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Martin Heidegger: force, violence and the administration of thinking

Knowles, Adam

Abstract: In 1929, Martin Heidegger announced a new fundamental term in his thinking: Walten. Heidegger uses Walten to designate the primal ontological force of nature, but also brings it into connection with administration (Verwalten), specifically linking it to university administration. The article argues that in the Black Notebooks Heidegger develops a philosophical conception of administrative practice in the midst of his own administrative practice as university Rector in the era of Gleichschaltung.

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Martin Heidegger

Force, Violence and the Administration of Thinking

Adam Knowles

THE GERMAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION, perhaps more than any other tradition in Western philosophy, is a peculiar product of the university system. David Hume, Jeremy Bentham, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, Baruch Spinoza—to name but a few—produced their works outside of the university system. Yet from Immanuel Kant in the 18th century to Peter Sloterdijk in the 21st, the history of German philosophy is a history of a thinking that has had its home within the German university—with Friedrich Nietzsche as a partial exception. This fact is central to the development of German philosophy.

In his book *German Philosophy 1831–1933* Herbert Schnädelbach puts it succinctly: »German university scholarship is ›bureaucratic scholarship‹ [*Beamtenwissenschaft*].«¹ Put differently, one can say that Germany university scholarship, including philosophy, has always stood in relation to a particular form of administration—namely the administrative structure of the professor as a civil servant. German philosophy is *administrative philosophy*, philosophy administered under particular rules of operation, a philosophy that has flourished under the particular conjuncture of a set of administrative practices.² Given the centrality of administration to the history of German philosophy, this paper pursues one central question: What can we learn about the work of Martin Heidegger by examining it through the lens of administration [*Verwaltung*]?³ Just as our own thinking and scholarly production (especially for representatives of universities in the United States) is the peculiar product of the productive operational imperative of the

¹ Herbert Schnädelbach: *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933*, Cambridge 1984, p. 23; *Philosophie in Deutschland 1831–1933*, Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 38.

² For a portrait of the figure of the German Professor on the eve of National Socialism see Fritz K. Ringer: *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community, 1890–1933*, Middletown 1980.

³ A systematic publication of documents from Heidegger's Rectorate in Freiburg is still lacking. The most extensive collection fails to take into consideration the Aryanization files from the Freiburg University Archive: Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (eds.): *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4. Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 1: *Dokumente*, Freiburg 2009.

neoliberal university, analyzing the conditions of production of any philosophical thinking is itself a philosophical task, and not merely a historical concern.⁴ While Heidegger, like many professors of his time, had ambitious plans for reforming the German university, he nonetheless remained a steadfast product of the German university system.

Moreover, Martin Heidegger was a philosopher whose university career spanned three distinct phases of the bureaucratic history of the German university. Heidegger began his academic career in the Weimar era and experienced a productive period of teaching and writing in Marburg, resulting in the publication of his magnum opus *Being and Time* in 1927 and a professorship in Freiburg in 1928.⁵ He then began the Nazi era as an established full professor with a significant international reputation. In early 1933 in the midst of the *Gleichschaltung* of the German university system, he made serious efforts to shape the administrative structure of the German university, while maintaining his teaching obligations and producing a large body of philosophical manuscripts.⁶ Finally, Heidegger entered a third phase of his career in the post-war German university after denazification. This was a period in which his reputation suffered under a teaching ban levied by the denazification commission, before reinstatement and public rehabilitation as a figure of immense international reputation.⁷

In this essay I would like to focus on the transition between two of these periods, specifically on the time from approximately 1930 to 1936. These were particularly fecund years of philosophical productivity for Heidegger, resulting in

⁴ For the most extensive analysis of Heidegger's administrative activity see Bernd Grün: *Der Rektor als Führer. Die Universität Freiburg i. Br. von 1933 bis 1945*, Freiburg 2010; on the complicity of the American university system see Piya Chatterjee (ed.): *The Imperial University. Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, Minneapolis 2014.

⁵ The most extensive biographies of Heidegger is Rüdiger Safranski: *Martin Heidegger. Between Good and Evil*, Cambridge 1998. On Heidegger's time as an instructor in Marbach see John van Buren: *The Young Heidegger. Rumor of the Hidden King*, Bloomington 1994; Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Philosophische Lehrjahre. Eine Rückschau*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, pp. 210–221.

⁶ The first extended treatment of Heidegger's political activities under National Socialism appeared in nearly contemporaneous publications by Victor Farías: *Heidegger and Nazism*, Philadelphia 1991; Hugo Ott: *Martin Heidegger. A Political Life*, London 1993; Peter Trawny: *Heidegger and the Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy*, Chicago 2014.

⁷ For the most extensive analysis of Heidegger's denazification process see Silke Seemann: *Die politischen Säuberungen des Lehrkörpers der Freiburger Universität nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges (1945–1957)*, Freiburg 2002; Reinhard Mehring: *Heideggers Überlieferungsgeschick. Eine dionysische Selbstinszenierung*, Würzburg 1992; Holger Zaborowski: *Eine Frage von Irre und Schuld? Martin Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 2010.

fundamental shifts in his thinking.⁸ These were also the years of *Gleichschaltung* and of Heidegger's most intense bureaucratic activity. Heidegger was one of many philosophers who sought influential administrative positions in higher education in the Nazi era. Indeed, during the entire Nazi period the discipline of philosophy was conspicuous for its intense participation in the administrative remaking of the German university system.⁹ Three German universities went through *Gleichschaltung* with a philosopher as Rector—Heidegger in Freiburg, Ernst Krieck in both Frankfurt (and Heidelberg), and Hans Heyse in Königsberg. Later, Erich Jaensch would become Rector in Marburg.¹⁰ In Berlin multiple philosophers participated in administering higher education, most prominently Alfred Baeumler, who played a critical role in overseeing academic surveillance in Alfred Rosenberg's Office of intellectual surveillance.¹¹ Baeumler, Krieck, Jaensch, and Heidegger constitute a partial list of the philosophers who sought proximity to Nazi centers of power. Many of these thinkers—for the most part mediocre philosophers at best—have conveniently been excluded from the memory of the discipline, with the exception of Heidegger. Of all the ambitious professors seeking to influence the administration of higher education in Nazi Germany, Heidegger is perhaps the one with the strongest post-war reputation—with Carl Schmitt only experiencing a later rehabilitation.¹² This underscores the question central to this article: did Heidegger have a philosophy of administration [*Verwaltung*]? Was administration a philosophical practice for him? The first four volumes of Heidegger's philosophical diaries known as the *Black Notebooks* provide a clear answer to this question, especially in the entries from the periods of the Rectorate and denazification, i.e. in the very moments when Heidegger was most thoroughly entangled in administrative practices. Heidegger regarded the administration of the university as a philosophical task, one linked to the exercise of power and associated with

⁸ This period has been associated with Heidegger's so-called turn (*Kehre*) since at least the 1969 publication of William J. Richardson's influential book: Heidegger. Through Phenomenology to Thought, New York 2009.

⁹ Frank-Rutger Hausmann: Die Geisteswissenschaften im »Dritten Reich,« Frankfurt am Main 2011; Helmut Heiber: Universität unterm Hakenkreuz, München 1991.

¹⁰ George Leaman: Heidegger im Kontext. Gesamtüberblick zum NS-Engagement der Universitätsphilosophen, Hamburg 1993; Ilse Korotin (ed.): Philosophie und Nationalsozialismus, Wien 1994; Thomas Laugstein: Philosophieverhältnisse im deutschen Faschismus, Hamburg 1990; W. F. Haug (ed.): Deutsche Philosophen 1933, Hamburg 1989; Monika Leske: Philosophen im »Dritten Reich«. Studie zu Hochschul- und Philosophiebetrieb im faschistischen Deutschland, Berlin 1990.

¹¹ Reinhard Bollmus: Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner. Studien zum Machtkampf im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem, Berlin 2006.

¹² Dirk van Laak: Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens. Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik, Berlin 2002.

a fundamental term which became central Heidegger's work in the late 1920s: *Walten*.¹³ To understand the nature of that task, we must first understand something about the role of *Walten* in Heidegger's thinking.

Before beginning the ontological analysis of *Walten*, it is important to remember a critical fact about Heidegger: from April 1933 to April 1934 Heidegger served in a significant bureaucratic function holding the office of the *Rektor-Führer* of Freiburg University.¹⁴ The archival record of the Rectorate shows Heidegger to be a conscientious, detail-oriented and highly functioning civil servant who deftly negotiated competing factions within the regime before, both during and after the Rectorate.¹⁵ Moreover, Heidegger never failed to be attentive to his concrete position within the cultural politics of National Socialism and he pursued a research agenda that was deeply aligned with the Nazi promotion of regional homeland studies (*Heimatkunde*) and with Nazi Philhellenism.¹⁶ After the war, Heidegger sought to occlude his administrative function more than any other aspect of his political past, even more than the anti-Semitism that he preserved for publication in the *Black Notebooks*.¹⁷

From the time of his testimony to the Denazification Commission in 1945, Heidegger began to carefully control the narrative about his relation to National Socialism and he remained largely consistent in his various portrayals of his Rectorate. In these accounts Heidegger, adopting a common set of post-war tropes about »inner emigration,« admits to a form of ideological complicity, distances himself from Nazi racial politics, and describes himself as being disappointed by what he called the increasing radicalization of the movement, while supposedly

¹³ I deal with the ontology of *Walten* in Adam Knowles: Towards a Critique of *Walten*. Heidegger, Derrida and Heideggerian Difference, in: *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 27/3 (2013), pp. 265–276; for the most extended analysis of the term Jacques Derrida: *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. II, Chicago 2011.

¹⁴ On the role of the Rector at universities under National Socialism see Helmut Seier: *Der Rektor als Führer. Zur Hochschulpolitik des Reichserziehungsministeriums 1934–1945*, in: *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 12/2 (1964), pp. 105–46.

¹⁵ Portions of this research can be found in Adam Knowles: *Heidegger's Fascist Affinities: A Politics of Silence*, Stanford 2019; Adam Knowles: *Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience*, in: Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (eds.): *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, New York 2018, pp. 168–186.

¹⁶ On *Heimatkunde* see Knowles: *Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience* (as note 15). On philhellenism see Suzanne Marchand: *Down from Olympus. Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970*, Princeton 2003.

¹⁷ On antisemitism in the context of the *Black Notebooks* see Trawny: *Heidegger and the Myth* (as note 6); Donatella di Cesare: *Heidegger, die Juden, die Shoah*, Frankfurt am Main 2015; Walter Homolka and Arnulf Heidegger (eds.): *Heidegger und der Antisemitismus. Positionen im Widerstreit, mit Briefen von Martin und Fritz Heidegger*, Freiburg 2017.

adhering to a form of »private National Socialism.«¹⁸ Nowhere does Heidegger discuss the precise nature of his administrative practices as Rector, even though he was involved in the production of thousands of files and deftly negotiated the material practices of party politics at the university, municipal, state and federal levels. Even in the sole text dedicated exclusively to the Rectorate, Heidegger does not specifically discuss his administrative work, except to say that he was »not interested in the formal execution of such empty bureaucratic business, but was also inexperienced.«¹⁹ By controlling the narrative about his relationship with the regime, Heidegger has successfully distracted us from investigating his role in the university *Verwaltung*, from what he called the “violence of administration.”²⁰

Yet in the *Black Notebooks* Heidegger offers a few important hints about what we might call his »philosophy« of administration. Although he mentions his administrative activities as Rector only a handful of times in cryptic passages, if one interprets these scattered references to the role of administration in the National Socialist remaking of the German university in the light of his ontological analyses of *Walten*, then an ontological complexity begins to accrue around a term that might otherwise be easily dismissed from philosophical analysis. This is the task I undertake in this paper. After analyzing the term *Walten* in Heidegger’s ontology, I will then seek to interpret Heidegger’s cryptic references to administration in the *Black Notebooks*. In the final section I will reflect on Heidegger’s place in the operation of our own »administered« academic practice.

1. Heidegger’s *Walten*

In Heidegger’s 1929–30 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger introduced *Walten* as a new ontological term.²¹ He initially introduces the term as a novel way of translating of Aristotle’s concept of *phusis*, yet *Walten* soon accrues a complexity imbedded with manifold meanings that defy any at-

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger: *Das Rektorat 1933/34. Tatsachen und Gedanken*, in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)*, vol. 16 of *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main 2000, pp. 372–394: 381. Daniel Morat: *No Inner Remigration: Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, and the Early Federal Republic of Germany*, in: *Modern Intellectual History* 9/3 (2012), pp. 661–79.

¹⁹ Heidegger: *Das Rektorat 1933/34. Tatsachen und Gedanken* (as note 18), p. 384.

²⁰ Martin Heidegger: *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*, vol. 94 of *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main 2014, p. 211; Martin Heidegger: *Ponderings II–VI, Black Notebooks 1931–1938*, Bloomington 2016, p. 155.

²¹ Martin Heidegger: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit [GA 29/30]*, vols. 29/30 of *Gesamtausgabe*, Frankfurt am Main 1983, pp. 40ff.; Martin Heidegger: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*,

tempt to reduce the term to its initial origins in Aristotle. In his typical style, Heidegger begins to associate *Walten* with a list of cognate terms such as *durchwalten*, *obwalten*, *umwalten*, *verwalten*, *überwältigen*, *vorwalten*, *Gewalt*, *Vergewaltigung*, and the neologism *erwalten*. These terms often tax Heidegger's translators, but if *Walten* is commonly translated as to sway, reign, govern, or prevail, then the set of cognate terms encompasses a broad range of meanings such as prevailing through, prevailing over, prevailing around, overpowering, administrating, governing, violence, rape and violation. The complexity of translation is intensified because Heidegger tends to utilize the substantivized infinitive *das Walten* in ways that do not lead to an elegant English rendering comparable to the verbal words. In this article, I will focus primarily on two of these terms *verwalten* and *Gewalt* in the light of the meanings they assume in the *Black Notebooks*.²² In the process I forego any attempt at a consistent translation of the term, for doing so imposes a rigidity upon a term which operates within a landscape of fluidity in Heidegger's German. By analyzing the role that the violence of *Walten* plays in Heidegger's work, both at an ontic and ontological level, we can better understand Heidegger's *philosophical* alliance with National Socialism.

Heidegger introduces *Walten* in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* in the context of an explication of Aristotle's ontology in a section entitled »The Two Meanings of *phusis*.« Though commonly translated as »nature,« Heidegger intentionally avoided the Latinate term and offered the unorthodox alternative translation of *phusis* as *Walten*. *Phusis* in this unique rendering is not simply a set of things which exist in the world, but it is more precisely the power that allows those things to be things, and even the power that allows the world to be a world. Through his interpretation prevailing bears this twofold meaning as both that through which the prevailing prevails and the very force of that prevailing. Heidegger distinguishes these distinct yet closely intertwined meanings of prevailing as »that which prevails in its prevailing« and »prevailing as such as the essence of the inner law of matter« (GA29/30, pp. 44–46/30–31).

Heidegger associates the first meaning, that which prevails in its prevailing, with more traditional conceptions of *phusis* as nature. This prevailing denotes the

Bloomington 1995. Volumes of Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe cited as GA number with German/English pagination.

²² Heidegger: GA 94 (as note 20); Martin Heidegger: Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/9), vol. 95 of Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main 2014; Martin Heidegger: Ponderings VII–XI, Black Notebooks 1938–1939, Bloomington 2017; Martin Heidegger: Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–41), vol. 96 of Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main: 2014; Martin Heidegger: Ponderings XII–XV, Black Notebooks 1939–1941, Bloomington 2017; Martin Heidegger: Anmerkungen I–V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–48), vol. 97 of Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main 2015.

elements associated with nature »in a narrower sense,« as »the vault of the heavens, the stars, the ocean, the earth« (Ibid., p. 46/30). Given that this productive natural force embodied in the earth, sky and other natural entities comes to be of its own accord, it is distinct from the objects created through human skill or craft (*technē*), things which come to be and perish through human intervention. In his 1937 lecture course Heidegger would describe the difference between *phusis* and *technē* in more detail:

»For that is what *technē* means: to grasp beings as emerging out of themselves in the way they show themselves [...] to order oneself [*sich einzurichten*] within beings as a whole through productions and institutions. *Technē* is a mode of proceeding *against phusis*, though not yet in order to prevail over [*überwältigen*] it or exploit it [...] but, on the contrary, to retain the holding prevailing [*Walten*] of *phusis* in unconcealedness.«²³

Technē, understood in its most fundamental sense as the human power for creation and bringing forth, operates through a capacity for intervention and a capacity for renunciation, both of which are enabled by prevailing. However, *technē* becomes a destructive force when it sets its own goals by attempting to overpower (*überwältigen*) the prevailing, when it becomes—in Heidegger's words—»arbitrary« and ceases to be the »occurrence and letting-prevail of the unconcealedness of beings« which is »required by *phusis* itself.«²⁴ *Phusis* in this sense ought to be understood as a »regional concept« denoting the realm of self-movement that occurs without human intervention (GA 29/30, p. 46/30). This power of prevailing is »that which is determined and governed from out of itself.«²⁵

As »the essence of the inner law of the matter,« prevailing in the second definition does not designate a particular region or domain, but instead refers to the enlivening force which moves matter in an Aristotelian sense of motion. *Phusis* conceptualized in this way »does not mean that which prevails itself, but its *prevailing* as such, the essence, the inner law of a matter« (GA 29/30, p. 47/31). This essence or inner law is not a power granted to or bestowed upon humans, but is instead that towards which human beings, guided by the capacity for philosophical listening and attunement, orient themselves within the emerging forth of being. This

²³ Martin Heidegger: Basic Questions of Philosophy Selected »Problems« of »Logic«, Bloomington 1994, p. 155; Martin Heidegger: Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte »Probleme« der »Logik«, Frankfurt am Main 1992, p. 179.

²⁴ Heidegger: GA 45, p. 180/155.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger: Aristoteles, »Metaphysik« Theta 1–3. Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft, vol. 33 of Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main 1981, p. 46; Martin Heidegger: Aristotle's »Metaphysics« Theta 1–3. On the Essence and Actuality of Force, Bloomington 1995, p. 38.

power is not entirely unrelated to more conventional conceptions of human power, for the very fact that human beings can at all have power—be it over themselves, one another, or nature—is enabled by the prevailing. Hence Heidegger writes: »I emphasize once more that *phusis* as beings as a whole is not meant in the modern, late sense of nature, as the conceptual counterpart to history for instance. Rather it is intended more originally than both of these concepts, in an original meaning which, prior to nature and history, encompasses both, and even in a certain sense includes divine beings« (GA 29/30, p. 39/26). In his initial introduction to and most detailed discussion of prevailing, Heidegger summarizes the confluence of the two aforementioned meanings, linking them further to language and understanding: »*Phusis* means this whole prevailing that prevails through man himself, a prevailing that he does not have power over, but which precisely prevails through and around him—him, man, who has always already spoken out about this« (GA 29/30: 39/26). Here Heidegger points to the primordial intertwining of human existence with the capacity for language. Many of his later treatments of *Walten* are devoted to fleshing out the link between the power of prevailing and the human capacity for language.

The human capacity for language is, by virtue of the prevailing that prevails, enlivened by the power which prevails through human beings. To speak authentically, or, in the language that Heidegger adopts in the 1930s, to speak poetically (*dichtend*), means to speak through and of the prevailing in accordance with its prevailing. Hence in *On the Way to Language* Heidegger defines language as »what prevails in and bears up the relation of human nature to the twofold [*Zwiefalt*].«²⁶ In this context, the twofold can be understood as referring to the ontological difference between being and beings. Accordingly for Heidegger, understanding the link between prevailing and language does not require grappling with how to speak *about* the prevailing, but instead it involves how to grasp the manner in which all language already speaks of and through the prevailing. Prior to all speech, the prevailing enables the very capacity for speech.

In short, being speaks through the prevailing, yet necessarily also diverges from the prevailing. Language, if employed authentically and poetically, speaks in accordance with the prevailing by attuning language to the prevailing. Given that that which prevails speaks in its prevailing as the elemental force of being, the role of the poet is to translate this speech while leaving, to the greatest extent possible, the prevailing untouched, that is to say, by leaving it in its unconcealment: »The poet experiences a prevailing, a dignity of the word, vaster and loftier than which

²⁶ Martin Heidegger: *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (1950–1959), vol. 12 of Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main 2018, p. 116; Martin Heidegger: *On the Way to Language*, San Francisco 1982, p. 30.

nothing can be thought.«²⁷ Importantly for Heidegger's philosophy of language, the poet renders this experience in poetry through the cultivation of silence, i.e. through the cultivation of the art of withdrawing language at the appropriate moment. »By learning that renunciation,« Heidegger writes, »the poet undergoes his experience with the world's lofty prevailing.«²⁸ The unencumbered prevailing of the prevailing relies upon a certain degree of knowing renunciation on the part of the poet in order to leave the prevailing in its unconcealment. Heidegger regards this act of renunciation as the proper care for language.

Prevailing is the primordial force of being. It is a violence or force which we must attune ourselves to, even as the contrary force of technology seeks to overpower this primordial force. In the *Black Notebooks* Heidegger takes up a similar set of themes, while overlaying them with a language of struggle, describing the task of thinking as »the release through struggle of the incomprehensible [*kämpferische Freigabe des Unbegreifbaren*]« (GA 94, p. 29/23). Later, on the cusp of taking up the Rectorate, Heidegger links this preservation of the poetic space of prevailing to an administrative task: »*The philosopher* is never someone who grounds—he leaps ahead and stands there to the side and instigates the clarity of questioning and tends to the hardness of the concept and thereby administers the space-time of free poetizing in the empowerment of the essence toward the grounding of humans in soil—work—struggle and descent« (Ibid., 82/63).

While one might be tempted to interpret this quote in a merely metaphorical fashion, this would overlook the fact that Heidegger was already negotiating for a position of power in the administration of the new regime and was only days away from assuming the Rectorate.²⁹ I suggest, therefore, that we dwell more closely with the term's philosophical import. Heidegger's fantasy was that the National Socialist revolution would transform the German university into the »space-time of free poetizing [*Raum-Zeit des freien Dichtens*]«. As the guardians of the »reigning world of the German element [*die waltende Welt des Deutschen*]« (GA94, p. 110/81), National Socialism would restore the gap between our speaking to and with the power of the prevailing by reinstating what he calls the »force of simplicity [*Gewalt der Einfachheit*]« (Ibid., p. 211/155), thus preserving »the quiet essential force of things [*die stille Wesensgewalt der Dinge*]« (Ibid., p. 419/304). This preservation was not merely a task of thinking, but also a task of administration.

²⁷ Heidegger: GA 12, p. 158/66.

²⁸ The masculine pronoun is Heidegger's own. Ibid., p. 159/67.

²⁹ On Heidegger's political affiliations with local Nazi and *völkisch* organizations see Reinhard Mehring: Martin Heidegger und die »konservative Revolution,« Freiburg 2018; Charles R. Bambach: Heidegger's Roots. Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks, Ithaca 2003.

2. Administration as Philosophical Practice

In his account of the Rectorate in the first volume of the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger associates two terms with the moment of his administrative alliance with National Socialism: *Gewalttat* and *Verwaltung*. National Socialism, Heidegger theorizes, will assert itself as »an act of violence.« As the »second beginning,« it will be the »origin of the act of violence« (Ibid., p. 209/153). Heidegger regards this act of violence as justified since it is directed against the technological machinations of an age that has forgotten being and is not only doing violence against itself, but also against the earth. As Heidegger puts it, this act of violence of the second beginning is thus responding to a prior act of violence, which he calls the »the violent cowardice in the face of being [*gewaltttätige Feigheit vor dem Seyn*]« (Ibid., p. 168/123). Concretely speaking, Heidegger is alluding to removing the »inessential« influence of the elements of the deadly pincer movement that he believed was trapping Germany: Americanism, Bolshevism and »world Jewry.« In *The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy* Peter Trawny attempts to describe this type of violence in strictly ontological terms as a form of what Trawny calls being-historical anti-Semitism.³⁰ However, I argue that closer attention to the language of *Walten* in the *Black Notebooks* reveals how Heidegger translated this ontological structure into the concrete political concerns of university administration as an act of very deep ontic violence.

As a man who was in his own brother's words—a »celebrity« and a »hot stock on the world market of public opinions,« Martin Heidegger's eager devotion to the movement lent early intellectual credibility to the Nazi revolution.³¹ As is well known, Heidegger joined the Nazi party on May 1st, 1933 and remained a member until the end of WWII.³² Already in March 1933 Heidegger served as a founding member of the Cultural-Political Working Community of German University Professors (*Kulturpolitische Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Hochschullehrer*), a »community of conviction, work and struggle.«³³ The founding document of this group is informative because it constitutes the most extensive political statement that he

³⁰ Trawny: Heidegger and the Myth (as note 6), pp. 18–37.

³¹ Letter from Fritz Heidegger to Martin Heidegger, March 30, 1930, in: Homolka and Heidegger (eds.): Heidegger und der Antisemitismus (as note 18), p. 16; Claudia Koonz discusses the revolutionary remaking of Germany sought by National Socialism in: *The Nazi Conscience*, Cambridge 2003; see also Saul Friedländer's discussion of Heidegger in the context of Nazi higher education policy in: *Nazi Germany and the Jews. The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939*, New York 1998, pp. 41–7

³² See Heidegger's membership card from the Zentralkartei der NSDAP, printed in Alfred Denker and Holger Zaborowski (eds.): *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4* (as note 3), p. 245.

³³ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BArch R8088/1155.

endorsed and participated in drafting. It ultimately tells us a great deal about the importance of *Verwaltung* in Heidegger's vision of reshaping German universities. In a somewhat disingenuous gesture, the group disavowed affiliation with any particular party, yet called for »German universities to wear a German face,« »for the renewal of an ethnic [*völkischen*] consciousness,« and for the leading role of the university as a »site of national-political education.« The group limited its numbers to »ethnically German university professors« and declared that those who do not recognize the »ethnic bounds of all genuine culture [...] have no place among us.«³⁴

Although Heidegger would claim to the Denazification Commission that he assumed the Rectorate because he was »persuaded to accept by friends and admirers,« the same report from the Cultural-Political Community notes that Heidegger was already in contact with the Ministry of Culture in Berlin weeks before assuming the Rectorate.³⁵ With the passage of the »Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service« on April 7th, 1933, the full *Gleichschaltung* of German Universities began and as Rector it would be Heidegger's task to remove all Jewish and so-called politically undesirable professors from universities.³⁶ Heidegger adapted with incredible alacrity to his role as a bureaucrat and documents signed by Heidegger on April 19th, 1933, one day prior even to the election, show that at first he eagerly worked to implement the anti-Jewish measures at the level of his own *Lehrstuhl*, or professorial chair.³⁷ By April 28th, the day on which Heidegger issued a decree »requesting a complete and clear implementation of measures from Apr. 7th« to all deans, almost all Jewish professors had been purged from the university.³⁸

In the section of the *Black Notebooks* dedicated to the Rectorate Heidegger describes the dawning of this moment in quiet ontic terms: »A day is dawning in which all authorities and institutions, all endeavors and standards will be *fused together* [*Eine Zeit bricht an, in der alle Gewalten und Einrichtungen, alle Strebungen und Maßstäbe eingeschmolzen werden*]« (GA94, p. 178/130). The key terms here are forces and institutions—*Einrichtungen*—the institutions, which of course must be managed correctly. Heidegger writes a »motto for the Rectorate« to himself in 1933

³⁴ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BArch R8088/1155.

³⁵ Quoted in Ott: Heidegger. A Political Life (as note 6), p. 325.

³⁶ Michael Grüttner and Sven Kinas: Die Vertreibung von Wissenschaftlern aus den deutschen Universitäten 1933–1945, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 55/1 (2007), pp. 123–186

³⁷ Heidegger augmented in his own handwriting a list of »non-Aryan« civil servants dated and stamped 19th April 1933, Universitätsarchiv Freiburg, file B1/3986; the German university system lacks the kind of departmental structure familiar in the Anglo-American system and the *Lehrstuhl* (chair) is the decisive administrative and financial unit.

³⁸ For a discussion of the source see Knowles: Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience (as note 13).

and ruminates about the term *Führerwille* (the will to lead), contrasting it with what he calls »the drive to dominate« (*Geltungstrieb*). While the leader who drives to dominate seeks to have their successes »be noticed and extolled,« the leader with the will to lead quietly gains satisfaction from his task. The drive to dominate, Heidegger opines, would require the following traits: »Necessary for him are soundness of administration, dexterity in negotiation, lightheartedness throughout *great* questions and tasks, pleasure in undertakings and a certain ability to run with the wolves« (GA94, p. 139/102). While it may be tempting to interpret Heidegger as saying that he rejects the will to dominate in favor solely of the *Führerwille*, as if that were some kind of defense, I would instead suggest that he is describing his administrative–political position as requiring a combination of both the will to lead and the drive to dominate.

This is confirmed by those who witnessed Heidegger's Rectorate. In the words of the Freiburg economist Adolf Lampe, who later served on Heidegger's denazification commission after imprisonment in Auschwitz, as Rector Heidegger »defended his positions with fanatical and terroristic intolerance and summoned the political force of the party to his defense.«³⁹ Heidegger recognized clearly that any movement seeking to remake institutions and authorities through the type of revolution he calls for in his infamous Rectoral Address »Self-Assertion of the German University« would require good administrators. This interpretation is corroborated by a passage, written after stepping down from the Rectorate, in which Heidegger adds philosophical depth to his use of administration: »The worlding of the world happens in the world-producing, opening, ordaining violence of administration—care [*Welt-weltung geschieht in der erweltenden, eröffnenden füğenden Gewalt der Verwaltung—Sorge*]« (GA94, 211/155). By linking administration to care, one of the most important concepts of *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces a new ontological complexity to the place of administration in his work. Administration opens up the space for the prevailing to prevail by violently removing whatever keeps it from prevailing. In other words, for the prevailing to prevail, space must be cleared for it and obstacles must be removed through a force that requires the administrative will to dominate.

Though the Rectorate may have failed to administrate properly, we should be wary of any attempt to say that Heidegger's assumption of the Rectorate is not philosophically important. In the fourth volume of the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger reflects on the failure of the Rectorate and speaks once again about his administrative capacity. Running throughout this volume rings the constant refrain »the genuine error [*der eigentliche Fehler*]« of the Rectorate. Here Heidegger offers a

³⁹ Letter to the Rector of Freiburg University, 6th Oct. 1945, Universitätsarchiv Freiburg, file C67/2817.

variation on that refrain: »They« will therefore not immediately grasp what the genuinely decisive factor was in my step in 1933, which nonetheless turned into an *error*. Not for the reasons I just mentioned, rather with regard to the possibility within National Socialism and with regard to the moment and the aptitude of a thinker for *administrative* activity in an institution of public education.«⁴⁰

Heidegger regrets the timing and the fact that he as a thinker may not have adjusted to this task—although this is not at all corroborated by the archival record. But Heidegger does look back on the Rectorate as an administrative failure. If anything, National Socialism failed Heidegger. What, then, might he sought to have achieved?

3. Conclusion

Even if *verwalten* never ascends to the status of a fundamental term in Heidegger's thinking, *walten* certainly does. Such terminological constellations and play with homophony are typical for Heidegger's philosophical practice. Reading administration into Heidegger's ontology of *Walten* is itself justified by Heidegger's own philosophical practice, which brings cognate terms into tenuous alliances, associations, and conjunctures. Readers of Heidegger's work in the 1930s, especially his manuscripts on the event (*Ereignis*), have long been familiar with this practice. This practice involves a mode of attunement which demands that the reader adjust to the repetitive motifs in Heidegger's thinking, following the variations on themes which course through his cyclical style of writing in the 1930s. Heidegger invites us readers to bring administration and violence together, along with the long series of terms mentioned in the introduction. This invitation is only reinforced when one attends to Heidegger's actual administrative practices not only during his Rectorate, but also during his entire career. This career was enabled by the administrative structure of what Schnädelbach calls »bureaucratic scholarship.« Heidegger was highly attentive to his own reputation and was a master at self-representation, yet we should not allow ourselves to be distracted by Heidegger's own sleight of hand.

One fact about Heidegger is ineluctable: he was a thinker who flourished under fascism. This fact need not determine all readings of Heidegger, but it should certainly inform them, especially when dealing with texts produced under condi-

⁴⁰ Heidegger, GA 97, p. 127: »Man« wird daher auch nicht sobald begreifen, was das eigentlich Bestimmende war in meinem Schritt 1933, der gleichwohl ein *Irrtum* wurde; nicht in dem eben Gesagten, sondern hinsichtlich der Möglichkeit im National-Sozialismus und des Augenblicks und der Eignung eines Denkenden zum *verwaltungsmäßigen* Handeln in einer Anstalt des öffentlichen Unterrichts.«

tions of fascism. What is extraordinary about the Heidegger case is the immense energy which has been devoted to rehabilitating Heidegger. Heidegger himself set this into motion as early as 1945 and was soon aided by a global cadre of scholars—most importantly, perhaps—Hannah Arendt. If this rehabilitation was successful, it was because something about Heidegger’s thinking has satisfied and perhaps still satisfies the needs of the operation of university philosophy—the sort of institutional philosophy that finds its home in various forms in very different university systems. This stands in contrast to thinkers such as Krieck, Baeumler and Jaensch, all of whom have been excluded from the discipline. Surely there is a question of greatness and mediocrity here, but those too are problematic terms rooted in gendered biases. Moreover, standards of and decisions about greatness are always the result of institutional practices. What has made Heidegger useful to the post-war universities? Why is it that Heidegger has proven so useful to our own administered thinking?