

conservatism but, rather, in Lilla's word, that which occurs at the 'poles' of the spectrum: *philotyranny*.

The liberal temptation will always be to see in Heidegger, the conservative, the anti-modern. However, despite their apparent kinship with Enlightenment, the Sartres, Marcuses, and Benjamins may themselves be of the anti-modern party. This is the party that continues, even at the contemporary moment, when powerful anti-modern impulses have again appeared, to allocate intellectuals to the side of left- or right-philotyranny.

In his careful attempt to 'de-Nazify' Heidegger – not to excuse Heidegger the man but to make clear that the work itself does not commit one to Nazism – Julian Young says of Richard Wolin's earlier critique of Heidegger's political thought (*The Politics of Being*) that he 'throws everything but the kitchen sink' at Heidegger (180). In *Heidegger's Children* things haven't changed, and it is difficult to argue with Young's view that Wolin's latest critique – this time via the 'father's' tendency to infect his children – is intended to make one suspect that the Heideggerian enterprise is flawed from the root. Wolin does not quite say this, but what he calls attention to in the thought – its 'völkisch' elements, its revulsion from democratic liberalism, its authoritarian elitism, and its tendency towards 'decisionism'⁵ – conspire to make one embarrassed about anything but the most seriously guarded admiration for carefully qualified aspects of Heidegger's critique of modernity. The political danger represented by 'existentialism' is a refrain throughout *Heidegger's Children*. In the work of Arendt, Jonas, Löwith, and Marcuse, Wolin carefully distinguishes 'good' elements of their thought from bad. But – with the possible exception of Marcuse – each chapter ends by leaving the reader with a final impression of each as stained by one or more of the bad, 'existentialist' traits of the Father.

If, for example, Wolin recognizes Arendt's 1930s and 1940s disgust with her teacher-lover's Nazism and her 'mildly leftist' critique of totalitarianism, we are not given, at the rhetorically decisive end of the chapter, an Arendt-to-admire. She backtracked in the 1950s on Heidegger, for example, praising his work and – as Lilla notes – acted as a virtual literary

5 'Decisionism' has its *provenance* in the work of Carl Schmitt, who figures prominently in both Lilla's and Wolin's books. From Schmitt's work, the word gravitates easily towards certain Heideggerian notions (e.g., resoluteness). Schmitt, sometimes called Hitler's 'crown jurist', concludes that every human grouping requires a sovereign whose job it is to decide what to do in the extreme or exceptional case – most important of all, to engage in war or not, with one enemy or another' (Lilla, *Reckless Mind*, 58). Schmitt's target was the notion of modern liberalism that the state should be a neutral institution, adjudicating with disinterest the differences among its constituent groups or individuals. He remains a figure of importance in contemporary political thought, among both conservatives and, paradoxically, certain radicals who enjoy the way his ruthless conceptualizations make liberals squirm.

agent for the cash-strapped Heidegger in America.⁶ As for her own work, it would be marked throughout her career by Heideggerian *hauteur* towards the democratic masses:

The primary fallacy [Arendt writes] of the 'democratic mentality in an egalitarian society is that it tends to deny the obvious inability and conspicuous lack of interest in large parts of the population in political matters as such.' In a Heideggerian vein, she bemoans the fact that in contemporary democratic societies, 'authentically political talents can assert themselves only in rare cases.' (*Heidegger's Children*, 68)

Even in the admittedly controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Wolin finds traces of Heidegger elitism, in, for example, the banality of the 'inauthentic' mass-men who engineered the Final Solution (*Heidegger's Children*, 59).

As for Hans Jonas, he is properly admired for his contribution to our understanding of Gnosticism (his supervisors were Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann) and for his influential contributions to the literature of environmentalism (*The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1984). His lifelong concern with 'nihilism,' one of Heidegger's great themes, would inform both bodies of work. Nor does Wolin forget that Jonas was once a much-needed wet blanket at a 1964 conference of theologians who had intended to examine Heidegger's conception of how we should respond to the 'call of Being': 'Heidegger's own answer is, to the shame of philosophy, on record and, I hope, not forgotten: "Let not doctrines and 'ideas' be the rules of your Being. The Führer himself and alone is the present and future German reality and its law. Learn ever deeper to know: that from now on each and everything demands decision, and every action, responsibility. Heil Hitler!"' (*Heidegger's Children*, 103–4).

However, Jonas, too, picked up bad habits from Heidegger, even if he doesn't mention his name in *The Imperative of Responsibility*:

Jonas's prophecies of impending ecological catastrophe are empirically uninformed. Remarkably, he takes into consideration none of the relevant scientific debates concerning the extent and gravity of environmental devastation. Instead, his depiction has the character of a *transcendental deduction*; his findings are merely assumed rather than demonstrated or argued for. Like his mentor Heidegger ... Jonas's discussion of modern technology and its effects proceeds on an a priori basis. The devastation of the earth, as it were, *inheres in the very concept of technology*. There is little room for ambiguity, for nuanced discussion of alternative positions. The tone of his writings remains an apocalyptic one. (Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 123–4; emphasis in original)

6 After he got back on his feet, he did not reply when she sent him a copy of her *The Human Condition*.