

Three essays on Heidegger

by John Minahane

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INTRODUCTION (by Peter Brooke)

John Minahane gave his talk *Why Heidegger is interesting* in May 2014 to a group of people in Belfast associated with the publishing house *Athol Books*. Athol Books was originally established by the British and Irish Communist Organisation, well known for its willingness to think 'outside the box' of conventional left wing assumptions. Both John and I were members of the B&ICO back in the 1970s and we find that our old friends are still as intellectually adventurous as ever. After giving his talk John was offered the chance to edit a new journal - *The Heidegger Review* - a project that fitted well with the series Athol Books had already produced on Irish-German relations.

The *Heidegger Review* was not intended as a journal of academic research on Heidegger - anything but! Rather it aimed at discussing the issues raised by, or related to, what Heidegger was doing. Minahane himself wrote on the relationship between poetry and philosophy among Heidegger's beloved Greeks and also on the poetry of the First World War, both on poets initially enthusiastic for war (Rilke for example) and those who were opposed to it. He himself has translated the *Bloody Sonnets* of the Slovak poet Pavol Orszách Hviezdoslav, one of the few poets to write against the war right from the start. I wrote about the political-philosophical outlook of Alexander Dugin, only going into his views on Heidegger in the third issue of the journal.¹ Brendan Clifford wrote on the conflicted relationship between the British (and, with regard to Tom Kettle and Conor Cruise O'Brien, Irish) intelligentsia and Nietzsche; Cathy Winch on Simone Weil, with particular reference to her views on technology. Philip O'Connor wrote an important essay on the political acrobatics of *Der Spiegel*.

Minahane himself is well known as a writer on Gaelic literature, in particular arguing that, once placed in their historical context, poems other writers have dismissed as mere technical exercises in fact have a rich intellectual and political content. He has translated the seventeenth century poet Geoffrey O'Donoghue and the fourteenth century Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, as well as the 'Argument defending the right of the Kingdom of Ireland' by Conor O'Mahony, written in 1645 in the context of the English Civil War and its devastating consequences in Ireland. Living and working in Slovakia, he has published translations of a number of Slovak poets, including, in addition to Hviezdoslav, Ladislav Novomeský, Milan Rúfus, Joseph Leikert and, most recently, Janko Král'.

WHY HEIDEGGER IS INTERESTING

¹ My contributions can be found elsewhere on the present website.

(Version of a talk given in Belfast on May 25, 2014)

What I want to do in this presentation is to say, in a few sketches, why I think this philosopher is interesting. I'll begin by saying where I think he was coming from and why he became a star in European philosophy in the late 1920s. I'll go on then to his political evolution, how he became a member of the Nazi Party and what kind of Nazi he was. After that, I'll say something more about the later notebooks, including some that he wrote during the first two years of the war. The main ideas that he defended for 30 years after the war are taking shape already in these notebooks.

Heidegger's background was rural German Catholic. To begin with, he was a Catholic philosopher. But like a great many others, his thinking changed in the early 1920s. There are arguments over how this happened. I can only guess, and my guess is that what happened was that he read Nietzsche, and he took in Nietzsche's idea that Christianity was dead, historically burnt out, and he was shaken to the core. But if the Christian way of thinking about the human being and the world wouldn't do, what would do?

Heidegger came up with an answer to this in his book called *Being and Time* which appeared in 1927, and which made him famous. To see why it caused such a stir, I think we have to look at what the other philosophies of the time were like. The cult of science was already very strong by then. Some philosophers were reducing the human being to a function of science or a scientific problem.

In my opinion, this is what Wittgenstein's philosophy amounted to, insofar as it was philosophy rather than mysticism. Wittgenstein wanted to remove everything that was vague and incorrect and unscientific from ordinary human speech. Then when we were all speaking clearly and correctly like well-programmed little machines, we would come up against the really important thing - but it couldn't be spoken about, there was nothing at all we could say about it! Of course, you could have this sort of philosophy without the mysticism - Bertrand Russell's philosophy was something like that.

Marxism preferred to consider the human being as a force of production or as a member of a class pursuing its class interests. Also, Marxism was very much influenced by the theory of evolution. When this was applied to human beings it often led to the view that human beings as they currently existed were hopelessly inadequate and unsatisfactory, and it was necessary to change them completely, maybe even into a different and superior type of being. Nietzsche was a long way from Marxism, but it was he who came up with the idea of the Superman: as the ape was to man, so man would be to the superman. This idea of the superman made a big impression and came up again in different forms. We find Trotsky expressing it in the 1920s, when he said that the average man of the future would be on the level of Aristotle, Goethe and Marx. And that would only be one peak of achievement, he said, there would be higher peaks rising up beyond it.

In Russia of the 1920s there were people who were speculating very freely on getting beyond the unsatisfactory human being as we know him. Bogdanov, for example, had the idea of transforming the population by blood transfusions. (Like Francis Bacon before him, he martyred himself to science: he died of a transfusion experiment which he was carrying out on himself in 1928.) Svjatogor and Jaroslavskij wrote about abolishing death and producing human immortality. Mouravjev had the idea of a population policy which

wouldn't rely on haphazard sexual intercourse and messy childbirth: instead, populations would be scientifically produced in laboratories.

Heidegger came up with some totally different ideas which countered all of this. He gave a description of basic human experience. He said: you come into a world which you did not make and which was not made for you. And you don't come in gently or smoothly. You're flung into it, hurled like a projectile. But immediately you begin to discover that you can respond to your situation and keep your flight going. And just when you're starting to get good at it, when you feel it is possible to have some element of control, you realise that you're not going to have enough time, because this flight of yours, which had a beginning, will also have an end. You're on the way towards death. And what you have to do, in the time that you've got, is to try to live the life that is proper or authentic for the special You that you are. This is very difficult, because from all sides there are pressures on you to live a standardised, average, line-of-least-resistance life. But as far as possible you must try to live your authentic life and then die your authentic death.

In effect, Heidegger was putting it up to the evolutionists and the scientists: this is what human life is about - tell me how you're going to evolve your way out of that! Maybe his description doesn't sound very cheerful. I should say that I'm not at all sure I can do him justice: I find most of *Being and Time* quite unreadable, there are just some sections that spring to life. No doubt that was also the experience of Albert Camus, who got what I think is a one-sided impression: he said that Heidegger showed the human being as humiliated and wretched.

But whether or not we are wretched, according to Heidegger we are definitely special. In the world we're surrounded by all kinds of other Beings, or Things-that-are-in-Being: animals, plants, hills, the sky and the stars. But none of those other Beings relate to their own Being. We do. And we do it all the time, it's inseparable from life. And that is what makes us special.

As Heidegger describes us, we are Beings that worry and Beings that care. Life is about certain people and things mattering to us, making us care about them. We live in a context, and we're committed. Living means being involved, or engaged. And likewise knowing. There's the well-known proverb that says, "What you don't know won't worry you" - Heidegger would turn that round and say, "What you don't care about, you'll never know". Or in his language: "Awareness of reality is itself a way of being-in-the-World". He even found an ancient Latin fable which makes the point for him. Care (Cura) was the first to shape a human being out of clay, before Jupiter (at Care's request) put a soul in it. Afterwards there was a dispute about how the human being should be named and who he belonged to. The gods held court proceedings on the matter, and it was decided that Jupiter should recover the human's soul when he died and the Earth should recover his body. But as long as he lived he would always be possessed by Care.

These ideas are all around us, they've gone into the atmosphere via French existentialism and any number of other routes. But there's another aspect of Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time* that's not so easy to tune in to, though it's central to his philosophy and to his life. Heidegger argues that roughly for the past two and a half thousand years, there has been a tendency in western thinking to forget Being. Instead we have developed the

artificial kind of thinking called Metaphysics, which was pioneered by Plato. This has now reached a crisis point. If we carry on thinking platonically, the results for mankind will be very destructive. We need to make a new start. In fact we need to reconnect with the thinking of the Greeks before Plato, and in doing so reconnect with Being.

What does he mean, “forgetting Being”? How can we forget Being? Or what does he mean by Being? People have cracked their heads on that question. Rather than go into academic arguments, I will suggest my own answer. Being is what people had a sense of in traditional country life. Platonism, by contrast, is a type of artificial, urban thinking. And if Platonism has become a serious problem and danger, that is connected with the fact that one European nation after another has found that all of a sudden most of their people live in towns and cities - a prospect that anyone down to the time of Marx and Engels would have said was impossible, the vision of a lunatic.

Anyhow... in *Being and Time* there's certainly a social element. But it's expressed in abstract language, and some of the most memorable things that are said about social relations are negative. For example, there's *das Man*. *Das Man* could mean “one” as in “one usually prefers...”, or alternatively “decent people”, “the neighbours”, “democrats”, or (a favourite expression of my uncle in Boston) “regular guys”. But ultimately *das Man* is an It, not a he, she or they, and It is constantly dragging us down from our authentic life to its own average, standardised conformity.

By the late 1920s Heidegger seems to have felt disappointed that his thinking wasn't making more impact. In the early '30s he certainly felt that. The notebooks begin in 1931, and one of the first things he says is: “Even today I still don't have enough enemies! *Being and Time* hasn't brought me a great enemy”. Not having enemies - that was a problem he wouldn't have forever! Anyhow, in those early notebooks he still seems to be narrowly focused on philosophy, but he keeps writing sloganlike sentences: “We must philosophise our way out of “Philosophy”!”; “Unerringly into the Unaccessible!”; “We must get ourselves back into the Great Beginning!” At this stage he sounds a bit like an agitator without a movement.

NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Then suddenly, I presume at the beginning of 1933, he starts writing about “the magnificent wakening popular Will” of the Germans. And he says that the most important thing is to “tie the most deeply-hidden Mission of the German People back into the Great Beginning”. Up to May 1933, when he took the position of rector of Freiburg University (which he says he was pushed into unwillingly), he writes nothing about National Socialism. Becoming rector also involved joining the Nazi Party. During the year when he was rector he does have many entries about National Socialism. But if there's any entry which is purely uncritical or which just expounds conventional Nazi ideology, I've missed it.

For that peculiar year Heidegger is an enthusiastic Nazi, no doubt about that. But he's enthusiastic only about Nazi potential. Everything he writes is about what the Nazi Party could be or should be, but obviously isn't; or alternatively, what it may become if it isn't

careful (there's a danger, he says, of bourgeoisification). For example, "National Socialism is a genuine power-in-becoming only if, behind all its doing and saying, it still has something to keep secret - and operates with a mighty force-in-reserve that works upon the future. But if what currently exists is the sum of all that is achieved and willed, then it is only a horror that will crumble away." And again, " (We cannot take) National Socialism as a finished eternal truth fallen from Heaven - taken like that, it would only be confusion and stupidity. So, as it has come into being, it must itself become a process of becoming and shape the future - that is, itself as an image step back before this future".

As I understand these statements, this is how a German philosopher in full philosophical armour says: the Nazi Party as it is today is a sow's ear, but I'm planning to make a silk purse of it. At some time in the late months of 1933 or early 1934 he writes, "Today one can speak of a "Vulgar National Socialism"; by that I mean the world and the criteria and demands and attitudes of those journalists and culture-makers who are currently installed and approved. From these sources, which naturally make a brainless appeal to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, a quite definite doctrine of history and man is transmitted to the people. This doctrine could best be described as Ethical Materialism". - What this ethical materialism amounts to, in Heidegger's view, is empty bourgeois respectability and conformism.

Furthermore, "there is now a gloomy biologism, which produces the right "ideology" for Ethical Materialism. People are spreading the deluded notion that the spiritual-historical world ("culture") grows plant-like out of the "People", if one simply clears away the impediments..."

There are several similar comments in the notebooks on the biological notions which the Nazis applied to society and culture. He thought all of this was rubbish. But what would the Nazi Party be if it rejected its biologism? Surely, it would no longer be Hitler's Party! As further proof that Heidegger was a very odd Nazi, he doesn't even mention the word Jews in his notebooks during this period when he was an active party member, so far as I can see. At least twice he says, "We must settle our accounts with Christianity". But there's no mention of settling accounts with the Jews.

His "rectoral speech", delivered in May 1933, is often described as anti-Semitic. In fact, it never mentions Jews or Judaism. (An English translation of the full text can easily be found on the internet). There's nothing in it which could be understood as incitement to racial hatred. Even Hitler isn't mentioned explicitly. Granted, there's a lot in it about the importance of the leadership principle. But it seems that the leader whom Heidegger thought it most important to follow was none other than Martin Heidegger.

The central idea in the speech is the need for the German people to set out on a great spiritual adventure. They must face the fact that the Christian-Platonic thinking of the last two and a half thousand years is now exhausted, as Nietzsche pointed out when he said that "God is dead". The Germans will need to link up with the thinking of the older Greeks of two and a half thousand years ago, who were in touch with Being. This will demand heroic virtues, and not least from people in the German universities. The regular Nazis in Freiburg who were listening to all of this, what can they possibly have made of it?

In April 1934 Heidegger, unable to do whatever he wanted to do, resigned his rectorship. In his notebooks he tried to see it as part of a learning process. "A failed year - a lost year - if Failure wasn't the highest form of human experience, etc." Actually, it took him about four years for the lesson to sink in. During that time he doesn't say very much about National Socialism, and he gradually begins to tackle some other issues, and especially technology: what the roots of modern technology are, and what effect it is having on life and thinking. He was still a formal member of the Nazi Party and he kept his professorship, but officially it seems he was gradually sliding into the "That fellow's no use!" category.

Then, in 1938, he made a judgment on his Nazi adventure. He had thought of National Socialism as "the possibility of a transition to a new beginning". But this was a mistake. Far from pointing towards a new beginning, it was an ending, the culmination of the existing modern trend. "What is beginning here is much more (and in a far deeper, more comprehensive and intensive manner than in Fascism) the completion of the Modern Age (despite the fact that this began in "Romanticism") - with the Dehumanisation of Man in the self-assured Rationality of the Historical-Technical, i.e. the thoroughgoing "Mobilisation" of all the Capability of a focused-upon-itself Mankind." And nonetheless, he said, I was right to make my attempt.

We might ask: what's wrong with that? What is outrageous or unreasonable in this explanation? Why can't we accept it now? And why should Heidegger have been expected to say something drastically different after the still-to-come World War? (As we know, he didn't.)

There had been a basic misunderstanding between Heidegger and the Nazi movement. Heidegger was a failed Nazi, but only because the Nazis failed as Heideggerians. They were supposed to become the political wing of his philosophy. Deep down in their depths, in their unseen potential, in the hidden historic element which they didn't rant about when they ranted (as he himself said, more or less in so many words), they were thought to be somehow capable of facilitating a major spiritual change in the Germans, a change that would go much deeper than any revolution.

Now if Heidegger believed there was actually a chance of this, surely he was justified in trying to become the intellectual guide of the Nazi movement? In fact, surely it was his duty? I think it's a tragedy that he didn't succeed. It is hard to imagine what a Heideggerian state would have been like. But I think, at the very least, it would not have had a culture of biological racism, which ran totally against Heidegger's thinking and which he despised. And without a full-blown, state-backed culture of racism, would something like the Holocaust have been possible? Apart from that, the German people were supposed to achieve an intensive renewal of the spirit. Military adventures could not have helped in this, they could only have been disruptive.

So I think the Heideggerian Nazi state would have been averse to any wars except defensive wars. It would simply have waited for Russia to become Russian again, if Russia had allowed that. (Bolshevism was seen as something totally non-Russian, a West-European metaphysical deviation.)

Bringing intelligent direction to raw barbaric energy - isn't this a theme that goes a long way back in Europe? Hadn't popes and bishops, poets and philosophers done this through the centuries, and been praised for it? And how obvious was it in 1933 that this couldn't be done with Hitler and the Nazis? If we look at the contemporary press, we will see that the larger body of opinion inside and outside Germany did not regard Hitler as the kind of political monster who could never fundamentally change.

I'm not so much thinking of Hitler's enthusiastic admirers, such as the editor of the *Irish Times*. On March 6, 1933 he wrote in his editorial: "In reasoned warfare against the Communists Herr Hitler will have the support of all civilised nations. At the moment he is Europe's standard-bearer against Muscovite terrorism, and although some of his methods certainly are open to question, nobody doubts his entire sincerity." I am thinking more of people like Daniel Binchy, who was an Irish diplomat in Germany from 1929 to 1932 and whose article "Adolf Hitler" was published in *Studies* in March 1933.

This article was republished two years ago in the *Studies* anthology. The editor, Professor Bryan Fanning, called it "astute". This, because Binchy had actually read *Mein Kampf* and had familiarised himself with Nazi policy. And Binchy had an uneasy feeling about Hitler and the raw Nazi energy, no doubt about that. But when he considered the current political situation, he said that one of the possibilities was that Hitler would follow policies fundamentally different from Nazi policy, in response to pressures from his coalition partners. He didn't think that was inconceivable. So why was it inconceivable that Hitler and the Nazis might respond to the intellectual energy of a great philosopher?

My conclusion from all this is: the explanation of his Nazi involvement which Heidegger recorded in his notebook in 1938 makes sense. It's basically the same explanation that he gave after the war, and it's adequate.

As I said earlier, I can't find anything about Jews or Judaism in the notebooks written between 1931 and 1938. But there are a number of mentions of Jews and Judaism in the later notebooks, written between 1939 and 1941. Almost invariably these come up in the course of expressing oppositional attitudes towards Nazism and Nazi policies. He does see Judaism as a current of thinking with some sharply negative features. But he insists that this isn't a biological problem, this isn't a racial problem, it's a metaphysical problem - like the problem of Americanism, the problem of Bolshevism, the problem of Christianity. But Judaism doesn't have anything like the importance that these other negative forces in thinking have for Heidegger.

You'd never guess that from the anti-Heidegger press campaign that was drummed up lately, where these references to Jews and Judaism were torn out of context. I would say that some of these press campaigners can't think, some of them won't think, and some of them want to stop anyone else thinking. Certainly, their recent activities won't have encouraged people in Germany to read these notebooks. And they won't have spurred anyone in Ireland, say, to look for translations. And yet these notebooks have some of the richest food for thought that a person interested in thinking is likely to find.

The most important idea is that metaphysically, there is nothing to choose between Fascism, Communism and Liberal Democracy. All of them leave the human being in the grip of technology. All of them are systems unresponsive to the world, responsive only to

complexes of artificial human aims and interests, and increasingly destructive (the ecology movement in past times took some ideas from Heidegger). And all of them degrade the mind and make it ever more difficult to find conditions for a new beginning.

In fact, if you have to compare Bolshevism and Americanism, then it's Bolshevism that's relatively harmless. It doesn't get its hooks so deep into its human beings. There's a zone of the Russian mind that it doesn't get to and that will survive it with rich potential.

In the immediate term, what's in store for the West, Heidegger says, is "a Prussianly-restrained unconditional hyper-Americanisation". So: was he wrong? It seems to me that that's what I've experienced in my own life in Ireland and anywhere else I've lived. There's some Prussian restraint on raw Americanism, meaning for example a social welfare system, a bureaucratic system of care, but basically the moving force is Americanisation. And what he says about country life, the prospects of country life, and the implications of the radio for country life - I can confirm all that from experience too.

About two years into the Second World War, Heidegger wrote that it was "a war over the Nothingness of Nothing". And after the war, he believed that it made no basic difference that Tweedledum had been defeated by Tweedledee and Tweedledoo (who now began their own Cold War over Nothing). None of them were capable of getting western thinking out of its dead end. All of them were letting technology get out of control.

As we know, liberal democracy was an impressive winner in its Cold War. Professor Fukuyama immediately announced that it was the only game in town - the only game that was ever going to be in town (though it seems to miss its enemies). And technology has got so far out of control that we only have occasional sentimental controversies about it, for example regarding privacy - as if the satellites are going to let you have any such thing.

The question arises: can there possibly be any alternative? ...

AN INVITATION TO THINK

Editorial published in the *Heidegger Review*, No.1, July 2014.

AN INVITATION REFUSED

A few months ago, an invitation was offered, and it was refused: an invitation to think. That is, an invitation to think about our world, its changes, and their implications. And also to ask some questions about modern thinking. How can the most dynamic thinking of the present time be described? In what ways is it changing the world? Where might it be taking us? And is there any possibility of anything except more and more of the future of present trends?

The invitation was offered, posthumously, by Martin Heidegger. Over about 40 years, roughly from 1930 to 1970, this philosopher wrote his most dangerous thoughts in notebooks which were not intended for publication in the foreseeable future. Some of them, composed between 1931 and 1941, were published for the first time in March of this

year. These writings give us thought at full gallop. Heidegger expresses himself freely, much more freely than was possible in his lectures and currently published books.

The topics addressed include Nazi racial doctrine, social policy and geopolitical strategy, all of which are treated with contempt in the entries from 1938 on. But there are other big topics besides Nazism: the competing systems of Liberal Democracy and Communism; their “representative nations” England, America and Russia; the relationship of modern man to technology; the history and current state of modern thinking. On all of these topics he thinks with the same ruthless intensity. Finally, with the quality there’s some quantity. In three substantial volumes, the recently published notebooks come to about 1300 pages.

Surely, one might say, the man has given us food for thought? Isn’t this an invitation to think? After all, Heidegger was no ordinary practitioner of the art. There were many respected judges who considered him the 20th century’s greatest thinker. Even recently Peter Sloterdijk, one of Germany’s two celebrity philosophers, declared that this opinion “is perhaps not wrong” (*Zeilen und Tage*, 2014 ed., p. 228).

Now, one wouldn’t expect everyone to accept an invitation to think! You have to like doing it, and not everybody does. It is understandable that many of those who noticed the invitation might turn it down. Such people feel they have other things to do besides thinking. Better things. More useful things!

In fact, Heidegger goes so far as to say, “*Thinking is passion for the useless*” (Notebooks IX, 15). But this is a very austere definition of thinking, maybe too rigorous. It seems to confine the chances that any thinking will happen to those strange people who are addicted to mental exertions that will never bring them profit (a vice which was widespread in rural Ireland in the 19th century and later, according to improving critics).

One might shrink from this raw statement by the ferocious German thinker. One might water it down a bit. And then one might wonder: is it too much to expect that some of the professional academic community, functionaries in “the culture business” as that philosopher unkindly called it, some few of the many who like to write little things about Michel Foucault; or even exponents of the higher journalism, the journalism that has pretensions, what the Germans call *Publizistik* - is it too much to expect that some of these people (within their limits, not over-straining themselves) might take up the invitation to think? Or that, supposing they felt compelled to turn the invitation down, they might do so with grace and good humour?

But yes, in actual fact, that was too much to expect! Witness what happened in March and April

of this year.

In the course of those writings amounting to 1300 printed pages, Heidegger made a few brief mentions of Jews and Judaism. There are about 12 such references, according to Jürgen Kaube of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (12/3/2014), though I have found only 9. None of these 9 passages, which readers will find in this journal, employ a language of hatred. Race terminology is not used - except in one passage which attacks the biological racism of the Nazis. Heidegger even specifically says that “the problem of the role of world Jewry” is not racial, it is metaphysical. What he says about Jews does not even have

the high intensity of some of his comments on Christianity. For example, "*Christianity is the most extreme humanisation of mankind and takes the godliness from its God*" (XIII, 110 - a statement which might be praised in Teheran or Tel Aviv, but which any traditional Christian would surely consider outrageous).

It is true that when Heidegger judges the contribution of Jewish thinking to the Christian west in its phase of modernity, he gives it a negative rating. And ditto international Jewish political influence at the outset of World War 2. When referring to Jews and Judaism he expresses himself as freely as when writing about anyone else, and this leaves him short of the standards of present-day political correctness. From the greatest thinker of the 20th century that simply cannot be tolerated.

So an international campaign was launched in the "quality press" to debate the question. *Is Heidegger Contaminated by Nazism?* In reality, this question - it's the title of Joshua Rothman's *New Yorker* essay - had been answered beforehand. "Yes" was the answer. The real question, to be discussed by examining those nine or so references to Judaism tom completely out of their context, was this: how badly is Heidegger contaminated by Nazism? On the question of degree there could be differing views.

Participants in the decontamination campaign included Thomas Assheuer in *Die Zeit* (21/3/2014), Jürgen Kaube in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (12/3/2014), Emmanuel Faye, who got going at the prepublication stage, in *Le Monde* (28.1.2014), Joshua Rothman in *The New Yorker* (28/4/2014), various writers in the English papers, and inevitably, Fintan O'Toole in the *Irish Times* (5/4/2014). But none of these was the star performer. On centre stage was none other than the director of the Martin Heidegger Institute at the University of Wuppertal, Professor Peter Trawny.

This was the man - a harmless enough official in the culture business, to all appearance - who had edited the notebooks for publication. While going through them he became aware that they included statements about Jews which no respectable person could make in those particular words today. One or two - I rely on Rothman's vivid account of a public meeting in Greenwich Village featuring Trawny - one or two he might have passed over, but when there were seven or eight...! He confided his worries to colleagues, but their responses only frightened him more. "*You cannot be director of the Adolf Hitler Institute, a colleague had warned him.*"

Now, the poor devil liked his job! He wanted, if at all possible, to keep it, as he disarmingly told his New York listeners. ("*I'm the director of the Martin Heidegger Institute, and I actually want to be that for a longer time, he said, to laughter from the audience.*") So what was he to do? There was nothing for it but to write a book called *Martin Heidegger und der Mythos der jiidischen Weltverschwörung* (Martin Heidegger and the Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy).

Heidegger, as a matter of fact, had not used the term "Jewish world conspiracy". The terms he used were *das internationale Judentum* and *das Weltjudentum*, usually translated in English as "international Jewry" and "world Jewry".

Now, these are the terms which were used by very respectable British politicians in 1916 when they started to speculate about harnessing Jewish influence to help them win their

world war (c.f. Jonathan Schneer: *The Balfour Declaration*, p. 152). It was on the assumption that a well-organised international Jewish interest existed, which was capable of effectively helping Great Britain in its war, that the Balfour Declaration was issued in November 1917, and Balfour later acknowledged that effective help was in fact given. Now it was as reasonable to assume that such an interest existed in 1939 as it had been in 1916. If Professor Trawny wanted to be fair, he could have written a book about *Martin Heidegger and the Myths and Realities of International Jewish Politics* - but, well, the job seemed to need a broad brush...

THE DECONTAMINATION

Trawny duly declared Heidegger contaminated (*Martin Heidegger und der Mythos*, new edition, p.12 and after). He then made himself available nationally and internationally for a decontamination campaign. The job was massive: as Fintan O'Toole explained, it would involve nothing less than a disinfection of western culture, because Heidegger's ideas had gone deep and wide therein. *"They can't be dumped, but they do have to be rethought in the knowledge that the great thinker who expounded them was also a moral idiot."*

Rothman's account of the meeting in Greenwich Village includes the following:

"(Professor Roger) Berkowitz, who served as moderator, started things off by reading passages from the black notebooks. One began: "The Jews, with their marked gift for calculating, live, already for the longest time, according to the principle of race, which is why they are resisting its consistent application with utmost violence." When Berkowitz finished, it was quiet enough to hear traffic on the Bowery. Then, slowly, the professors, along with members of the audience, tried to talk about what Heidegger had written. No one knew what to say; the conversation was halting and desultory."

It appears that none of these professors of philosophy were familiar with the concept of context. No one demanded that the entire passage where this sentence occurred should be read out in English translation. If that had been done, they might possibly have discovered that the passage was an attack on Nazi racism (*Notebooks XII*, 38). The translated sentence, as printed in *The New Yorker*, tramples over all the nuances of the original. A better version would be:

*“The Jews, with their marked gift for calculation, have been “living” longest according to the race principle, and precisely for that reason they are also putting up the strongest resistance against its absolute application.”*²

The phrase with their marked gift for calculation is italicised in the original, which suggests that someone is being quoted ironically. In any case it refers back to the previous sentence, where he has said that racial breeding is a kind of calculation imposed upon life. The meaning of the present sentence I take to be something like this: the Jews have survived as a group in the Christian west through a sense of racial affinity, but they haven't had much of a life, and they know that if the whole of Europe took the racial principle to extremes there would be no kind of life at all.

Someone at the dumbstruck meeting in Greenwich Village did finally blurt out a clear response to that sentence.

“After a while, the group paused for wine and crackers—the glummiest cocktail hour ever. (Later, an enraged audience member found his words, and responded to the passage by saying, ‘That sentence strikes me as somehow so deranged, so alien to a sense of the real. . . . Anyone who is capable of that sort of argument cannot be trusted to think.’ A few people—by no means everyone—applauded.)”

Heidegger cannot be trusted to think... Words worth pondering!

Peter Trawny put it differently: Heidegger was too stupid to think. But let's take things in order. Addressing the New York meeting, Trawny insisted upon a renunciation of context. And at the same time he wanted to save Heidegger from himself, not to mention saving his own job from Heidegger.

“‘There's a point where we have to say, ‘No, no, this is a point we cannot contextualize anymore,’ he said. ‘There is a responsibility to say, ‘It's impossible—Heidegger, you cannot say that!... Even if you are the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century, this is over the limit.’ ”

At the same time, he saw a way out for Heidegger in one of the philosopher's own concepts, “errancy”—the idea that human beings are not calculators, but conjecturers, and that being wrong is, therefore, an irreducible part of being a person... Trawny continued,

² Die Juden “leben” *bei ihrer betont rechnerischen Begabung* am längsten schon nach dem Rasseprinzip, weshalb sie sich auch am heftigsten gegen die uneingeschränkte Anwendung zur Wehr setzen. (GA 96:56). In context the passage reads (using Minahane's translation): XI.38 - *That in the age of Contriving-things [die machenschaft] Race shall be elevated to the explicit and purposefully organised “Principle” of history (or just of historiography): that is no arbitrary contrivance of “Doctrinaires”, but a consequence of the power of Contriving-things, which must reduce What's-in-being in all its Zones to the terms of planned calculation. Through the race notion “Life” will be brought to a breedable form, which represents a type of calculation. The Jews with their marked gift for calculation have “lived” longest according to the race principle, and for just that reason they also put up the strongest resistance against its unlimited application. The organisation of racial breeding does not stem from “Life” itself, but from the overpowering of Life by Contriving-things.*

I can't resist the temptation to add to what John has said on this passage. It is simply outrageous that so-called Heidegger specialists - or even anyone with pretensions to understanding the meaning of words - should fail to see that this is an attack on the Nazi desire to maintain racial purity. The only way it could be construed as an attack on the Jews is because it observes that the Jews have historically been anxious to maintain racial purity - something no-one surely could deny.

- PB

'He knew, at the end of his life, what was written in these notebooks. He was aware of the problems. But he couldn't take the pen and wipe it out. He tries to show us how deeply a philosopher can fail. I don't know whether this interpretation is strong, but I hope so — that this could be possible.' (As to the question of 'contamination,' Trawny said that he regretted, somewhat, the choice of that metaphor. It may have been 'too strong.')

I think the least one can say is that this interpretation of Heidegger is original. With a paradoxical boldness it speculates on a kind of deathbed conversion of a rake - or to use Fintan O'Toole's language, the deathbed enlightenment of a moral idiot. Because the fact is, Heidegger was notorious above all for not repenting. He refused to accuse his own thinking of contributing to racial massacre. Not once was he heard to say: I acknowledge my own share of the guilt for the Holocaust. - I don't know that he ever said in plain language: Those British and American cultures which have cultivated racism, as I did not, and which have promoted and practised genocides, as I did not, might consider making a start on repentance of their own. But he often seemed to imply that.

For consistently failing to apologise he is notorious. But now it is suggested that at the end of his life he wanted his notebooks to be published, specifically so that people could see how bad Martin Heidegger really was (but not immediately, there was no hurry; his repentance could appear as the last item in his collected works). The director of the Martin Heidegger Institute hopes this interpretation could be possible.

"The problem is not just that I'm morally shocked — it's also a problem that he is so dumb,' Trawny said, as the evening drew to a close. 'Observe what he is writing there. You see that, like all the others, he was not better. You thought it, actually; for long years, you thought he was very clever, but he is not. This is something that requires a certain distance,' he concluded. 'You shouldn't be too much in love with what you are reading, or you will be disappointed, like always.'"

So we come to the stupid Martin Heidegger. I suppose stupidity is an extenuating circumstance. But the hard cops in the decontamination squad were in no mood for excuses. The notebooks, said Thomas Assheuer (*Die Zeit* 21/3/2014), "are philosophical madness and in certain sections a thought-crime (*ein Gedankenverbrechen*)."
Fintan O'Toole probably wouldn't be caught using a phrase like that. But he crisply summed up the dominant view in the decontamination debate: "As the publication for the first time of his philosophical notebooks now reveal, [Heidegger] was a thoroughgoing Nazi".

Now if we are to take the evidence of the notebooks, which even those whose thoughts O'Toole was copying seem not to have read for themselves, what we find is this: a thoroughgoing Nazi who was not a racist and who contemptuously rejected biological racism again and again. A thoroughgoing Nazi who could write at length about Bolshevism, and repeatedly, without once mentioning Jews! (This dog that did not bark in the night was not noticed not barking by the decontaminators; but then, they were not listening very closely.) A thoroughgoing Nazi who believed that Nazism was not, as it claimed to be, a solution to the modern political crisis, but merely that crisis in a more advanced stage; who thought that the Nazis were doing more damage to the German rural communities than any politicians before them; who regarded the war on Russia as an act of folly and a disaster; who believed that the great event most of all to be desired was a

dynamic spiritual interaction between Germany and Russia. - Quite some thoroughgoing Nazi!

A FAILED NAZI

The truth is that Heidegger was a failed Nazi. Or more exactly, the Nazis were failed Heideggerians. They were supposed to come under his spiritual direction, and the Germans were supposed to become the pioneers of a great new human awakening, the children of Being... Who knows what that might actually have meant? It didn't happen.

(About twenty years ago I heard this view of things expounded by Patrick Healy, the leading philosopher of Bewley's cafe in Grafton Street in Dublin, before progress ground on and the cafe ceased to facilitate these idle pursuits.)

As a general rule, the decontamination campaign put the spotlight on the Jewish question. But one does find broader issues looming behind.

According to Jürgen Kaube (*FAZ* 12/3/2014), what Heidegger wrote about Jews proves he was anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism, though, could not have been central to his thinking, since the mentions of Jews are so few and far between. Kaube then says a certain amount of what has already been said here. Far from being a thoroughgoing Nazi, Heidegger had an essentially private, eccentric notion of Nazism, or what Nazism should be. In his public statements in 1933-4 he ignored the issue of race, even when warned by higher-ups that the racial doctrine was not an optional extra. By 1938 he saw clearly that the Nazis were hostile to his own social vision. Looking back on his famous "Rector's address" at Freiburg University (1933), he thought: my mistake was to suppose that an institution (i.e. the university) could have Awareness. But he expressed no guilt feelings. Even if the university and the Nazis wouldn't join him, he would be faithful to his thought.

"Later on he formulates a thought on similar lines: 'Ruling means being King: out of such Being to act royally.' Not just administering through bureaucratic authorities, which is all there is nowadays. So then, totally free in his opinions, he philosophises together an idea for himself, lives in a receding reality, and withdraws as ruler into his invented kingdom, where for want of fellow-inhabitants he enjoys the dubious privilege of autocratic rule."

The intense hostility in Kaube's paragraph is striking. And one has to pinch oneself and remember: this is being said about a philosopher living in Germany in 1938... and 1939, 1940, 1941! A time when the ruling thoughts were the thoughts of Hitler and Goebbels. The philosopher was resolved to be master in his own mind: he would not let Hitler / Goebbels give the orders there. One might perhaps have expected - a little sympathy? But Kaube has none. The clear implication in this piece of writing is that it would have been better if Heidegger had been a conventional Nazi.

Why, then, was Heidegger worse than a Nazi?

Kaube is fighting against something within himself and in such cases, of course, one doesn't fight fair. He quotes the most desperate passages on the possible destruction of the earth, and how that would be a cleansing of Being, as if they typified the whole. "A Manicheanism of Being", as Trawny puts it. But the Manichean death-wish is not

Heidegger's typical mood. (To people who don't themselves know those four-o'clock-in-the-morning thoughts, they're not easy to explain.)

We're getting a bit closer when we come to Albion:

"There is one enemy above all: the English. They are actually a whole enemy conglomerate: 'The bourgeois-Christian form of English 'Bolshevism' is the most dangerous'. After all, they invented the machine, democracy and utilitarianism, which ends up in pragmatism."

With the English we come to technology and an outrageous Heideggerian aphorism.

"A remark he makes several times is: 'Technology is the Historiography of Nature', which means that technology in Nature operates just as destructively as historiography in History and is equally inadequate to its object."

Now that's the great obscenity! There it is! Kaube is a devotee of modern democracy. For that system he is one of the guardians. And at the same time he has some intuition which tells him this frightful thinker might actually be right. (Which is why he ends his polemic by saying: it is hard to know who might read these badly-written writings! We need to talk about Heidegger, but these writings need not be read!)

TECHNOLOGY - THE RADIO AND THE CLONE

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DESTRUCTION OF THE VILLAGE

Technology, by its nature, leaves what we say behind. It is difficult now to tune in to some of what Heidegger says about it. For example, denouncing the effects of Nazi policy on rural Germany:

"People preach about 'Blood and Soil', and they carry on urbanisation and destruction of the village and the family farm on a scale that a short time ago no one would have imagined... 'The countryman', who once walked the fields; and the nutrition industry worker, well provided with radio and cinema, who has to do with 'tractors' and his 'motorbike'. The fight against 'urbanisation' is senseless when already the country is more 'urban' than the town" (XI, 1; XIV, 84).

What's all that about? Why shouldn't a farmworker have his radio and go to the pictures on his motorbike?

In 2014 that question can't really be discussed. It's a pre-television, pre-combined harvester, pre-baler, pre-milking machine sort of question. Definitely it's pre-electricity, bringing with it the smell and flicker of oil lamps and lanterns and old-time ranges. It comes from a time when some people still thought that the world should have places in it that were not urbanised.

In the 1920s and 1930s any number of gifted writers racked their brains for solutions to problems that we now know were insoluble. For example, rural depopulation, death of the peasantry, flight from the land. This problem was as old as the industrial revolutions and it

grew as industry grew. More recently there had been a response in modern politics, including in the young labour movement. (I remember hearing that even at the time of the Great Depression Ramsay MacDonald, the Labour Prime Minister of Britain, declared that a "Back to the Land" movement would have to be part of the solution.)

By the late 1930s, however, those who wanted to save rural Europe were pessimistic. The German situation was depressing. Though it was Nazi Party policy to save the German countryside, the flight from the land continued apace under the Nazis, and the government with all its powers was forced to admit that it had no idea how to stop the exodus. There's more than a whiff of pessimism, I think, in Article 45, 2, v of the Irish Constitution of 1937: *"The state shall... direct its policy towards securing... that there may be established on the land in economic security as many families as in the circumstances shall be practicable."*

Simone Weil, writing in 1940, had this to say: *"It is obvious that a depopulation of the countryside leads, finally, to social death. We can say it will not reach that point. But still, we don't know that it won't. So far, there seems to be nothing which is likely to arrest it."* (*The Need for Roots*, 1987, p. 78.)

What did she mean by "social death"? - I think people like Weil and Heidegger believed that society needed to have roots where everything else that grew had its roots: in the land. There needed to be communities living on the land and spiritually framed by the land, and not bound up with the artificial life of towns.

Still, wherever you lived the town would come looking for you, offering its gifts. The motorcycle made regular trips to town easier. Motorised farm machines came between the farmworker and the land. The cinema showed him urban visions, and the radio tuned him in daily to urban thinking. All of this undermined the morale of the rural community as such.

"The inferiority complex in the countryside is such that you see peasant millionaires who find it natural to be treated by retired petit bourgeois with the sort of arrogance shown by colonials towards natives. An inferiority complex has to be very great for money not to be able to wipe it out," Simone Weil said.

Weil and Heidegger knew that their ideas were being challenged. Missionaries were at work all over Europe, preaching that everything had to be urbanised. Foremost among them, of course, were the Bolsheviks. But though Bolshevism was the most vocal, it was not the most effective. As Heidegger pointed out elsewhere, it was in England that modernity first developed, and England was also a pioneer in producing attitudes of mind for accepting what modernity brought. English culture was better at bringing people to a satisfied feeling of progressing while holding the line, as compared with crude Bolshevism, which left raw nerves everywhere. This is what Heidegger means by saying that *"the bourgeois-christian form of English 'Bolshevism' is the most dangerous"* - a statement which Jürgen Kaube quotes mockingly, as if it were transparently absurd.

Francis Bacon, the great English philosopher, the genius who foresaw technological society centuries before it happened, was already very plausible and reassuring. He encourages us

not to be afraid of a society based on experimental science. Always, whenever we need to, we will be able to hold the line. (For example, religion will not be abandoned.)

I'm not certain of this, but I think we cannot accuse Bacon of promising we could hold on to country life. His model society, the New Atlantis, seems to be urbanised through and through. The New Atlantis is a hyper-technologised island where "we have... we have... we have... we have..." I would say that modern capitalist society can be described as the ongoing quest for the New Atlantis, as yet not attained.

Anyhow, since World War II we have entered the age of urban totalitarianism. Europe is thoroughly urbanised across its length and breadth. There are fewer people in rural parts, but that doesn't matter because there are more, bigger, better machines and a lot more food is produced. And where Europe has led, the world is following. Everywhere will be urbanised, though people continue to stream from an urbanised countryside into the urban spaces proper. We now have a world where most people live in the larger towns and cities.

Along with this breakneck urbanisation, world population has rocketed. It's not long since the death of a man who devoted his life to showing the West what it was destroying: Claude Lévi- Strauss. In his last interview he remarked that in 1908, when he was born, there were one or one and a half billion people in the world. As he neared the age of 100, the figure was over six billion. Since then it's gone over 7 billion. And these billions are involved in a world system which depends on the principle that, if everyone chases the New Atlantis, everything's going to work out. (Statistics can be provided to show that the situation is good. The indicators are improving.)

FUKUYAMA AND THE POST-HUMAN FUTURE

Since the pace of technological change has not actually slackened, it might be interesting to ask if there are issues of the present day that may be equivalents of 'rural depopulation'. Let us see if there are people in the culture business taking some sort of a stand on a major issue, trying to hold the line.

Two such people came forward in the early years of our present century. Both are champions, to my mind, of the global quest for the New Atlantis: that's certainly true of one of them and I think it's not unfair to the other. In 2001-2 they produced books trying to hold the line on genetic engineering. They are Jürgen Habermas and Francis Fukuyama.

The Future of Human Nature - Towards a Liberal Eugenics? was published in German in 2001. Habermas argued that human cloning should be banned and that genetic engineering of humans should be permitted only on therapeutic grounds (avoiding some disease or disability) but not for enhancement (conferring some positive advantage). His argument for banning enhancement centred on the sense of moral autonomy of the engineered person. Such a person might feel that he had been determined to such a degree by his parent/planner that he didn't have meaningful control in his own life. But this would undermine liberal democracy, which can function only if its citizens feel they are free subjects.

Habermas took his argument to the United States and tried it on the liberal academic philosophers (Dworkin, Nagel, McCarthy etc.). But he found that, with their "Lockean" formation, they didn't know what he was talking about. They couldn't see why the genetically planned person should feel less free than anyone else. Besides, parents had a right to confer any advantages they saw fit on their children, and that was that.

A year later Fukuyama argued for the same practical proposals, but a lot more forcefully. *Our Posthuman Future - Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*, London 2003 (PF henceforward) is a thought-provoking book. Fukuyama has nerve. At the moment when the East European regimes collapsed in 1989, he put in what was nothing less than a takeover bid for the European ideology of progress (*The End of History and the Last Man*). On behalf of Anglo-American liberal capitalism he claimed total victory in the war of systems. Game over, "Americanism" was going to be universal! After this there might still be wars and regime changes, but actual history was over.

Later he said that of all the counterarguments put forward, "it seemed to me that the only one that was not possible to refute was the argument that there could be no end of history unless there was an end of science". So he decided to check out the historic potential of the dynamic new biotechnology.

Like Habermas, Fukuyama argues for a ban on human cloning and also on human genetic engineering for enhancement purposes, though permitting it on therapeutic grounds. But he finds himself at a serious disadvantage. It is hard to argue that the intimate construction of the human being, inaccessible until now, is something that everyone, parents included, should be wary of and step back from, if you don't believe that there's something quite unique about humans, that they have some essential human nature. But this is not at all the opinion of most scientists, or even of most philosophers. It used to be, but it isn't now.

The great break came with Immanuel Kant, who made morality independent of nature. "*A number of observers have pointed out the similarities between Kantian ethics and the view of human nature embodied in Protestantism, which holds that the latter is irredeemably sinful and that moral behaviour requires rising above or suppressing our natural desires in toto. Aristotle and the medieval Thomistic tradition argued that virtue built upon and extended what nature provided us, and that there was no necessary conflict between what was naturally pleasurable and what was right. In Kantian ethics, we see the beginnings of the view that the good is a matter of the will overcoming nature*" (PF p. 119)

A good deal of western philosophy has followed Kant's lead on this. One long-term result is the explosion of "the rights industry" in the USA over the past generation. It's not hard to manufacture a right if you really want to, or an obliging academic can do it on your behalf. "*Ronald Dworkin, for his part, proposes what amounts to a right to genetically engineer people, not so much on the part of parents but of scientists*" (p. 107).

Fukuyama thinks that "*there is a desperate need for philosophy to return to the pre-Kantian tradition that grounds rights and morality in nature*" (p. 112). He says, almost in so many words: the need is desperate because the scientists, who do not believe that there's any essential human nature, are on the verge of treating human beings as just another product, something you can design and build. And to back them up they have "legions of bioethicists and casual academic Darwinians" (PF p. 160). - The bioethicists are a relatively

new service in the culture business. Their function seems to be to find justifications in ethical terms for whatever the scientists are doing or might want to do.

Since no one else (apparently) has been making the case for an essential human nature, Fukuyama makes out his own. Among other things he says: it's so natural to think of human nature when talking about rights or ethics that even these post-post-Kantians can't avoid smuggling human nature assumptions into what they're saying.

An important part of human nature, as Fukuyama sees it, is the capacity to have a whole gamut of emotions in experience. It follows that if someone is programmed to be happy, unstressed, optimistic or whatever irrespective of circumstances, experience will be impoverished and the person's humanity will be deformed. But aren't Americans doing that already in large numbers?

"The widespread and rapidly growing use of drugs like Ritalin and Prozac demonstrates just how eager we are to make use of technology to alter ourselves. If one of the key constituents of our nature, something on which we base our notions of dignity, has to do with the gamut of normal emotions shared by human beings, then we are already trying to narrow the range for the utilitarian ends of health and convenience." (p. 173). And there will be much more of the same. Anything that genetic engineering will be able to do in the long term, neuropharmacology will probably be able to do much sooner - though of course, not as far-reachingly.

As for the social effects of unrestrained biotechnology, Fukuyama thinks Nietzsche is a good guide to what may lie before us if we go down the posthuman road. Hierarchies may reform. There may be a new Superclass which will treat the others more or less as slaves. But equally the result may be a more egalitarian society than ever before. We simply cannot tell.

Coming to the end of this absorbing book, Fukuyama seems to recognise the strength of the forces ranged against him - interests which, in pursuit of progress and improvement, would want to go beyond humanity.

"Despite the poor repute in which concepts like natural rights are held by academic philosophers, much of our political world rests on the existence of a stable human "essence" with which we are endowed by nature, or rather, on the fact that we believe such an essence exists.

"We may be about to enter a posthuman future, in which technology will give us the capacity gradually to alter that essence over time. Many embrace this power, under the banner of human freedom. They want to maximize the freedom of parents to choose the kind of children they have, the freedom of scientists to produce research, and the freedom of entrepreneurs to make use of technology to create wealth." (PF p. 217)

But this new kind of freedom will be different essentially from all freedoms known before. The older freedoms were in accordance with human nature. This included political freedom, which gave us "the freedom to pursue those ends that our natures had established". These ends are not tightly determined, but they nonetheless do have limits, limits set by the constant elements of human nature themselves.

"Human nature is very plastic, and we have an enormous range of choices conformable with that nature. But it is not infinitely malleable, and the elements that remain constant - particularly our species-typical gamut of emotional responses - constitute a safe harbour that allows us to connect,

potentially, with all other human beings. It may be that we are somehow destined to take up this new kind of freedom, or that the next stage of evolution is one in which, as some have suggested, we will deliberately take charge of our own biological makeup rather than leaving it to the blind forces of natural selection. But if we do, we should do it with eyes open" (PF p. 218). We should know that posthuman life might be squalid horror.

CAN IT BE STOPPED?

Two things particularly strike me about this book. The first is that Fukuyama's reasonable idea of a human nature that experiences an adventure of life, meeting it with emotional responses that have an integral element of shock - this notion of human nature, taken in earnest, would require that genetic engineers should be kept away from humans entirely. They should not be allowed to make interventions on therapeutic grounds, any more than for reasons of enhancement (assuming this distinction would hold up in contemporary law). But this man of the American mainstream does not feel he can face his constituency making an argument like that.

Secondly, there's an air of helplessness that, willy-nilly, enters those final passages of a book that is very much "up for a fight". Professor Fukuyama, challenging the American parent's right to make his offspring look like a Californian beach boy, does not really feel on firmer ground than Professor Heidegger denouncing the effects of the radio in rural Germany. The American Frankensteins have the wind in their sails, and he knows it.

* * *

In the only piece of writing from Gaelic Ireland that seems to be a comment on Baconism - *Pairlement Chloinne Tomais*, written in Lord Bacon's time by Muiris Mac Daibhi Duibh Mac Gearailt - the prediction is that it will end in squalid chaos. More common, however, among the Gaels was a fastidious refusal to let the mind be bothered about such things at all. One should be content to do whatever good things could still be done (like making poems) and wait patiently for the chance to reestablish a way of life that would reconnect with the traditions of Ireland. In the Gaels' opinion, it would seem that the best way to solve those problems which the Baconians and their modern- world critics were wrestling with in the 1630s and 1730s and 1830s and 1930s, was not to have those problems in the first place. (I consider that this long-protracted Irish spiritual resistance is of immense value to the world, and its history ought to be known.)

Something of these attitudes was smuggled even into the culture of the 20th century Irish independence movement. I can't remember now where I saw Tadhg O Donnchadha (a literary historian and translator of German poetry, of no small merit) considering the idea of a return to Gaelic Ireland: "Going back? I think most people would be glad to go back, if they could!" - But of course, this is a thought-crime. From Ireland to Slovakia, wherever and whenever I have voiced some critical comments on what technology is doing to the world. I've been liable to hear those words, "You can't go back!" - pronounced with true solemnity, with the conviction that announces a central article of faith.

Very well, you can't go back, unless you are back. There won't be much point trying to make the posthumans human again. We can't go back, but... could we possibly go...

sideways? (This is the issue in Alexander Dugin's Fourth Political Theory (The first three are Heidegger's metaphysical triplets, Fascism, Communism and Liberal Democracy) though it is depressing to find that a man who has written excellently about the inherent racism of the cult of progress and, among other things, how it degrades the generations of the dead - seems to have a lasting attachment to writers of the 1920s and 1930s - Julius Evola and Ernst Junger for example - whom it is hard not to regard as deranged ...

A BRIEF COMMENT BY PETER BROOKE

Although Heidegger personally lived a rather 'primitive' rural life I don't think he believed in the possibility of 'going back'. For him technology was the product of more than two thousand years of a process of thinking that began with the debates in Greece over the nature of 'being'. Technology implies a particular idea of being which developed in the West and has now overspread the world. Heidegger was working on a different idea of being which would have different consequences. He offers no solution to an immediate problem. It may well be that the problem of 'climate change', for example, created by industrialisation, can only, in the short term, be 'solved' by industrial means. The 'multipolar world' wanted by Alexander Dugin, who counts himself as a disciple of Heidegger, can only be achieved by war, which also implies a highly advanced technology. We, on the other hand, might hope that through the type of thinking of which Heidegger is the best known representative another future is in the course of being prepared. To quote the famous interview he gave to *Der Spiegel* that was published under the title 'Only a god can save us' just after his death:

'Heidegger: I know nothing about how this thought has an "effect." It may be, too, that the way of thought today may lead one to remain silent in order to protect this thought from becoming cheapened within a year. It may also be that it needs 300 years in order to have an "effect."

SPIEGEL: We understand very well. However, since we do not live 300 years hence but here and now, silence is denied us. The rest of us - politicians, half-politicians, citizens, journalists, etc. - must constantly make decisions. We must adapt ourselves to the system in which we live, must seek to change it, must scout out the narrow openings that may lead to reform, and the still narrower openings that may lead to revolution. We expect help from philosophers, even if only indirect help -- help in roundabout ways. And now we hear only: I cannot help you.

Heidegger: Well, I can't.

SPIEGEL: That must discourage the non-philosopher.

Heidegger: I cannot [help you], because the questions are so difficult that it would run counter to the sense of this task of thinking to suddenly step out in public in order to preach and dispense moral censures. Perhaps we may venture to put it this way: to the mystery of the planetary domination of the un-thought essence of technicity corresponds the tentative, unassuming character of thought that strives to ponder this unthought [essence].

SPIEGEL: You do not count yourself among those who, if they would only be heard, could point out a way?

Heidegger: No! I know of no way to change the present state of the world immediately, [even] assuming that such a thing be at all humanly possible. But it seems to me that the thinking that I attempt might be able to awaken, clarify, and confirm [a] readiness [for the appearance of a god] that I have mentioned already.

SPIEGEL: A clear answer! But can - and may - a thinker say: just wait - we will think of something within 300 years?

Heidegger: It is not simply a matter of just waiting until something occurs to man within 300 years, but rather to think forward without prophetic claims into the coming time in terms of the fundamental thrust of our present age that has hardly been thought through [at all]. Thinking is not inactivity, but is itself by its very nature an engagement that stands in dialogue with the epochal moment of the world.'

That is perhaps how we can best see our task, not just in the realm of 'thinking' but in all the other realms of disinterested intellectual life - poetry, painting, music for example - at the present time.