

interpretation

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The Political Implications of Heidegger's *Being and Time*: On Blitz's Interpretation

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Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the Possibility of Political Philosophy. By Mark Blitz. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981.)

Few philosophical works of this century have been accorded as wide an international reading as has Heidegger's *Being and Time* (originally published in Weimar Germany in 1927). Just because of this unusually prominent attention, any study seeking to elicit its implications for a philosophic understanding of man, society and politics, addresses itself to a matter of prime intellectual import. Heidegger's claims—that individual self-discovery always inheres in an historic context of relations with other people and with things; that he has delineated the structure of human existence in contemporary terms; that his new perspective demands a rethinking of the meaning of the western philosophic tradition—all conspire to endow with unusual weight the explication of whatever significance his work might have for political philosophy. That Heidegger had foreclosed a reading of his work in moral terms only enlarges the problem of its relationship to political questions. His encounter with National Socialism—which he never fully accepted, criticized or repudiated—adds special poignancy to a consideration of the political meaning of his major work, written as it was before any such involvement came within his anticipatory horizon; that encounter also places him in the unusual position of a prime philosopher with a direct political involvement.

With all due respect to Mark Blitz—to whom respect is due for intelligence, scholarship, concern and conviction—I do not think that this is the way to address an inquiry with this import or to write a book with this title. What we are given are 250 pages, largely consisting of a chapter-by-chapter summary-restatement of *Being and Time*; it is prefaced by a few introductory pages that are devoid of any appreciation of the import of what is being attempted; at the end, eight short pages of comprehensive conclusions suddenly appear as *obiter dicta* with no discernible relationship to the preceding discussions. I find myself in general agreement with the thrust of his conclusions, to the point that I expect the two of us would find large areas of agreement concerning specific political questions. But that does not mitigate the fact that the conclusions appear as a surprisingly positive, if minimal, appendix to a textual discussion to be noted for both its generally hostile tone and also for the paucity of attention to issues conceivably bearing on questions of social or political concern. What we have is not a

book properly bearing this title, but rather the expanded notes which an author might well have made for himself preparatory to writing such a book and capping it with an addendum listing the conclusions which he had set out to establish.

The book starts by claiming four prime influences on Heidegger: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey and Husserl—but no indication is given of how any of them may have contributed to Heidegger's thought and, having been named, they are barely even noticed in the ensuing pages. As an afterthought, the author also suggests that some of Heidegger's concerns have been taken from Aristotle and from Kant: rather than develop these in their pervasive presence, they are largely ignored. No cognizance is taken either of Heidegger's tremendous respect for Aristotle or of the pervasive Kantianism which underlies all of Heidegger's discussions: Heidegger's full acceptance of Kant's Copernican Revolution¹ or 'transcendental turn'—from focus on the world-as-such to delineation of the subjective structure of human experiencing itself—is to be seen in the entirety of *Being and Time*: which is concerned not with Being itself or Time itself (how could we know them except through the peculiarities of the human outlook?), but with their meanings as seen to function in human experiencing of the world *qua* experiential. *Being and Time* claims to be a phenomenological work: it is concerned with how things appear to us, not with what they conceivably may be as such; it broadens out Kant's unique conception of time as the center of a cognitive act to the existential center of all human experiencing. It is informed and structured throughout by transcendental forms of argumentation—proceeding from what is actually known down to enabling conditions of possibility, taken as ontologically prior to any given actuality; in this last, Heidegger's work is not only Kantian but faithfully Leibnizian as well (yet Leibniz' name does not once appear even though Heidegger traced his own philosophical lineage back to him).²

At the outset, we are told that "Reducing Heidegger's thought to secure and familiar categories would betray Heidegger's own sense of the radical nature of his enterprise" (p. 20). But that is precisely what virtually every critical comment in Blitz's book does: throughout, the orientation of an unexplicated 'traditional analysis' is invoked; throughout, the vocabulary, orientation, standards and doctrines of an unexplicated transcendent platonism are invoked, without argument, justification, or even citation; it is questionable whether many of these invocations could be legitimately traced back to Plato himself rather than to a textbook platonism; in most cases they are certainly not attributable to Aristotle. By ignoring Heidegger's own equation: "transcendental philosophy = ontology,"³

1. See Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962) [cited hereafter as *KPM*], esp. Section I. See also my *Heidegger, Kant and Time* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971) [Cited hereafter as *HKT*], Ch. IV.

2. See Martin Heidegger, *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 5th ed., 1965) [cited hereafter as *WG*].

3. *KPM*, p. 93.

Blitz is compelled to consistently misconstrue Heidegger's conception of his project as the development of phenomenology into an existential ontology; thus he fails to come to terms with the meaning of Heidegger's own term for his developed project, "fundamental ontology," the ontological structures of the human perspectival outlook; and he then plagues it with the kinds of questions which any phenomenological approach must foreclose at the outset (cf. p. 35). By thus ignoring the nature of Heidegger's project and by substituting his own undefined *ex cathedra* categories, Blitz has indeed found it impossible not to "betray . . . the radical nature of [Heidegger's] enterprise." As a result, every chapter and comment is replete with misconstruals and misunderstandings that lead the author astray, that discount the relevance or the seriousness of his critical remarks, and that make the reader wonder whether he is reading about Heidegger's own book or rather some grotesque caricature of it.

Thus the crucial distinction between 'possibility' and 'potentiality' is confused throughout (cf. pp. 117, 194): "the basic question" of the book—drawn after a look at Heidegger's description of our discovery of environmental tools—is posed: does it "force a new conception of the possibilities for practical activity" other than that of "traditional analyses" (p. 61)? Which "traditional analyses" we are not told. Heidegger's conception of possibility is held to be incompatible with man as subject to "natural movements and natural laws" (p. 66)—without any facing of the issues involved or any argumentation whatsoever. Despite the heritage from Leibniz and Kant, we are informed that 'possibility' cannot be understood as "inferior to 'actuality' or 'necessity'" (p. 73); just why we are not told, nor are we told that quite separately both Leibniz and Kant presented serious arguments precisely for doing just that (cf. Kant's "Postulates of Empirical Thought"). Politically important themes such as justice, moderation, and courage, we are informed, again without argument but only with *ex cathedra* pronouncement, cannot be understood "as Dasein's possibilities" (p. 92–93). But that is precisely the point: although Heidegger does not discuss these particular virtues as such, what he is concerned with is discovering just *how* animating ideals and ideas can enter into human experience precisely as possibilities for us, possibilities which we can anticipate actualizing or can, in ontic form, bring into the constitution of an existential present. If such ideas or ideals cannot be conceived as possibilities for us, does this not destroy any prospect of moral behavior or the validity of any moral judgment?

Again Blitz asserts—without argument, discussion, or consideration of even plausibility—that "what we are is the practical attempt to be those unchanging things we imitate . . ." (p. 95); that "the *full* obligatory presence of a moral requirement cannot be revealed to authentic Dasein" (p. 141); that "man is not an entity to whom what is absolutely obligatory can practically apply" (p. 142). Had the author faced Heidegger's Kantianism, he might have faced the Kantian argument that 'ought implies can', that all practical obligations *must* first be possible, and that it is only by discerning the moral possibilities presented by a situation

that one is able to act as a moral being within it, an argument fully in accord with Heidegger's own grounding of morality in its conditions of enabling possibility.⁴

Likewise, it is difficult to make much sense of Blitz's scattered discussions of Heidegger's revolutionary conception of time and temporality—an *essential* feature of the book: after all, it is entitled *Being AND TIME*, and Heidegger clearly at the outset set forth the thesis which it is to develop: "whenever Dasein [self-conscious human being] tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with *time* and its standpoint."⁵ Yet this central examination of time and temporality, as revealed in the pervasive structure of human experience, is one which is misconstrued at almost every turn. Although Heidegger repeatedly described temporal finitude as the horizon of man's essential finitude—is this not one prime point of the chapter on death?—we are told that he "does not wish to identify temporality's finitude with man's" (p. 158); that the three 'ecstases' of time (future, past and present) are, Blitz incredibly insists, temporalized "equally" (p. 160)—despite Heidegger's own repeated arguments and insistence that temporal integration of any situation is *always*, even when 'inauthentic', under the aegis of futurity.⁶ We are even told Heidegger "makes it clear that time is neither subjective nor objective" (p. 245)—despite Heidegger's own emphatic insistence that time (a conception distinct from temporality) is "'more Objective' than any possible Object [and] also 'more subjective' than any possible subject."⁷

On the basis of 'analyses' such as these, we are then assured that the full temporality of the structures of Being "do not come to light explicitly in *Being and Time*" (p. 230) because Being's historicity is only considered "from the perspective of Dasein's historicity and not from its own finite openness" (p. 232). Precisely—just because Heidegger's concern is to explicate what can be seen from within the human perspective or horizon. And historicity, as Heidegger presents it, is *not* the mere acknowledgement of the presence of the past. Our own present is primarily formed out of what *was* future and *is* present, presently being constructed in terms of what is still seen as future. Solely by virtue of this ongoing continuity of historicity do the possibilities seen in our present vision of the alternatives before us enable the making of choices (thus expressing transcendental freedom) by authentic anticipatory decision and thus maintain the temporal continuity enabling us to learn from the experiences we have already had. Such possibilities are temporally, as situationally, finite and cannot all be comprehended by our limited perspectives. This historicity that *is our* finite openness enables us to build ourselves as we build the situations within which we will be finding ourselves (cf. p. 66).

4. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie & Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) [cited hereafter as *B&T*], pp. 335–58; also, *HKT*, Ch. VI.c.

5. *B&T*, p. 39.

6. See *B&T*, pp. 373, 397, 437.

7. *B&T*, pp. 471–72.

Misapprehensions such as these rest on seemingly deliberate refusal to recognize Heidegger's continued attempt to develop Kant's transcendental turn as the animating impulse behind every page of *Being and Time*. Heidegger, himself, made his point of departure abundantly clear when he stated 'it is only Kant in and with his *transcendental* questioning, who was able to take the first decisive step since Plato and Aristotle toward an explicit laying of the ground of ontology,' a step that cannot be bypassed by serious thought.⁸ Blind to this, Blitz has misconstrued the entire project of constructing a 'fundamental ontology'; Heidegger was *not* concerned to redo pre-Critical speculative theory concerning the nature of a transcendent reality (cf. p. 181); he sought rather to delineate the fundamental ontology by which the human perspective functions, that set of ontological characterizations which *we* project as the means whereby we read our world and our situations within it. However Being may be in and of itself, Blitz continually seeks to treat it as a 'cause' (cf. p. 181). Heidegger nowhere treats the notion of causality as fundamental; rather he would seek, speaking ontologically, to trace things back to their ground of possibility (and in doing so he is, again, following Kant, for whom causality was merely an interpretive category of the *human* understanding, *not* legitimately attributable *by us* to things as such). Rather than deal in attributions of causality which, as efficacious, treat the present as a function of the past, Heidegger has argued that whatever Being may be in itself, it always appears to us in terms of grounding possibilities. Being appears to us in terms of our future-oriented temporality. Heidegger's descriptions of the structures of that temporality—which looks to finitely open futurity and not a closed pastness as the ground of present actuality—seems, I think, largely in accord with an expanded notion of teleological reason. What Heidegger has *not* done—and this is a crucial point for criticism of the topic of this inquiry even if ignored by Blitz—is not to have developed to any degree the structures of historicity, which are the structures of temporality writ large in social terms.

The one commendable chapter in Blitz's book is the discussion entitled "Heideggerian History and Heideggerian Politics." It begins by asserting (not arguing or demonstrating!) that Heidegger has nothing to say to ethics, new or old (p. 203); I have elsewhere explained why I think he is open to serious criticism for ignoring the implications of his 'fundamental ontology' for questions of ethics and moral theory, although I think it would be truer to say that the concept of authenticity suggests a new ethic (which carries forward the old).⁹

But this chapter is mainly concerned to chronicle Heidegger's encounter with National Socialism in a way that seeks to be fair and balanced. He cites the history, not only of the early involvement but also the quick disillusion and his renunciation by its authorities. He quotes Heidegger's two most famous statements in this regard—regarding "the inner truth and greatness of the national Socialist

8. *WG*, p. 15, n. 14.

9. See my "Founding an Existential Ethic," *Human Studies*, 4 (1981), pp. 223–36.

movement” as “the encounter between global technology and modern man” (p. 212). To conclude from these merely that one cannot derive from Heidegger a political philosophy “of the best regime” (p. 217) is to miss the point. One could have pointed out that Heidegger’s famous ‘turn,’ from the paean of individual authenticity that is the substance of *Being and Time* to the later ‘mystical’ writings, took place precisely in the days of National Socialism. One might ask in what way National Socialism was seen as a legitimate response to “global technology,” what indeed the great “inner truth” of that movement was seen to be. Surely, even in its beginning, Heidegger must have been aware, not only of its developing racism, but its militarism, chauvinism, condemnation of individuality, disdain for freedom, its penchant for war and conquest. Even Heidegger’s own statements reveal at least a subliminal fear of its anti-intellectualism, guised in his defense of the autonomy of the university. Good philosophic questions—to which I have no answer—are how the author of *Being and Time*, of his first Kant book and contemporaneous essays, could have been ‘taken in’ and why to the end he declined to repudiate it. However, I think it is not an accidental coincidence that the early works were produced in Weimar Germany, that the subsequent effective disavowal and ‘turning’ only came under a regime that despised the Weimar Republic.

Blitz ends his book with brief conclusions which, as already suggested, appear ‘out of the blue’ without even indicating the specific discussions or comments from which they emerge. He sees some “positive” results: Heidegger has effectively argued against the attempt to describe human affairs by means of the natural sciences because doing so reduces man to a thing; “he illuminates the ground on which any effort to steer a proper course between unconvincing [moral] absolutism and reductionist relativism must begin” (p. 251)—would that he had spelled this out! Despite earlier assurance that Heidegger’s gap between theory and practice “casts doubt on all of Heidegger’s analyses” (p. 170), we are now assured at the end that somehow Heidegger has managed to clarify “the intelligibility of practice *as* practice apart from theory . . . [and] begins to restore the sense of wonder that theoretical activity can happen at all” (pp. 251–52). And finally, that Heidegger “cogently discusses the status of history and historical possibilities, . . . elaborates the historical as historical . . . [and can] clarify the strange combination of contingency and inevitability with which possibilities are first presented” (p. 252).

His “negative” conclusions are: that Heidegger’s “analyses as they stand do not allow the full intelligibility of what is political” (p. 253)—I agree; that, in contrast, “political entities [sic]—such as justice, glory, courage, moderation—cannot genuinely be interpreted as ready-to-hand in Heidegger’s sense, and that they are most fruitfully grasped, in his terms, as possibilities of Dasein” (p. 253); but whoever suggested the former? The latter is surely the case—so why is this a ‘negative’ criticism? Further, that “the phenomena on which Heidegger bases his interpretation of human finitude as Dasein’s finitude—as

the finitude of man as transcendent to 'Being' [No. This is never claimed; only continued confusion between the 'transcendent' and the Kantian 'transcendental' could suggest it.]—can be understood as revealing a finitude congruent with the connection between man's possibilities and the possibilities of what is beyond him" (p. 254). But, if one accepts the Leibniz-Kant thesis that all human apprehension is perspectively defined, as Heidegger surely does, then how can one meaningfully talk, much less 'know' of possibilities beyond us? And, again, if Blitz rejects this principle of perspectivity, then why doesn't he argue against it instead of ignoring it while condemning its consequence?

Then, "Heidegger's analysis does not make clear the grounds on which the political and philosophical ways of life are both intelligibly interrelated and split" (p. 254). But why doesn't he then tell us about this, how he sees it, the perspective which he brings to his distinction and the justification(s) of it? As left here, this is mere rhetoric.

Finally, we are told that "the decisive political entity [sic] is justice" (p. 256)—but in what does justice consist? How may we recognize its ontic embodiments? What possibilities of it are presented to us in specific kinds of situations so that we may recognize its hidden or partial presence? And, one should add, why are fundamental values such as justice always referred to as "entities"? Are they thing-like? Are they not, rather, ideas? Ideas, Forms, or, perhaps ideal possibilities which we seek to actualize in our finite situations to the extent that we are able to commit ourselves to their progressive realization? This ambiguous language, coupled with a rhetorical assertiveness persistently declining to define or describe its terms while dogmatically pronouncing their 'being', that refuses to take cognizance of the philosophic structure of Heidegger's own outlook and the philosophic history built into it—one need not accept it but in a serious book one expects, then, reason for rejecting it—is to end where we began.

For reasons indicated, I believe that Blitz has misconstrued Heidegger's text from the beginning. Yet I agree with what is imputed by his title, namely that *Being and Time* does have a certain relevance for political philosophy. But I do not think that the function of political philosophy is to try to characterize the delineations of an ideal state or a universally 'best regime'—under all circumstances? for all cultures? for all stages of civilized development? That is utopianism, the utopianism that has nourished every ideological cult and mindless revolutionary, that has been invoked to justify the greatest tyrannies of our time. Whatever Heidegger may legitimately be accused of, he is guiltless of that.

If, however, we regard the function of political philosophy to be, not to paint portraits of ideal states—surely one prime lesson from Greek philosophy is that we should confine our efforts to what is attainable by men—but rather to delineate the grounds of legitimacy and to consider how the principles of such legitimacy may be tested and incorporated in contemporary political situations. If this more limited yet more responsible task be the function of political philosophy, then it might seem that Heidegger's attempt to delineate the structures of human

existence should have something important to say to the redevelopment of political thought relevant to the issues of our time. This is certainly not the appropriate occasion to provide an alternate to what is before us. But it would yet seem incumbent upon this very critical reviewer to offer some suggestion of how that alternative road of development might be seen.

Whatever Heidegger may have done with his own life or with the directions in which he took the development of his own thinking, *Being and Time* is a demonstration of the social nature of individuality. Celebrating individual authenticity, it delineates ways in which it may be enhanced or lost. However some of Heidegger's own particular discussions may be regarded, however we may regret that he did not see fit to develop the existential 'category' of 'being-with' into a social ontology, authentic individuality is always presented as being presented in a social matrix—not only with other people, nature, and things, but at least by implication, within organized society. Whatever suggestions may be found for the development of a 'new ethic' and its political implications, the development would start from here by examining, in transcendental fashion, the conditioning grounds of its enabling possibility. Heidegger has effectively argued that social individuality is the crux upon which the ontology fundamental to our individual outlooks is built—thus carrying forward an old Aristotelian thesis. For reasons too complex to discuss in this brief compass, he himself did not pursue this. But his own failure to do so notwithstanding, this early work has provided, it would seem, at least three theses which should importantly contribute to the reconstruction of contemporary political theory.

If individuality is inherently social, not only in its actual functioning but also in its grounding possibility, then the philosophic ground of an atomistic liberalism which cannot develop any coherent notion of the common good, has been cut off. This 'destruction', to use a Heideggerian term, opens the way for the revitalization of the tradition of civic republicanism (which traces its lineage through Hegel, Kant, Rousseau, Leibniz, Machiavelli and Cicero, back to the Greeks). Such revitalization of the tradition opens the way for the development of principles by which a technological culture can function within a responsible society, a society which takes as a prime responsibility the enhancement of the growth of authentic individuality.

A central thesis of *Being and Time* is that Being always *appears* to us in the form of time, that our working conception of time is formed by the temporality inherent in our outlook. This temporality, Heidegger has cogently argued, is fundamentally structured in terms of futurity, in terms of possibilities not yet actualized by means of which we read our current situations and the relevance of particular lessons from what-has-been which seem to bear upon the alternatives we see ourselves to be facing. Do we not assess any problematic situation as posing the question, what should be done about it? And is not that 'should' considered practical, considered as an intelligent exercise of prudential reason, only when it is confined within the 'can', within the scope of those genuine possibilities pres-

ently available to us for discrimination, selection and consequent actualization? As Aristotle had already said, “no one *deliberates* about the past, but about what is future and capable of being otherwise” (1139^b). Heidegger’s radical reconstruction of the conception of time and temporality can, I think, be legitimately read as an attempt to systematically think out just what this entails in the structuring of human experiencing.¹⁰

Placed into the present context of discussion, Heidegger’s important contribution is the demonstration that social individuality is necessarily structured by each of us in temporal terms, with the presence of futurity (as available but as yet unrealized possibility) always carrying us onward. When this demonstration is transmuted from the perspective of the individual to that of the social, as Heidegger all-too-briefly does at the end of *Being and Time*, we see that all social questions arise within the context of an ongoing historicity.

All social questions arise for any generation, as for any individual, in specific historical situations, each being seen and understood as having grown out of the possibilities, actualized or discarded, which it has inherited and as still offering alternative courses for continuing development. As the old hymn goes, “new occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth.” Yesterday’s good answers to old questions in new problematic situations are not necessarily presently correct ones, for the fluidity of social change does not always permit reinstitution of yesterday’s seeming solutions. This is not to say anything against our necessary use of transtemporal or abiding criteria, by which to evaluate the specific possibilities which we see presented to us in the mobile situations within which we find ourselves. A sailboat, sailing against the wind, will first tack this way and then that—precisely in order to stay its course. Values and value-loyalties, then, appear to us as both judgmental standards and continuing goals, as ideal possibilities by which we plot the course, evaluate specific situations we seek to carry forward and which we incorporate in determinate (finite) forms into the actuality of the present, to the extent to which we are able.

But this is to raise the question of what value(s) or norm(s) may be taken as basic, what fundamental possibility of human existence, indeed, makes our valuing possible? What is the enabling ground of the possibilities we actualize by means of our evaluative judgments in reading our situations? In terms of the prime evaluational concept adumbrated in *Being and Time*, how are we able to make the particular choices between situational possibilities of authentic or inauthentic individuality? What makes this distinction itself possible? How is our ability to make such choice grounded? Heidegger’s answer is straightforward: “*Freedom is the ground of grounds.*”¹¹ Freedom is our existential condition; by virtue of it, we are able to make discriminations and choices. It is not a transcendent abstraction but a transcendental condition; it “*is* only in the choice of

10. See Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 229–57; also, *B&T*, pp. 48–49.

11. *WG*, p. 53.

one possibility” and in accepting that act of choosing and its consequences.¹² Freedom then is not merely a political concept. Freedom is transcendence: at the core of every man’s existence, it is his grounding ability to transcend the immediate confines of his momentary present, comprehend his wider present as a field of activity, discern the specific possibilities which by illuminating his present situation, beckon him onward while yet retrieving the lessons requisite to his chosen quest. Freedom is, then, the grounding capacity for humans to be human: it is “the grounding capacity” to make particular decisions and find justifying reasons for them; it is not merely one reason or ground among others: it is the fundamental “grounding unity of the transcendental finding of reasons or grounds” for particular decisions, choices, and courses of action.¹³ Building on Descartes’s insight that all cognitive reasoning involves freedom (cf. *Meditation IV*), and Kant’s that it is the most fundamental reality of our moral being, Heidegger has developed the fundamentality of freedom as the transcendental foundation of every possible human activity.

Rather than seek the source of a political implication in the notions of (in)authenticity, as Blitz has done, the use of that transcendental reasoning which is the heart of *Being and Time*, would rather ask: what makes authenticity or inauthenticity possible? Heidegger’s point is that it is existential freedom, as transcendental ground, which makes either possible: for freedom characterizes every individual regardless of how authentically or inauthentically he may respond to its call—as the ‘call of conscience’ if you will.

The road to a political philosophy out of Heidegger would then take the primacy of freedom seriously. For it is certainly requisite to the actual embodiment of any other social criteria—justice, fairness, equality, morality, individuality, responsibility. In seeking out principles of political legitimacy in a society designed for human living, the first principle would then seem to be the question of freedom; not only is it the root of morality, as Kant had urged; as the root of any “transcendental obligation,”¹⁴ it is the root of any evaluative activity, and thereby of any notion of social responsibility.

That this is no heretical thesis may be quickly seen by applying the principles of transcendental reasoning—looking for the grounds of enabling possibility—in earlier sources. One might have no better place to look than Plato’s *Crito*. For what is voiced in its concluding passages, as the conversation between Socrates and the Laws of Athens, precisely carries with it the thesis that social participation not only carries obligation with it but that obligation rests on individually free consent, consent to be bound by a system of law and an obligation, not only to obey those laws but to call to public attention those which are deemed to need change. As given, what might be called ‘the right to resign’, the right to

12. *B&T*, p. 331.

13. *WG*, p. 53.

14. *WG*, p. 52.

unpunishable emigration and thereby the essentially voluntary nature of societal membership, is spelled out as an essential precondition of the social “agreement”;¹⁵ transcendently considered, legitimate society presupposes a priority of socially recognized freedom as the basis of ensuing obligation. It would further seem that the acknowledged public need for free criticism again rests on that primacy of freedom which is the presupposed ground of any defensible notion of political legitimacy. Without this, how could we have any intelligible discussion of concepts of justice or any other social virtue?

If, as Heidegger says, “the essence of [human] finitude reveals itself in transcendence as freedom for [its] ground,”¹⁶ then, again, freedom is primordial and carries with it a moral obligation. And the development of a theory of government that is true to the essence of the human beings it is to govern, must not only, with Rousseau, insist that social freedom, a free society, is the first principle of legitimacy; it might well look back to Aristotle’s considerations on how the demand for freedom can be squared with the social stability that is requisite for it as a condition of its actualization.

If freedom is prior and fundamental ground of all other social aspirations, then the first question that is to be asked about any social proposal or possibility is that of whether it serves to advance the freedom of the citizen under the aegis of a common good which can only be conceived as the social grounding of maximal individual freedoms. The question always is: How, then, may freedom be maximized in *this* social setting? How may it be embodied in any contemporary state governing a mass society? How may it be related to the de-individuating (but also, in many ways, liberating) aspects of modern technology? How may it encompass economic as well as intellectual or recreational activity? In short, what are the responsibilities of an organized historical community for the enhancing of the maximal freedom of its citizens within the circumstances of its current situation?

It is my view that the possibilities for political philosophy which Heidegger’s ontological grounding of human existence in *Being and Time* suggests are to be found:

—*by taking time seriously*: all situations, individually or socially, are temporally structured in terms of inviting possibilities; we then need recognize the finite possibilities any situation offers and discern those aspects of the inheritance that we choose to preserve, or annihilate, in the light of the future prospects we see for development.

—*by taking history seriously*: we not only come out of a past which is somehow living as a cultural heritage in the present; we are now building future options by resolving some and choosing others; we do not have a responsibility

15. See *Crito*, 50 (N.B.: this term appears in both the Jowett and the Tredennick translations).

16. *WG*, p. 54.

only to the past out of which we come, to use what has been given to us and thus honor its past-ness by utilizing its lessons instead of having to repeat them; we also have a responsibility for the future which we are now circumscribing by our present choices and activities.

—*by taking individuality seriously*: all decisions are individual decisions; even social decisions arise out of them by aggregation, consensus or imposition; as such we have a responsibility to encourage the possibilities of individually authentic deciding, authentic by virtue of being true to freedom as the ground of responsibility and enabling possibility.

—*by taking freedom seriously*: because freedom grounds our ability to make choices *and* also to take responsibility for those choices; to place any value, as a criterion for action, beyond that of abetting the social freedom which makes each individual's freedom possible is to deny the ground of his own being and may rightfully be construed as an act of moral suicide. Insofar as what Heidegger has called the 'freedom that is transcendence, the ground of all grounds', itself arises within any human perspective, as Heidegger has argued, from the human ability to 'care' about others as well as oneself, the custody of political freedom would seem to entail a responsibility to care about the state of freedom in the society in which we find ourselves as voluntary members.

We start with what has been given, including the possibilities we see presented to us. We make ourselves into what we are by building the horizons within which we develop the potentialities we bring with us and the possibilities we discern the future as offering to us. It is then no philosophic accident that Heidegger had seen part of Kant's greatness to lie in the crucial place he accorded to imaginative reasoning. For it is that imaginative reasoning that is the bearer of our freedom as individuals who are, as individuals and as social beings, formed by the temporality of our outlook and concerned with the continuities of building history. As social beings, we organize ourselves, in political community for the end of protecting and enhancing the possibilities we cherish and which motivate our membership.

By recognizing that our individuality essentially grounds us as free social participants, that each of us, individually and together, are temporally constituted beings whose life-careers are constituted by the discrimination of possibilities in a continuity of historical development—we bring individual morality and social responsibility together. Only by open recognition of this essential grounding of each in his own freedom that is simultaneously the freedom we share with others, can we make sense of Heidegger's supreme moral injunction: to say, each to himself, "'become what you are' and say this with understanding."¹⁷

How, then, may we understand the 'possibility of political philosophy' which *Being and Time* suggests? By understanding that individuality is embedded in sociality, that both are constituted by temporality, engaged in building history, and

17. *B&T*, p. 186.

grounded in that transcendental freedom which makes it possible for each to become those possibilities he builds into himself. If we are to do this with understanding, we need an orientation that enables us to do so: the function of a political philosophy coherent with the structure of human nature would seem to be to discern those principles of social organization and practice which legitimate the responsibilities we should accept and the specific freedoms we should encourage in the historical situations in which we are engaged.