

Two study of
structures of
consciousness—sort
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Two of the 20th Century's most prominent philosophers were Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt, who happened to live and work during the time period in which the atrocities of The Holocaust were committed. In addition to a strong mutually beneficial intellectual relationship, the two of them had a romantic affair. The fact that he was a German and she was a Jew makes their story all the more interesting. Why would a man who loved a Jewish woman be a strong supporter of German politics during the Holocaust? Why would Arendt forgive him? Can Heideggerian philosophy account for the catastrophic crimes committed against the Jewish race? What good are philosophic ideals if they do not address morality in everyday life? In this essay, I attempt to address some of these questions. Additionally, I would like to address the relationship of Arendt and Heidegger in the context of The Holocaust, and the effect that it had upon their philosophical works.

Also, I attempt to prove that Heidegger's political failings, and a refusal to admit any wrongdoing on the part of the German government, undermine his philosophical credibility, while Arendt's public endorsement of him and his ideals weakens her credibility as a voice of the Jewish people. Philosophy is the study of and the admiration for wisdom itself. It comes from the Greek words "philos," meaning love and "sophia," which means wisdom. After his mentor Husserl, Heidegger was a major proponent of "phenomenology," the philosophic study of structures of consciousness—sort of a detailed look at what the process of thinking is itself, and how philosophies are created. In 1923 Heidegger took a position at Marburg University, working as an associate professor.

He continued to work in phenomenology and also lectured on Aristotle. During this time period, he worked on his treatise, *Being and Time*, which was ultimately seen as a major philosophical work. Partially due to this accomplishment, Heidegger was awarded the position of Philosophic Chair in 1928 at Freiberg University. With Hitler's rise to power, Heidegger's life entered a more controversial stage, referred to as "the turn." Though he had been rather apolitical prior to the 1930's, the increasing demands of university hierarchy necessitated a certain degree of political involvement. He was elected rector of Freiburg University in 1933, and soon after joined the NSDAP party. His infamous rector's address from that post is often seen as evidence of Nazi support, though the movement is not specifically mentioned. However, actions speak louder than words, and during his rectorship, Heidegger willingly transformed the university into the National-Socialist mold, expelling Jewish academics, and not even objecting to the firing of his previous mentor Husserl.

Perhaps surprisingly, a year later Heidegger resigned from the post, and expressed some covert criticism of Nazi ideology, engendering the surveillance of The Gestapo, and eventually sent to dig trenches.

Heidegger's ambiguous relationship with the Nazi party has sparked a great deal of criticism, and continues to this day. Books like *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger* by Pierre Bourdieu, *Heidegger and "the Jews"* by Jean-Francois Lyotard, and *The German Genius: Europe's Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century* by Peter Watson question whether Heidegger's philosophy should be considered valid in light of his political sympathies. He was considered a great ideologist and was

banned from teaching at the same time. Even in his own time, Heidegger's loyalties were questioned. On the one hand, his actions garnered the suspicions of the Gestapo and were anti-government enough to get him a post digging trenches.

On the other hand, because at one point he'd been an openly anti-Semitic rector, he was banned from teaching until 1949. The ban was lifted in part due to Hannah Arendt's willingness to vouch for him (Rosenbaum), interesting in its own right. Still, he continued to write until his death, with increasingly obscure texts. In 1924 Hannah Arendt enrolled as a student at Marlburg University to study philosophy, and took classes with Martin Heidegger a year later. The contradictory nature of their relationship encapsulates the cognitive dissonance between the ideals of the National Socialist Movement and its reality. Though a brilliant philosopher, Heidegger as a man failed to address the moral implications of the Holocaust, and as a result lost the respect of his peers, students, and by extension, Western philosophy as a whole suffered. He was the most prominent philosopher of his time, gaining near-celebrity status, but he was a contradictory man.

He espoused virtue, yet cheated on his wife. He loved Hannah Arendt for her mind, yet made her feel as though she must stifle her intelligence in his presence so as not to threaten his egoistic intelligence. He cared deeply for a Jewish woman, and his best teacher was a Jewish man, Edmond Husserl, yet he upon becoming rector of The University of Freiburg, he banned Jewish intellectuals from the establishment. The relationship between Heidegger and Arendt can be seen as a metaphor for the arc of philosophy as a whole during the time period in which they lived. First, Heidegger alone was

prominent, garnering fame through books like *Being and Time* (1927) and *The Task of Thinking* (1964) and teaching notable courses that gained him fame and recognition uncommon for a philosopher. At this time, philosophy was a mainstay in German society, something upon which people could rely at a time when government wasn't fulfilling the needs of its people.

Cultural zeitgeist—a return to nature—a metaphysical observation of details and thoughts and principles, not the rigidity of prior ideas introduced by Nietzsche, the key notable feature of which was the natural approach that was later applied to all fields of science and industry as well as education and politics. Then, Arendt entered the picture, representative the increasing presence of women at the university level, and all for which that stood—she was said to have brought a conscience to the world of philosophy, weighing the grand ideas of her time against private principles of good and evil, applying them to reality. With the change in government, everything shifted. Arendt was interned, then escaped to America,—excised from academic society as all Jews and most women of the time were. Heidegger gained prominence during this same time period, delivering a rectorial address promoting the Nazi Socialist Movement based on the ideas that development of a man and technological progress should be simultaneous and be carried out highlighting the triumph of a man over technology though focusing on the importance of a symbiosis between a man and technology. As the Holocaust dragged on, and it became increasingly clear that it was not a movement of ideals but one of hatred and destruction, the banished point of view of Hannah Arendt became the mainstay in public opinion. With her publication years later of *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of*

Evil (2006), she captured the thought of the time, answering for herself questions full of emotional coloring and philosophical ideas of why people make others suffer through the most sophisticated and cruel crimes against the humankind (Avineri). However, the answers were nothing without actions but she could do nothing physically to prevent those crimes and humiliation, destruction and devastation.

Finally, we see the difficult but grand triumph of forgiveness over ignorance and intolerance. Though Heidegger never apologized for his political actions, and never even explained the reasoning behind why he acted in the way that he did, Arendt forgave him. The two reconnected with a tenuous academic friendship, mostly in the form of letters that contained a touch of the inspired romance the two had once known. Though in action they were opposites, the gentle Jew and the fox-like Gentile, they were perfect academic counterparts—inspiring one another with lofty ideas, and praising each other's attempts for the sake of mutual growth. The concept of Heidegger being a fox is discussed closely by Arendt in her personal diary *Denktagebuch* of 1953 where she kept interesting thoughts about people, the situation, and some notes from notable books she liked or disliked (Forrest 6). Arendt even took the step of helping Heidegger to regain his reputation.

The world was skeptical of German intellectuals after the war. Hadn't their ideas made a direct path to the dogma that caused the Holocaust? Arendt argued that this was not so; "He did his duty...; he not only obeyed orders, he also obeyed the law" (Arendt, Eichmann 135). She helped him to regain his standing, and for the most part forgave him, though in private she still expressed sorrow and a bit of skepticism about his moral conduct (Forrest 6).

This was another way the world reflected her views. Germans tenuously rebuilt their reputations, but many retained private resentments, and the world at large still remembers them as the society in which Nazism could thrive.

The philosophical environment in Germany was favorable for development of ideologies and different concepts that could be used to encourage people for changes and increase their moral spirits. The political ideology was created in the same time as the philosophical one though people did not recognize the applicability of ideas to the political life of the country and, as it later turned out, most part of the world. As such, it is questionable whether the ideology itself was negative or its implementation in practice was ineffective and perverted. The political ontology of Martin Heidegger interpreted by Pierre Bourdieu referencing youth Zeitgeist suggests that it was based on the natural approach and its popularity for cultural use. In addition, Heidegger's "turn" and his belief in "inner truth and greatness of the movement—namely the encounter between global technology and the modern man" (Bourdieu 9) can be considered decisive for shaping his views and people's perception of his ideas referring to the Nazi ideology and him as an integral part of it. The Holocaust's effect on philosophy was great because any event that takes place in the world and raises a great number of different views that are often opposing each other makes the world of philosophy revive leading to strong criticism or support to the event or people who provoked it. As such, philosophical ideas by Nietzsche that were provoked by the Holocaust can be used for a more thorough analysis of

interactions in the society in that period so that people stopped talking about the dissemination of ideas.

If people do not agree with the Nazi philosophy and are not ready to support the movement, why should they act in a strongly negative and destructing manner. Some of Nietzsche's famous quotes about the Holocaust include the following: " Under conditions of peace the warlike man attacks himself" and " The surest way to corrupt a youth is to instruct him to hold in higher esteem those who think alike than those who think differently." ' Holocaust Theology' can be regarded as an individual strain of thought because it explained the desire of people to dominate and their high level of patriotic views while any patriotism when received in high doses can be harmful and leading to fascist views. At the same time, Martin Heidegger who was considered one of the prominent philosophers of the time supported the Nazi ideology and Adolf Hitler as the ideological leader of this discriminating movement full of hatred and humiliation towards other people and nations. Heidegger was known for criticizing the academic approach to the exploration of the concept of being. As suggested by Loving, " A stereotypical criticism of much of traditional academia is that it only studies ' dead white males'" (97).

However, he also supported the Nazi ideology which made him a rather controversial person for the period right after the war and till the current moment because people cannot understand how such an educated and prominent philosopher could fail to understand the destructing nature of fascism. This can be explained through the notes in Hannah Arendt's diary where she uses an allegory of a fox to analyze the behavior of Heidegger and

his inability to identify the “ difference between a trap and a non-trap” (Forrest 6). As noted by Habermas and McCumber, “ Heidegger’s work has long since detached itself from his person” making him a great philosopher who supports the Nazi though. Arendt was a prominent political theorist though she was often referred to as a philosopher. The relationships between Arendt and Heidegger were unclear for the entire world as they supported each other in all difficulties and troubles. Honan claims that “ Arendt, whose fiery reproach had extended to European Jews whom she said had ‘ collaborated’ with the Nazis in their own destruction, did almost everything she could to whitewash the unrepentant Heidegger...” (26).

Another characteristic of their relations by Honan suggests that they were two strong persons who could not reach the compromise in a way we all got used to and their struggle continued: “ The book [Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger by Elzbieta Ettinger] shows that Arendt was so arrogant that she thought she alone could decide who should be forgiven and who should not,” said Elie Wiesel, the Nobel laureate who has written of his experiences in the Auschwitz death camp. “ I’m not so sure her moral stature will remain intact.” The effect of the relationship between Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt was evident in their work as she tried in all possible ways to make him look less Nazi-supporting than he was at the same time opposing his views. Heidegger was brilliant in terms of his ideas, concepts, and other philosophical issues he created and introduced in his works though he was negatively perceived due to being a supporter of Hitler. ‘ The Banality of Evil’ in contrast with Arendt’s original phrase “ radical evil” can be interpreted as her attempt to reconcile her view of Martin’s evil and make an accounting for

it so that she can forgive herself for loving an evil man. The lasting Impact of the works of Heidegger and Arendt is their books like Heidegger's Being and Time which questioned the concept of being as it should be applied rather than it have been applied since Plato's ideas introduced and Arendt's books Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil where she tries to justify her affection for a man who commits evil and The Origins of Totalitarianism which can be considered one of the great political theories of all times.

To conclude, the abstraction of philosophy renders it impotent—in the case of Heidegger, his refusal to allow his ideas to stand up to real-world examples makes them meaningless. Heidegger was considered weak because he could not decide which of the parties he wants to support. At the same time, he was strongly criticized by all activists of the time for his positive reaction to the Nazi ideology and antisemitism whereas the most active critic was Hannah Arendt who was also his major supporter because she tried to clean his reputation. She forgave him everything and reflected her justification for their relationships in her books and notes where she claimed that he was like a fox that could not identify the trap. Both the events of one's life and the major relationships one has in one's lifetime have a significant impact on intellectual work.

Martin Heidegger's abstraction of moral concepts sidesteps any real ethical judgments... and Arendt's public endorsement of him and his ideals weakens her credibility as a voice of the Jewish people.

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