

EXCHANGE

Second Thoughts on *Gedachtes Wohnen*

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Troy Paddock's paper recapitulates the well-known association of Martin Heidegger with National Socialism and further argues that this association extended to the Nazis' racial imperialism. Surprisingly, Paddock does not include what is perhaps most pertinent to his point: namely, Heidegger's inclusion in his 1953 publication of the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and again in a *Der Spiegel* interview in the 1960s, of allusions to "the inner truth and greatness of this movement," that is, National Socialism.¹ The former would have come at the very time that Heidegger was writing the semi-mystical cultural anti-capitalist romanticism that is the core of the author's discussion.

The *Introduction to Metaphysics* appeared in German in 1953, though Heidegger had compiled most of it by 1935. "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken," the essay which is central to the author's argument, was delivered as a lecture in Darmstadt in 1952.² Heidegger was, then, a more or less unrepentant "old Nazi" at the time he composed "Bauen, Wohnen, Denken." The temptation to oversimplify the case is great, all the more so since Heidegger has achieved the status of guru among some who can brook no criticism of his holy name. However, it does no harm to point out, in Heidegger's defense, that he also showed genuine anguish in his confrontation with National Socialism. There just never seems to have been enough to call true repentance, and there was certainly no repudiation.

Any attempt, such as Paddock's, to clarify the connections between Martin Heidegger and other thinkers in the ambit of the National Socialist intelligentsia should therefore be welcomed. Tying Heidegger to Nazi geographers like Friedrich Ratzel, the subject of this essay, would be a highly original contribution to intellectual history. On the other hand, to my lights, very little connects Heidegger to Ratzel's geography other than a homology of thought or what is more or less a shared "notion."

Paddock might have added a bit of background on the community of geographers within which Ratzel worked. For example, Götz Aly and Suzanne Heim's *Vordenker der Vernichtung* contains much information on influential German geographers like Walter Christaller, who influenced post-war geography as well as Nazi racial imperialism.³ Providing more than an apposition of Ratzel's or any Nazi era geographers' thought and

Heidegger's would advance our knowledge of tightly knit communities of intellectuals in the Third Reich and shed new insight into the substance of their thought.

The exploration of the environmental implications of Heidegger's work is intriguing. The author is clearly right that Heidegger had a preference for pre-modern technology, and Paddock might have also included Heidegger's highly romantic characterization of traditional forestry or other allusions to human interaction with the environment. For instance, Heidegger contrasted traditional ways of working the land to modern "agrobusiness" in the "Question Concerning Technology." In the first draft of this paper in 1948, which included a draft version of "Das Ding," agrobusiness was even condemned for being "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 hydrogen bombs."⁴ That is, modern command and control of nature was no different from the Holocaust.

Yet, by romanticizing traditional agriculture and condemning modern industry, Heidegger was no different from any number of other intellectuals, from first class thinkers to the very worst hacks, who wished to place the font of all virtues in the breast of the virtuous European peasant. As with much talk of "family farmers" then or now, this offered the advantage of addressing a community that is more imaginary than real, seldom reads what is said in its name, and therefore offers few contradictions to whatever idiocy is proposed. But that hardly makes Heidegger a panting Nazi, nor is such idealization even especially right wing. One can find it in the work of Piere Nora today, much beloved by the cultural studies crowd.⁵

Of course, the connection between a lot of left-leaning cultural criticism in the present, including technology critiques within ecology, and National Socialist literati is part of the frisson of sending up Heidegger. But, as Richard Wolin, hardly an uncritical admirer of Heidegger, would quickly point out, it was Nazism's enthusiasm for modern technology and the brown shirts' plain gaucheness that pushed Heidegger to believe he had made a mistake; or that the Nazis had made a mistake in not making him their philosophical leader, advisor, and prophet of their political religion.

Can the "Gedachtes Wohnen" paper show Martin Heidegger to be a romantic nationalist? "*Ding*" itself was a buzzword, for instance, which was very popular in youth groups of the 1920s and 1930s. Few terms could have held more romantic resonance. *Ding* referred to ancient Germanic tribal councils in which men would meet under arms to discuss the concerns of their community in supposed solidarity. An argument could be made that Heidegger did believe Germany had a unique world historical mission. His historicism, discussed at length by Wolin, also led him to embrace the concrete embeddedness of Germany in its environment and its present.⁶ Nevertheless, this paper only implies these connections; it does not demonstrate them.

Did Heidegger really hold the same vulgar "*Lebensraum*" philosophy common to National Socialist party radicals? This seems as doubtful as attempts to connect him to the Nazis' crass anti-Semitism. A comparison to other National Socialist intellectuals is instructive. For instance, some of the interdisciplinary sociologists and historians who would inspire Germany's "Bielefeld School" after the war, Werner Conze, Otto Brunner, or Theodor Schieder, sent memoranda to organizations like the SS to advise them about ethnic cleansing in the east, only to chafe when these were ignored.⁷ While other German intellectuals seem to have been disappointed by their inability to contribute to ethnic cleansing, Heidegger was doing little more than brooding over Nietzsche on long walks through the Schwarzwald.

Like Heidegger, after the war these historians and sociologists were wont to

reinterpret their participation in the Third Reich in terms of global, technological forces imposed externally on German society: "The fully evacuated man is, so to speak, the raw material out of which handymen and executioners of the extermination terror can be formed. He is only just another piece of rational-technical apparatus."⁸ But Heidegger seems to have been the first to blame modern technology for the Holocaust in his work from which he spun off the piece, "Das Ding." In one section he dwells upon the Holocaust with unusual sensitivity: "Hundreds of thousands die en masse. Do they die? ... They become pieces of stock in the inventory of the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are liquidated without any notice in extermination camps. And also without such camps ..."⁹ Few would endorse Silvio Vietta's attempt to whitewash the philosopher by stating, "Heidegger expressed himself toward fascism wherever it was possible for him to do so with the philosophical means at his disposal and at the level of understanding that he himself saw as appropriate for western history."¹⁰ But Heidegger did confront the industrialized killing of the Nazi regime directly as the greatest crime of National Socialism, and he identified industrialization itself as its essence. By directly confronting himself and his audience with the extermination camps, Heidegger was doing something that was by no means typical, even if it was not unheard of.¹¹

This at least poses some difficulty for connecting Heidegger to National Socialist concepts of *Lebensraum* before, but especially *after*, 1945. The National Socialist campaign to transform Eastern Europe into a German landscape implied, from the beginning, radical ethnic cleansing. I would be the last to say that no argument could be made, but I find it unlikely that Heidegger embraced such an approach.

If Heidegger cannot be said to have displayed much ardent enthusiasm for *Lebensraum*, that does not mean that no connection or homology exists to dangerous pseudo-scientific cultural imperialists like Ratzel. On the other hand, are these homologies really all that different from other contemporary romantics, some of whose anti-fascist credentials were unimpeachable? Take, for instance, Walter Benjamin's concept of aura. I certainly would not put it past the Heidegger of the 1930s to have worked out some connections between National Socialist policy and his fundamental ontology, and I would not put it past the dishonest Heidegger of the 40s, 50s, and 60s, who sometimes pined away for the lost sense of mission of his youth. Still no such argument, to my mind, is advanced in this article.

"Gedachtes Wohnen" could establish this connection in at least two ways. The first is the history of ideas. Paddock might demonstrate the influence of thinkers like Ratzel on Heidegger's work and thought somehow. As Tom Rockmore has pointed out, this is a daunting task even for obvious examples like Ernst Jünger. Heidegger's philosophy required a posture of immediacy, and he condemned the application of other's thought as non-essential. Nevertheless, this kind of exegesis has been done before and could be done here.¹² Did Ratzel ever give a paper in Heidegger's presence? Did the two ever correspond? Was an obvious influence on Heidegger, like the ecologically thoughtful Jünger, influenced first by Ratzel and then, in turn, did he influence Heidegger? Did Heidegger demonstrably read Ratzel's books? Did they share institutional milieus of any kind? If Paddock's argument could demonstrate even a tenuous intellectual line running from geographers like Ratzel to Heidegger, that would shed new light on Heidegger's conceptions of space.

But this is not a historical journal and historicism cannot tell us everything. It is not the only level at which an argument could be made. Paddock's article could also try to establish a more abstract argument.

Maybe Heidegger and Ratzel never knew each other at all, but maybe their thought

is demonstrably similar and shows a clear correlation with racial supremacy and *Lebensraum* philosophies. Since Ratzel's ideas are unambiguously fascist, the correlation could then be extended to Heidegger. Presumably, his die-hard followers in the present could also be warned of these implications. Does the cultural imperialism indistinguishable from *Lebensraum* follow in some necessary way from Heidegger's mystical romanticization of space and destiny? This seems to be the direction in which Paddock wants to go, but to my mind, this is not done successfully. Furthermore, since Heidegger was the teacher of the likes of Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse, the power of his ideas to determine the thought and actions of his followers cannot be considered binding.¹³

Notes

1. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 213. The *Der Spiegel* interview is published in Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 1998), 91–115, esp. 103–04.
2. Heidegger spoke in a mixed audience of architects, engineers, and his fellow philosopher and rival José Ortega y Gasset. The essays are collected in Otto Bartning (ed.), *Mensch und Raum* (Darmstadt: Neuer Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, 1952).
3. Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1993). This book is now available in translation.
4. Martin Heidegger, "Einblick in das was ist," in Petra Jaeger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge: 1. Einblick in das was ist, Bremer Vorträge 1949* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 26. Rüdiger Safranski, *Ein Meister aus Deutschland. Heidegger und seine Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1997), 457. Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 43. See also Richard Wolin, "Introduction," in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 15, and Heidegger's exchange of letters with Herbert Marcuse, 152–64. The Soviet Union had exploded its first atom bomb on 29 August, only roughly three months before Heidegger gave this lecture first in Bremen.
5. Pierre Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in *Realms of Memory, Volume 1*, eds Lawrence Kritzman and Pierre Nora (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
6. Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 181–85.
7. Götz Aly, "Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung," and Ingo Haar, "'Kämpfende Wissenschaft' Entstehung und Niedergang der völkischen Geschichtswissenschaft im Wechsel der Systeme," in *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, eds Winfried Schulze and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), 163–82, 215–40, respectively. James Melton, "From Folk History to Structural History: Otto Brunner (1898–1982) and the Radical-Conservative Roots of German Social History," in *Paths of Continuity: Central European Historiography from the 1930s to the 1950s*, eds Melton and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 263–92.
8. Aly, "Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung," 175.
9. Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, 56. "Darum vermag der Mensch den Tod nur und erst, wenn das Seyn selber aus der Wahrheit seines Wesens das Wesen des Menschen in das Wesen des Seyns vereinigt. ... Den Tod in seinem Wesen vermoegen, heisst: sterben koennen."
10. Silvio Vietta, *Heideggers Kritik am Nationalsozialismus und an der Technik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1989), 9. Although elsewhere Heidegger typically equated Russian prisoner of war camps with concentration camps, here he identifies the abiding unique means of Nazi genocide as the most horrid instance in which humanity is alienated (*verstellt*) from the truth of being human. Concentration camps barred their victims from experiencing a human death.
11. This point is made throughout Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germany's* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
12. Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism, and Being* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
13. Otto Pöggeler, *Heidegger in seiner Zeit* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999), 197.