consistent with his views on the historicity of *Dasein* or human existence, that explicitly supports Hitlerian dictatorship and suggests justifications for German expansionism and persecution of the Jews.

This is not to say that the text necessarily renders Heidegger's thought as a whole bankrupt. We still must ask whether we can disentangle the truer or more promising aspects of his philosophy from the pernicious ones. We still must try to diagnose the errors in Heidegger's views and understand the merely ideological or culturally conditioned elements in them, while remaining open to the possibility that they can provide insights that transcend the dark circumstances of this seminar. We still must judge this text in the larger context of Heidegger's thought. The five essays by leading thinkers and scholars in this volume take up these philosophical challenges, offering us distinctive ways to read the seminar from appropriately critical, yet not dismissive perspectives.

# The seminar

Heidegger held his seminar “On the Essence and Concept of Nature, History, and State” in ten sessions from November 3, 1933 to February 23, 1934. We do not have Heidegger’s own notes or text for the seminar, if such existed; instead, the text consists of student protocols or reports on the seminar sessions. These protocols were reviewed by Heidegger himself, as confirmed by two interpolations he makes in the text. The protocols also generally sound like Heidegger; readers familiar with his lecture courses will recognize typical trains of thought and turns of phrase. The first protocol provides one student’s perspective on the discussions that took place during the opening session of the seminar; it is valuable as a glimpse of the atmosphere in Heidegger’s classroom and his practice as a teacher. To judge from the remaining protocols, the subsequent nine sessions must have proceeded more like a lecture course, for only Heidegger’s voice is present, and he develops a fairly continuous line of argument. Thus, while we cannot rely on this text as a verbatim transcript of what Heidegger said, it is reasonable to take it as good evidence of the essential content of the views he developed during this seminar.

The text of the protocols forms part of Heidegger’s papers in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach (item DLA 75.7265). The text was generally unknown until Marion Heinz accidentally discovered it in 1999, as she explains in her essay in this volume. It then circulated among some scholars, and Emmanuel Faye relied on it in his controversial study of Heidegger’s politics.<sup>2</sup> The seminar protocols were finally published in German in 2009.<sup>3</sup> With our translation, English-speaking readers have the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about this remarkable text.

In a retrospective on his teaching written around 1945, Heidegger refers to the seminar as developing a “critique of the biologicistic view of history.”<sup>4</sup> It is true that Heidegger consistently rejects the reduction of human beings to the biological, including biological racism, but Heidegger’s most distinctive concern in the seminar, and its primary point of interest for most readers today, is the development of the rudiments of a communitarian and authoritarian political philosophy. For a detailed analysis of the seminar, we refer the reader to Marion Heinz’s essay. It may be useful, however, to present a brief summary of each session here.

Session 1: This is the only protocol that gives us a sense of the personality of its author, Karl Siegel. Siegel blames both the students and the professor for the rather confusing and unproductive first session of the seminar, but he helpfully identifies Heidegger’s general strategy of trying to undercut

traditional concepts of nature, history, and state, along with scientific and epistemological prejudices, for the sake of a fresh encounter with the “essences” of these phenomena.

Session 2: Heidegger investigates the essence of nature and provides historical perspective on the concepts of *natura* and *physis*, emphasizing that *physis* originally referred not just to a particular domain of beings, but to all beings in their very way of Being.

Session 3: There is a deeper connection between history and time than there is between nature and time, even though all natural processes occur in time. Furthermore, time cannot be understood merely through quantitative measurements of the duration of events.

Session 4: The Kantian and Newtonian conceptions of time cannot do justice to historical, human time. These conceptions take time as an objective or subjective dimension with a uniform linear structure, but in human existence we must make decisions about which times are significant. In this sense, animals have no time, since they are not able to “decide both forwards and backwards.”

Session 5: Time is the “authentic fundamental constitution of human beings” as the beings who “can have and make history.” Heidegger now turns to the state, rejecting traditional ways of practicing political philosophy by asking about the state’s origin or purpose; he seeks an ontological understanding of the connection between state and people.

Session 6: Heidegger seeks to restore the political to its rightful status as the unifying essence of a community. The state fulfills this essence, so that the state is “the way of Being of a people” while the people is “the ground that sustains” the state. A people can be understood in various ways, including through racial concepts, but perhaps most fundamentally it is “a kind of Being that has grown under a common fate and taken distinctive shape within a *single* state.”

Session 7: A born leader can decisively affect the Being of the state and people. Such a leader must be supported by an educated elite or “band of guardians.” Since a people without a state is unfulfilled and lacks its Being, the people properly loves its state and binds itself together with the leader to a single destiny, ready for sacrifice.

Session 8: The space of a people has two aspects. The immediately familiar homeland calls for rootedness in the soil. But there is another impulse, “working out into the wider expanse,” that calls for “interaction.” Germans who live outside the boundary of the Reich are denied the opportunity to participate in the extended space of state-governed interaction, while rootless people such as “Semitic nomads” may never understand “our German space.”

Session 9: State and people are bound together through the “implementation” of the will of the leader. Heidegger raises the question of the essence of the will of the people, and of will in general, distinguishing will from wish, drive, and urge. “An animal cannot act, because it cannot will.”

Session 10: A true leader will not use coercion, but will awaken a harmonious will in the led. This may require education as “the implementation of the will of the leader and the will of the state, that is, of the people.” Heidegger ends by praising the “Führer-state” as the culmination of a historical development that has reconstructed community after the Middle Ages were dissolved by modernity.

## Context

The seminar is distinctive as Heidegger’s most concerted attempt to develop a political philosophy. But of course, it is not a self-contained work that can be understood purely on its own. It stands within the context of Heidegger’s voluminous writings over many decades, the complex history of German political thought, and the violent struggles of the twentieth century. The contributors to this volume address these contexts in a variety of ways. Here we will simply draw attention to a few texts by Heidegger that are particularly important to forming a well-rounded judgment on his political thought, before we return to some distinctive concepts in the seminar and consider their implications.

*Being and Time* (1927) generally appears to operate on a level of ontological abstraction that rises above particular political views, and the text emphasizes individual more than communal existence. Still, the climactic section 74 sketches a communal authenticity that would involve a generation’s discovery of the people’s destiny through communication and struggle (*Kampf*).<sup>5</sup>

After assuming the rectorship of the University of Freiburg in April of 1933, Heidegger delivered his inaugural Rectoral Address, “The Self-Assertion of the German University,” on May 27, 1933. In this speech, Heidegger delineated three forms of service to the state: military, labor, and knowledge service. He claimed that the traditional concept of academic freedom was only a negative form of freedom, and that true university life must involve a will to a self-assertion in which leader and follower, teacher and student, together forge a bond in the pursuit of knowledge in the service of the people’s destiny. During this period, Heidegger made other

pronouncements to both the university and the broader public in support of the National Socialist regime, including speeches in favor of the plebiscite of November 12, 1933, in which Hitler called on the German people to ratify his domestic and foreign policies.<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the Rectoral Address, see Theodore Kisiel's essay in this volume.

Heidegger delivered two lecture courses during his year as rector, which are collected in the volume *Being and Truth*. Particularly striking is the introduction to the course "On the Essence of Truth," which appears to celebrate *polemos* or "struggle" as the essence of Being. In a particularly disturbing passage, Heidegger explains struggle as standing against the enemy, and comments that the internal enemies of the people have to be rooted out without mercy, "with the goal of total annihilation."<sup>7</sup> (For the full passage, see Slavoj Žižek's essay, p. 164.) In conjunction with the remark on "Semitic nomads" in the 1933–4 seminar, these thoughts seem to anticipate and endorse a possible Holocaust. The same lecture course notably includes a ferocious attack on Erwin Kolbenheyer, a novelist and Nazi ideologue who had presented a "biological" account of the purpose of art in a speech at Freiburg.<sup>8</sup> For Heidegger, the destiny of a people has to be understood in distinctively historical, not biological terms.

After stepping down as rector, Heidegger delivered a lecture course in 1934 on *Logic as the Question of the Essence of Language* that explores what it means to be a people.<sup>9</sup> While marked by its contemporary political context, the lecture course adopts a tone that is rather more questioning than the 1933–4 seminar and less dogmatic. For further discussion of this course we refer to the reader to Robert Bernasconi's essay in this volume.

Heidegger's 1934–5 seminar on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* explores a variety of themes including sovereignty, law, and freedom, showing an attraction to a right-Hegelian point of view but also raising numerous questions, particularly in Heidegger's private notes for the seminar.<sup>10</sup>

With his 1934–5 lectures on Hölderlin's "Germania" and "The Rhine," Heidegger embarks on an exploration of this poet as a figure who recognizes the difficulty of "the free use of the national"<sup>11</sup> and points the way to a deeper, less immediate encounter with German destiny.

*Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) develops a confrontational understanding of the relation between Being and human beings and criticizes various supposedly half-hearted political developments of the time for missing the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism.<sup>12</sup>

By studying Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger, Heidegger evidently hoped to come to grips with this "inner truth"—the metaphysical basis of the Nazi movement. Heidegger's various lectures and writings on Nietzsche

(1936–42) were revised and published after the war in two volumes, where Heidegger cut some of the more political passages.<sup>13</sup> These texts evolve from an initial fascination and enthusiasm to a rather negative view of Nietzsche as trapped in a metaphysics of the will to power and eternal recurrence. Through an intensive study of Jünger's 1932 work *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*), Heidegger concluded that Jünger was an exponent of a one-sided Nietzscheanism.<sup>14</sup>

The private writings of the late thirties and early forties offer evidence of Heidegger's disillusionment with Nazi ideology: drawing on his critique of Nietzschean will to power, he criticizes the Nazi celebration of violence and insists that Being transcends power and manipulation; he also denounces willful assertions of the primacy of the *Volk* that fail to understand that the people must look beyond itself to recognize its destiny within the history of Being. These critiques do not bring Heidegger any closer to liberal or leftist points of view, however; instead, he seems to distance himself from all political positions.<sup>15</sup> In a dialogue composed at the very end of the war, Heidegger rejects the moral judgments that are being passed on Germany and attributes evil to a nonmoral "devastation" at work in Being itself.<sup>16</sup>

The Bremen lectures of 1949 are an example of how Heidegger drew on his account of Western metaphysics to position himself in the postwar period as a critic of all modernity, including Nazism. The most famous passage here presents "the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps" as "in essence the same" as mechanized agriculture and nuclear bombs.<sup>17</sup> Readers must decide whether passages such as this point out deep roots of modern nihilism, whether they are reductive and pose false equivalencies, or whether the truth lies somewhere in between.

We can find anticipations of Heidegger's political engagement in the 1920s, and echoes of it in the 1940s and thereafter; the careful reader must determine whether those resonances are enough to condemn Heidegger's thought as a whole, or whether he succeeded in thinking through his own errors. In either case, his support for Nazism in the 1930s, and in 1933–4 in particular, is a critical point in his life and thought. The seminar on "Nature, History, and State" is essential reading if we are to form a judgment on this crucial episode.

## The politics of the seminar

Let us return to the seminar itself and to what we take to be some of its most notable features as a study in political philosophy.

First, Heidegger assigns an ontological status to the relation between people and state: that is, what it means for a particular people to *be* must be established through its state. While he leaves open the question of what a people in general is, he claims that the state is not just “grounded on the Being of the people” (p. 46 below), but *is* the Being of the people (46, 52, 57). “The people that turns down a state, that is stateless, has just not found the gathering of its essence yet; it still lacks the composure and force to be committed to its fate as a people” (46). A people without a state *is not yet*, in the sense that it has not yet found its unique fulfillment as a community.

Heidegger elaborates on the people-state relation through an analogy to individuals. Because individuals’ own Being is an issue for them, they have consciousness and conscience. They care about their own Being, they want to live, and they *love* their own existence. In just the same way, the people loves its state: “The people is ruled by the urge for the state, by *erōs* for the state” (48). This is why we care about the form of the state, or the constitution—which is not a contract or a legal arrangement, but “the actualization of our decision for the state; . . . constitution and law . . . are factual attestations of what we take to be our historical task as a people, the task that we are trying to live out” (48–9).

The erotic urge for the state is to be distinguished from “drive” as felt by lower animals; bees and termites are instinctively driven into cooperative formations, but this is a nonhuman phenomenon and not genuinely political (48; cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2, 1253a8–9). The vagueness of an urge also separates it from will, which is clearly focused on a particular goal (58).

Heidegger briefly distinguishes his concept of the political from two others. Carl Schmitt’s view that the essence of the political is the friend-enemy relation comes in for some criticism when Heidegger emphasizes that in Schmitt’s view, “the political unit does not have to be identical with state and people” (46). Heidegger implies that a group based on solidarity against an enemy is less fundamental than a *Volk*—whatever that may be. Heidegger also criticizes Bismarck’s concept of politics as “the art of the possible,” which depends too much on “the personal genius of the statesman” (46).

But this remark should not lead us to expect an anti-dictatorial point of view, and in fact, Heidegger’s views as presented here easily lend themselves to a personality cult: he claims there can be a born leader, an individual who “must be a leader in accordance with the marked form of his Being.” A born leader needs no political education, but he ought to be supported by an educated elite, a “band of guardians” who help to take responsibility for the state (45). Heidegger seems to envision something like Plato’s “perfect guardians,” the philosopher-rulers, but here they are in service to a creative

leader who knows instinctively, not philosophically, what to do. This leader not only understands, but actually “brings about” what the people and the state are. It is noteworthy that these words were penciled in by Heidegger himself on the student protocol (45; cf. a similar insertion on 46). The born leader drafts the state and people, so to speak: he draws the line between who “we” are and who “we” are not. The focused will of the leader provides the clear identity that a vague urge cannot.

There is little room for debate and disagreement within Heidegger’s complex of people, state, and leader. “Only where the leader and the led bind themselves together to *one* fate and fight to actualize *one* idea does true order arise” (49). He envisions “a deep dedication of all forces to the people, the state, as the most rigorous breeding, as engagement, endurance, solitude and love. Then the existence and superiority of the leader sinks into the Being, the soul of the people, and binds it in this way with originality and passion to the task.” The citizens are ready to sacrifice themselves in order to defeat “death and the devil—that is, ruination and decline from their own essence” (49).

In the eighth and perhaps most original session of the seminar, Heidegger focuses on the political meaning of space. In all of Heidegger’s thought, space is meaningful: it is not a geometrical abstraction, but a complex of places where things and human beings belong—or fail to belong. Here he develops two aspects of the space of a people: homeland (*Heimat*) and territory. (Heidegger indicates the latter with a variety of words: *Land*, *Herrschaftsgebiet*, *Territorium*, and *Vaterland*. The term “fatherland” is mentioned only one other time in the seminar, on p. 52, where Heidegger implies that it reflects an inadequate relationship to the people.) The immediately familiar homeland, the locality into which one is born, is small, not just in its measurements but in the coziness of its familiarity. The proper relation to it is *Bodenständigkeit*: groundedness, standing steadfast and rooted in the soil. But there is another impulse, which Heidegger calls *Auswirkung in die Weite*, working out into the wider expanse. The space of the state, the territory, requires this extended “interaction” (*Verkehr*). Only when rootedness in the soil is supplemented by interaction does a people come into its own. What is the most important element of this “interaction”—is it war? Commerce? Travel? Or something else?

While Heidegger does not answer this question, the passage could be seen as an example of a dialectic between home and homelessness that is at work in many of Heidegger’s texts. In *Being and Time*, one must experience the uncanniness of anxiety before one can return authentically (*eigentlich*, “own”-ly) to one’s familiar environment. If we were completely ensconced in our surroundings, they would be our habitat and we would