Dangerous Liaison

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Issue

Alan Ryan

Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger
by Elzbieta Ettinger
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1.

Since Elisabeth Young-Bruehl first revealed it, admirers of Hannah Arendt have been troubled by the fact that she was for four years—from 1924 to 1928—the mistress of Martin Heidegger.[1] She was a Jew who fled Germany in August 1933, a few months after Hitler's assumption of power. He was elected Rector of the University of Freiburg in the spring of 1933, and in a notorious inaugural address hailed the presence of the brown-shirted storm-troopers in his audience, claimed that Hitler would restore the German people to spiritual health, and ended by giving the familiar stiff-armed Nazi salute to cries of "Sieg Heil." The thought that these two were ever soulmates is hard to swallow.

Not only that. After the war, Arendt made her reputation with the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951; Heidegger steadfastly refused to discuss the Nazi regime or his attitude toward it. He remained silent about the extermination of the Jews, about the terrorism of Hitler's regime, and about his own equivocal behavior. Only in September 1966 did Heidegger talk to reporters from *Der Spiegel* about his career in the 1930s. Even then, he insisted that the interview be published only after his death, and it duly stayed in the magazine's safe until May 31, 1976. Arendt died a few months before him, so there was no question of her responding to the interview; still, she remained quiet, if not silent, about Heidegger's Nazi leanings, relegating them to footnotes and asides in the essays that referred to her teacher and lover.

Twenty years after Heidegger's death, the *Spiegel* interview makes very peculiar reading. It is no death-bed repentance; it breathes Heidegger's absolute determination to protect himself and his image of himself to the last. Heidegger insisted that he used his position as Rector to defend the university against the Nazis, that he protected Jewish members of the faculty, that he resigned after one year—in April 1934—in protest against the interference of the Nazi minister of education, and that what he thereafter taught and wrote was sufficiently critical of the regime to mean that he was permanently under surveillance. His interviewers gratefully swallowed the story, asking no nasty questions about exactly when he left the Nazi party (May 1945), whether he did not have ambitions to provide National Socialism with a more intellectually respectable philosophical basis than *Mein*

Kampf (he clearly did), and why he was unable to say (even posthumously) that he had made a fool of himself. It is true, as Hans Sluga says in his *Heidegger's Crisis*, that his interviewers pressed him doctrinally on the question of the connection between philosophy and politics. What he was allowed to escape too easily was his own moral failings.[2] Many other pro-Nazi academics—even the notorious timeserver Alfred Baümler—managed with better or worse grace to apologize, if only in private; from pride or from a curious incomprehension of what was at stake, Heidegger could not.

Arendt did not pass over Heidegger's follies—if that is what they were—in complete silence. In a *Commentary* essay of 1946, she acknowledged that

> some outstanding scholars went out of their way and did more to aid the Nazis than the majority of German professors, who fell into line simply for the sake of their jobs. And quite a few of those outstanding scholars did their utmost to supply the Nazis with ideas and techniques: prominent among them were the jurist Carl Schmitt, the theologian Gerhard Kittel, the sociologist Hans Freyer, the historian Walter Frank…and the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger.[3]

But, first and last, she believed that Heidegger had been anything but a natural Nazi. In her view, the plebeian, anti-intellectual Nazis understood Heidegger's philosophy of Being as poorly as he understood their politics: "The scholars first put to one side by the Nazis as of relatively little use to them were old-fashioned nationalists like Heidegger, whose enthusiasm for the Third Reich was matched only by his glaring ignorance of what he was talking about."[4]

Her valedictory essay, "Heidegger at Eighty," published in these pages, mocks his political ineptitude in the same way.[5] Who but Heidegger could have thought that the "inner truth" of National Socialism consisted in "the encounter between global technology and modern man," and what ought one to say about a thinker who escaped "from the reality of the Gestapo cellars and the torture-hells of the early concentration camps into ostensibly more significant regions"? Still, a good many critics have thought this let Heidegger off much too lightly; ought she not to have denounced his wickedness rather than mocked his foolishness? Ought she not to have remained unreconciled with him after the war, and done her best to see that he was frozen out of the scholarly community?

2.

It is against that background that Elzbieta Ettinger has written her brief, breathless, and soap-operatic account of Arendt's relationship with Heidegger. *Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger* induces mixed emotions. As a work of scholarship, it is a disgrace; but in what it reveals about its main characters, it is fascinating. It raises dozens of questions that Professor Ettinger has either never asked or does not know how to frame; but it may provoke somebody to answer them more intelligently. It is a politically poisonous little book, and has already started another round of the old controversy provoked by Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*; still one can hope that this time around the controversialists will refrain from arguing about what defines a good Jew and attend to what Arendt

was trying to say. In short, this is a thoroughly silly book; but it is hard to regret its existence.

Its scholarly wickedness is straightforward enough, though Professor Ettinger's publishers must bear some of the blame. Professor Ettinger is the first person who has been able to read the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger. She says she could "peruse" Heidegger's letters to Arendt: his executors have long done their best to restrict access to them, and they still refuse to allow them to be quoted. It is a violation of the most minimal scholarly decencies not to say more—indeed, to say something rather than nothing—about what she perused and on what terms. When Ettinger assures us that "the letters Heidegger wrote Arendt in 1950 reflect his short-lived desire to retrieve the glory of love and power," we have to take her interpretation on trust. But her constant misreading of the letters between Arendt and Jaspers that readers can look at for themselves suggests that we would be unwise to do so.[6] She quotes freely from Arendt's letters to Heidegger. Here, too, Ettinger was the first person to have access to letters that innumerable scholars would have been keen to see. Instead of giving her readers a proper account of whether what she has used is representative of the whole, she provides snippets extracted from this and that letter, stitched together with a moralizing and intrusive commentary.

This is deplorable, but not because it reduces the book to an exercise in character assassination. I am sure that Heidegger was a man of extremely bad character—though Arendt, famously, thought otherwise: she held that he had no character at all, writing to Jaspers in 1949 that "what you call impurity I would call lack of character—but in the sense that he literally has none and certainly not a particularly bad one."[7] I am equally sure that Arendt let Heidegger off the hook too easily and for dubious reasons, including a kind of snobbishness about who was entitled to criticize great philosophers. But it just won't do to reduce Hannah Arendt's failure to judge Heidegger as harshly as he deserved to an inability to get over a girlish crush. At least we need to ask whether Heidegger was uniquely wicked among German thinkers—Ettinger herself provides quite enough evidence that he was not—and whether Arendt's belief that Heidegger was a great philosopher but a political simpleton has something to be said for it.

Professor Ettinger reduces everything to a matter of Arendt's psychological insecurities. When she quotes Arendt writing to Heidegger to tell him that she was working on *The Human Condition*, "which I could not [do]…had I not learned from you in my youth," Ettinger takes this as a simple attempt to ingratiate herself with Heidegger; anyone who has ever opened *The Human Condition* knows that it is perfectly true. The same is even more importantly true of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which provides an account of what one might call the "metaphysics" of totalitarianism that would have been quite impossible without Heidegger.[8] Much of the intellectual interest of both books lies precisely in the fact that they employ Heidegger's ideas for very un-Heideggerian purposes.

Arendt's devotion to Heidegger needs a more intelligent treatment than it gets here. A reader who knew only what German intellectual history they find here would think that Heidegger's success in attracting disciples was all a matter of stage management and seduction. But this is silly, even if Elfride Heidegger was prone to think that he had affairs with all his women students. As the impact

of Heidegger's work on Sartre suggests, you did not have to be German, a nationalist, a conservative, or an impressionable young woman to believe that *Being and Time* upended all previous philosophy. Again, George Steiner regards Heidegger as the outstanding philosopher of the twentieth century, and Steiner has spent the past forty years wrestling with the Holocaust in anything but a spirit of denial. One may think that Steiner overestimates Heidegger's importance, and that he is too easily seduced by a sort of fake seriousness in Heidegger's work, but it would be absurd to explain Steiner's admiration for Heidegger as a case of Jewish insecurity.

Ettinger knows that a great many Germans immediately after the First World War longed for an authentically German philosophy, felt despair at supposed cultural decay, and found something of the same inspiration in classical and pre-Socratic philosophy as Heidegger did. She dismisses all this as "romanticism," and I have some sympathy with her irritation at what was too often a revolt against the modern world in all its aspects. Still, the mere numbers cast doubt on the idea that Arendt's enthusiasm for Heidegger was the expression of an adolescent insecurity that she somehow never grew out of. The post-1945 impact of Heidegger's ideas on theologians throughout Europe and North America suggests how persuasive his ideas continued to be to people who were aware of his dubious political history. It is light-minded to sweep all this aside.

3.

As soap opera, the story is simple and familiar. A duplicitous professor falls for an exotic student and uses his position to seduce her; the naive student is bamboozled and falls deeply in love. The professor's suspicious wife and the force of circumstance put an end to the affair, but the naive student remains seduced, even after two marriages and long separation. Twenty years later, the duplicitous professor needs the help of his seduced student to restore his public reputation and his finances; egged on by his resentful wife, he looks to the seduced student for help. The seduced student lacks the good sense and self-respect to tell him to get lost, and devotes herself to managing the restoration of his finances and reputation until both die some twenty-five years afterward.

This is the stuff of too many campus novels. Its interest lies only in the fact that the duplicitous professor was Heidegger and the naive student was Arendt. He is widely thought to be one of the greatest philosophers of the century; whatever the justice of that estimate, there is no doubt that he has been one of the most influential. She was a public moralist, never shy about criticizing the lies and self-deceptions of politicians, journalists, and fellow intellectuals. If she did not see through him, that is disturbing.[9] If she saw through him but conspired to protect him from his critics, that is worse. The latter is the charge that Ettinger presses. The explanation she favors is that Arendt was driven by emotional insecurity; Heidegger was a father-substitute who could never be rejected.

Arendt came from a well-to-do, assimilated, mildly left-wing Jewish family in Königsberg; she had an unsettled childhood, her father dying of syphilis when she was seven and her mother marrying again when she was thirteen. She adored her mother, disliked her stepfather and his children, and was no doubt as troubled as her situation in the family suggests when she went to the

University of Marburg at the age of eighteen in 1924. Heidegger was already famous; he was only thirty-five, and *Being and Time* was still three years off, but he was known as "the little magician from Messkirch," and seen by adoring students as "the secret king" of German philosophy. Heidegger's written works are, everyone agreed, a pale memory of the lectures in which he groped for the words in which to express his conviction that man had become forgetful of Being. Part of their intensity lay in the way they set out an atheistic theology. Other thinkers had said that God had abandoned mankind, that He was not dead but had surely turned away from us; Heidegger spent most of his life rethinking that thought in non-theological terms. Part, no doubt, was borrowed from the general climate of cultural despair in post-1918 Germany. His lectures were crowded, and students queued to be supervised by him. He saw Arendt in a lecture, and wrote a friendly, courteous note inviting her to meet him; matters progressed swiftly, and they were soon lovers.

It is wholly plausible that Arendt was simply bowled over by Heidegger's advances, overcome, as Ettinger somewhat awkwardly says, by "the overpowering attraction that his intellect and manhood held for her"; it is no news to professors that first-year students find cleverness a notable aphrodisiac. Whether it mattered that she was a Jew is more debatable. Ettinger has no doubt.

> Neither her past—that of a fatherless, searching youngster—nor her vulnerable, melancholic nature prepared her to withstand Heidegger's determined effort to win her heart. She shared the insecurity of many assimilated Jews who were still uncertain about their place, still harboring doubts about themselves. By choosing her as his beloved, Heidegger fulfilled for Hannah the dream of generations of German Jews, going back to such pioneers of assimilation as Rahel Varnhagen.

But Ettinger herself quotes Arendt writing to Karl Jaspers that she found the Jewish question "boring" until the late 1920s; and when she wrote a book in the 1930s about the early nineteenth-century Berlin Jewish writer and hostess Rahel Varnhagen, Arendt was quite unsympathetic to Varnhagen's attempts at assimilation—as Jaspers complained in the letter to which Arendt was replying.[10]

The affair was managed by Heidegger. He was a married man: his wife, Elfride, was not a woman to take betrayal lightly, and a small university town in central Germany was no place to flaunt an illicit affair. Arendt was to respond only when he communicated with her, and to see him as and when he decided. Arendt did not appear to mind, but within a couple of years, she was on her way to Heidelberg to work for a doctorate with Karl Jaspers. Ettinger suggests, plausibly enough, that Heidegger pushed her out of Marburg for the sake of his own safety.

The affair seems to have fizzled out slowly and painfully. They remained in touch, but largely by way of Jasper's reports to Heidegger on Arendt's work, and Heidegger's help with applications for research money. In 1933, the break came. She wrote to say she was disturbed by rumors that he had excluded Jews from his classes and cold-shouldered Jewish colleagues. He replied in terms oddly similar to those he used to the de-Nazification commission after the war, which were in turn almost

identical to those he used in the 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*. No, he was not anti-Semitic; he had helped Jewish students, found stipends for them, and protected Jewish colleagues; his aim as Rector was to preserve the university's independence. Silence fell between them until 1950.

Arendt's career thereafter was a helter-skelter affair; she married a fellow student, Gunther Stern, in 1929. He fled the country after the Nazi seizure of power, while she went to Paris and worked for a Zionist youth organization; the marriage petered out in the mid-1930s. She lived with and then married Heinrich Blücher, a tough, worldly, sensible, and altogether admirable German Communist, who had fought with the Spartacists and was unbothered by Arendt's anxiety and self-doubt. Heidegger did not exactly prosper under the Nazis. When his attempts to ingratiate himself with the regime got nowhere, he went back to teaching at Freiburg. In his interview with *Der Spiegel*, he maintained that his lectures were a critique of the Nazi regime, but he remained unmolested, though he claimed he was always under suspicion. Professor Ettinger relies uncritically on Hugo Ott's research for her information, but there seems no doubt that Heidegger was essentially left alone by the Nazi government, that he did not expose himself to as much danger as he claimed in 1966—and as Arendt said in 1971—and that he was allowed to teach philosophy pretty much as he chose.[11]

On the other hand, as Professor Ettinger does not acknowledge, his philosophical work was of absolutely no use to the regime.[12] Its unworldliness may or may not acquit Heidegger of complicity in the Nazis' wickedness, but it makes it hard to see him as a useful intellectual prop. This is one of the crucial issues. It is true, and Arendt recognized it, that in the 1930s Heidegger *wanted* to provide the National Socialist revolution with a philosophy. This is not quite to say that Heidegger wished to be useful to the regime as it revealed itself. He suffered from the delusion—not uncommon among intellectuals—that if only he could find his way to the centers of power, he could turn the revolutionary energies of the regime to philosophical purposes. His rectorate may genuinely have seemed important to him for his attempt to reorganize the faculties of his university so as to protect the various humane disciplines from what he thought of as the threat of technology; he may well have hoped that he could thereafter mold National Socialism into the instrument of Heideggerian philosophy. Nazism in practice was no doubt a sad letdown.

It is important to see what this does and does not imply. It certainly does not imply that Heidegger was a decent person, a liberal, or a democrat. He was not. He was personally manipulative and disloyal, and, as Arendt acknowledged, a terrible liar. His only mention of the Nazis' attempted extermination of the Jews was a particularly stupid suggestion in a 1949 discussion of the damage wrought by technology, to the effect that the gas chambers were merely an instance of the same forces that had mechanized agriculture:

> Agriculture today is a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of countries, the same as the manufacture of atomic bombs.[13]

But when he was establishing his reputation as the "hidden king" of philosophy, liberalism and democracy were unattractive. The Weimar Republic in the 1920s was not obviously an improvement

on Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany—however vast its superiority to what came next. Of course, Heidegger never became a liberal or a democrat thereafter, while many others did, or at least pretended to. So far as Heidegger's relations with Arendt were concerned, this made no difference. She had written him off as a political idiot—in the most literal sense, a man so turned in on his own mind and its fixations that he had no grasp of worldly reality—and it was only a question of whether she would reestablish personal and intellectual relations with him.

In 1950 she did so. In Germany in the winter of 1949-1950 on a mission to recover stolen Hebraica and Judaica, she visited Jaspers in Basel, and then went to Freiburg; there she sent a message to Heidegger suggesting a meeting. They met, and were reconciled. Just what happened is unknown. This does not stop Ettinger from speculating that Heidegger carefully "let her see not the famous philosopher but an aging man broken by vicious slander and accusations of trespasses he had neither committed nor even knew about." There is no evidence that they discussed any such thing, though there is no evidence that they did not. Arendt was certainly happy to have met him again, but she was not very explicit about the reason for that happiness; what she wrote to Heidegger was that seeing him "saved me from committing the only truly unforgivable disloyalty, from mishandling my life."

Both to Jaspers and her husband she maintained the same view as always; Heidegger was relatively innocent of political wrongdoing, both because he was incapable of honesty and because he was a political *naïf*. Ettinger misreads a 1951 letter to Jaspers in which Arendt observed that Heidegger "really doesn't know and is hardly in a position to find out what devil drove him into what he did," as though it exculpates Heidegger.[14] It seems, on the contrary, to be a restatement of the familiar line: Heidegger was incapable of understanding himself, so there was no point expecting him to analyze what he had done twenty years before.

From 1950 until her death, relations between Heidegger and Arendt were an odd mixture of the distant and the close. Sometimes years passed when they did not write. Letters were sometimes warmer and sometimes colder. Visits, at long intervals, had equally mixed results. She thought Heidegger's critics were a mean-spirited and opportunistic bunch, but she was willing to express her own estimate of his follies and blindnesses. In describing those last years, Professor Ettinger makes much of Heidegger's exploiting her understanding of the American literary scene when he wanted to raise money by selling the manuscript of *Being and Time*, portraying this episode as yet another piece of Heideggerian anti-Semitism and emotional exploitation. But readers of the Arendt—Jaspers correspondence will recall how often it is concerned with questions of finding publishers for his or her work in the US and Germany, and will draw their own conclusions about Professor Ettinger's interpretation.

4.

If Professor Ettinger's view of things is not right, there is still a large question or two to be asked. What did drive Arendt's relations with Heidegger, and what might one think about them? The great

puzzle is this. Arendt generally denied that she was a "philosopher." She said she was a "political thinker" or a "political theorist." In *The Human Condition* and elsewhere she denied that philosophy could or should play a role in politics. Philosophy was concerned with absolute truth; a philosopher who thought he possessed the truth was almost bound to hanker for a philosopher king, the ruler who would make absolute truth absolutely powerful. As she ruefully acknowledged in her tribute on Heidegger's eightieth birthday, it is "striking and perhaps exasperating that Plato and Heidegger, when they entered into human affairs, turned to tyrants and Führers." But the explanation of this failing was neither "the circumstances of the times" nor "preformed character" but "what the French call a *déformation professionelle*."[15]

Yet, the curious fact about Arendt was how deeply she delved into Heidegger's philosophy to illuminate modern politics. This is the theme of Dana Villa's *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, a book which will be enjoyed by readers who already know a great deal about its two heroes, and will be hard going for anyone else. But the story that Villa tells is full of interest.

By the 1950s Heidegger had decided, as he told his *Spiegel* interviewers, that "only a God can save us now," and that the philosopher's task was to wait for the coming of God, or in the alternative to compose himself to endure God's absence. What relation this God might bear to the Christian God that Heidegger had turned away from in the early 1920s was unclear. What was clear beyond any doubt was that no Führer could help, indeed that our political arrangements were perfectly irrelevant. Art and poetry provided glimpses of the Godhead, or of Being, but he had long abandoned any hope of a political route to cultural regeneration. The old themes of his philosophy were still in evidence: that the modern world was in crisis, that the technological and utilitarian approach to the world prevented us from truly encountering Being, that German thought was uniquely competent to see deeply into the crisis of modernity, and that philosophy was the master discipline.

The discussion had its slightly dotty aspects, as when Heidegger said that the photographs of the Earth taken from space were more frightening than nuclear weapons, but it did at any rate illuminate both Heidegger's dislike of the US and the metaphysical quality of his loathing of communism. He enunciated an essentially apolitical creed, conservative inasmuch as it condemned every distinctive feature of the modern world, but with no faith in any particular political or national tradition. When his *Spiegel* interviewers asked whether he, the most distinguished living German philosopher, could help them in any way, Heidegger answered, "I cannot." In the 1930s, he had thought otherwise; now it seemed that the problems remained, but he had been wrong about their "solution."

This interview undermines Arendt's belief that Heidegger's philosophy could be neatly detached from his politics. In one sense, of course, it could be: she herself mined the Heideggerian vein for political purposes quite unlike his. But the idea that it was some kind of "thoughtlessness" about politics that explained his attachment to National Socialism was hardly sustainable. There may be no very quick route from Heidegger's reflections on Being to Nazism, but it is uphill work to make him anything but elitist, irrationalist, nostalgic, and contemptuous of the humanist impulses behind most modern political ideas. Arendt's claim that Eichmann acted "thoughtlessly," as a devoted cog in a

hideous machine, has some plausibility; the attempt to drive a wedge between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics is a lot less plausible. Indeed, she cast doubt on the distinction when she wrote *The Human Condition*.

Existentialist philosophy had always made much of the contrast between authenticity and inauthenticity. The best-known claim of existentialism is that everyday life is deeply inauthentic; we patch together a life built around momentary satisfactions and evasions of reality. Authenticity demands an appreciation of human finitude and human freedom. We do not live only in order to die, but death is the central reality of human life and facing it is life's main task. Those of us who are skeptical of existentialism's appeal generally complain that staring into the abyss cannot be the purpose of life; Heidegger's admirers commonly think it is. Dana Villa shows rather nicely how one of Arendt's most striking achievements was to turn Heidegger's vision against itself. This she did particularly in *The Human Condition*.

The Human Condition was a misnamed book; the German edition's title, *Vita Activa*, was nearer the mark. It was an account of one half of the human condition, the half that philosophy's concern with the *vita contemplativa* left out—the life of human beings as active creatures, as beings who live in communities, who practice politics, who work, argue, organize, and struggle with each other. One reason why it is so hard to know what she meant when she denied being a philosopher is that Arendt's view in *The Human Condition* seems to have been that human beings encounter reality and become "authentic" in action rather than in thought. Why this is not a philosophical view is to me wholly mysterious. Whatever it is, it is a nice inversion of Heidegger.

Again, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is an utterly Heideggerian book. It treats totalitarianism as an exercise in the kind of total domination that Heidegger associates with the modern technological treatment of the world. The damage a totalitarian society does to its subjects is again explained in Heideggerian terms; the point of the constant upheaval and terror characteristic of totalitarian regimes is to destroy our sense of reality. The ambitions of the totalitarian state are essentially modern, quite different from those of traditional authoritarianisms, and they require a homeless, "massified" people for their effects to be achieved. Empirically, as many critics have complained for the past forty-five years, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is hair-raisingly imprecise; the casual connections between the elements of the story—imperialism, anti-Semitism, the rise of mass society, the role of parties, charismatic leaders, the system of terror and much else—are often hard to detect. But one can certainly see how it might be a backhanded tribute to Heidegger.

That his ideas could be turned to such novel purposes might be the basis of a defense of Heidegger the philosopher. What defense there could be of Heidegger the man and the political actor remains hard to say. Readers of Thomas Sheehan's essay in this journal[16] will recall his rough handling of the historian Ernst Nolte's attempt to save Heidegger's reputation; Nolte, in essence, argued that it was not unreasonable to support the Nazis in the early 1930s, since they were effective anti-Communists and vigorous German nationalists. If the choice lay between communism and National Socialism, the right choice was National Socialism. As Sheehan observes, "With friends like Nolte, Heidegger may not need enemies." A recent French edition of Heidegger's political writings[17] takes much the same

line as Nolte, and will doubtless meet with the same reactions.

But what defense short of Nolte's can do Heidegger any good remains unclear. Heidegger thought his philosophy would purify and clarify National Socialism; he never abandoned the distaste for the modern world that led him to embrace Nazism in the first place, and above all he said nothing after 1945 in explanation or expiation of his behavior. He must either have been right, excusably wrong, or blazingly and obviously wrong. Arendt seems to have held both the last two views at once. The incoherence of her position might be diminished by the plea that Heidegger's political incapacity was so extreme that *he* could be forgiven what any ordinary person could not; but it is, of course, just that plea that Arendt's critics will violently resist.

Professor Ettinger laments Arendt's inability to sever her emotional ties to Heidegger. But many of us find it even more puzzling that she continued to cherish his philosophy. She shared Heidegger's conviction that we live in a distinctively "modern" age, that this is a century of "crisis," and that we can usefully talk about "the political" and "the social" as though we could diagnose and cure the ills of everyday life by making sure to attach the right labels to things. Otherwise, her thought was a world away. American rather than German, republican and liberal rather than bleakly anti-political. She emphasized the importance of many of the same values that Tocqueville and Mill emphasized —social pluralism, a place for public debate, an individualism that is not mere selfishness but a public-spirited wish to contribute something distinctive of our own to our community. Heidegger, to the extent that he ever noticed what his former student had achieved, cannot have liked it.

Of course, this does not settle the matter of Arendt and Heidegger. If you share Isaiah Berlin's belief that everything Arendt wrote has been vastly overpraised, you are unlikely to care about her intellectual debts and may well think that her dismissal of Heidegger's Nazism as a form of stupidity hardly meets the case. If you are as deaf as I am to Heidegger's quasitheological obsession with humanity's loss of contact with Being, you will surely think she overestimated his philosophical genius, and ought decently to have forgotten him after 1933. If you are a devout Heideggerian, you may think she is only a minor interpreter of the great man, but you will surely sympathize with her wish not to lose touch with him after 1950. In short, Arendt's relations with Heidegger occupy one small corner of the history of German intellectual culture in the twentieth century, and what you make of them must in the end depend on what you make of that larger history.

Letters

The Arendt/Heidegger Affair March 21, 1996

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1 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *For Love of the World* (Yale University Press, 1984).↩

2 Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 234-235.↩

3 Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding, 1930-1954* (Harcourt Brace, 1994), p. 201.↩

4 Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding,* p. 202.↩

5 *The New York Review*, October 21, 1971, pp. 50-54.↩

6 One instance: When Arendt was contemptuous of attacks on Heidegger that she blamed on Adorno and Horkheimer, Jaspers pointed out that Heidegger had behaved badly toward Jaspers himself and his Jewish wife. Arendt's reply that "no one has the slightest idea about the things you have said" is taken by Ettinger to mean that if only Jaspers kept quiet about these events Heidegger's reputation would be damaged no further. But its obvious meaning is that since Adorno did not know of them, they don't excuse him. Ettinger, pp. 119-120.↩

7 *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: Correspondence, 1926-1969* edited by Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, translated by Robert and Rita Kimber (Harcourt Brace, 1992), p. 142.↩

8 This is nicely set out in Dana Villa's book *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton University Press, 1995) and is spelled out even more clearly and persuasively in Seyla Benhabib's forthcoming treatment of Arendt's politics, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, to be published by Sage Publications in 1996. I am grateful for the chance to read Professor Benhabib's typescript while writing this review.↩

9 Of course, she and Jaspers thought that they saw "right through him," as she said in a letter to Blücher. Ettinger, p. 45.↩

10 *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: Correspondence*, pp. 192-201.↩

11 Hans Sluga's *Heidegger's Crisis* suggests that surprisingly few philosophers were molested as philosophers; their treatment as Jews and social democrats was quite another matter, of course.↩

12 I don't at all mean to say that his addresses of 1933-1934 were anything but disgusting; only that they had little effect, and certainly not the kind of effect that his existentialism had.↩

13 Quoted by Richard Wolin, from *Der Spiegel*, August 18, 1986, p. 169, in Wolin's book *Labyrinths*, (MIT Press, 1995), p. 160.↩

14 *Hannah Arendt—Karl Jaspers: Correspondence*, pp. 167-168.↩

15 *New York Review*, October 12, 1971, p. 53.↩

16 *New York Review*, January 14, 1993.↩

17 Martin Heidegger, *Ecrits politiques*, edited by Françcois Fédier (Gallimard, 1995).↩