

With its Sphinx-like indifference to qualifications that readers might have about particular assertions as well as the impression it gives of having been dictated to him by Being itself, Heidegger's prose is a recurrent target of Wolin's. It is, we might say, an entirely *undemocratic* manner of writing.<sup>7</sup> While not being guilty of oracularism, Jonas is faulted, though, for sharing in Heidegger's other biases, including the latter's indifference to evidence as well as his obvious dislike of technology, even if technology be a 'fate' of the *Seinsgeschichtliche* and the fault of no individual in particular.

Worse: Jonas shares the Heideggerian view that Western decline is linked to Western liberalism, science, and technology:

Jonas adopts a position on 'the decline of the West' that differs only by degrees from the standpoint espoused by Spengler and Heidegger. Like Germany's national revolutionaries, Jonas assumes that liberal democracy is without a future. Culturally and historically, it remains inextricably entwined with the scientific and industrial revolutions. Liberalism is therefore inseparable from the age of technology and the 'planetary devastation' it has wrought. (*Heidegger's Children*, 125)

This outlook leads Jonas into what Wolin calls praise of 'the advantages of autocracy.' The planet is in crisis and liberal democracy is powerless to solve it (indeed, has contributed to it). Therefore he turns, however reluctantly, to debate the merits of *which autocracy*, left or right, would be better equipped to deal with the crisis. Answer: left. 'Hands down,' in Wolin's phrase.

The pattern of good and bad holds also for Karl Löwith. Like his fellow-students, Arendt, Jonas, and Marcuse, he was appalled by his old teacher's turn to Nazism and went on to achieve distinction as a cultural historian. But like 'the repressed' in classical psychoanalysis, Heideggerianism 'returned' in uncanny ways to compromise Löwith's legacy. Not enough to discredit his body of work, perhaps, but just enough to continue to taint Heidegger's 'teaching.'

In this case, though, Wolin faces a problem. Löwith was one of the first and most acute analysts of the Heidegger problem, and Wolin relies extensively on his memoirs and later essays on the philosopher in order to place Heidegger in the context of Weimar 'declinism,' the view that night was descending on the *Abendland*. His accounts of Heidegger's social insecurities – the son of a sexton and therefore nervous among his social 'betters' in the German professoriate – also help inform Wolin's hypothesis that Heidegger cannot properly be understood by recourse only to his texts.

7 The oracular style is more pronounced in the later, post-Being and Time Heidegger. It can be found throughout the work of the post-war years, but, for this reviewer, it reaches its apogee in the period 1936–38 (*Contributions to Philosophy*).

However, the post-war Löwith, perhaps having had a bellyful of politics in the modern world, began to turn his attention to Stoicism, and with this choice Wolin's current-events mentality will have nothing to do. In his classic move he links it – in what seems the most far-fetched manner of all his linkages to the Teacher's thought – to Heideggerian 'releasement' or 'acquiescence' (*Gelassenheit*), a reverentially hands-off openness that stands in contrast to sweaty enframing and that permits truth to reveal itself. For Wolin there is too much in this of an irresponsible recoil from the modern:

Tellingly, in one of the few instances where Löwith deigned to comment on contemporary affairs – a radio series on the problem of death in the modern world – his thoughts turned predictably to the Stoic ideal of suicide, which he endorsed enthusiastically as an exemplary moral choice. He gave not a thought to the problem of industrialized mass murder, the risks of nuclear annihilation, or the immorality of capital punishment. Instead, Löwith remained satisfied with a Third Century B.C.E. credo, whose modern exponents were Goethe, Hegel, and Burckhardt. (*Heidegger's Children*, 99)

Had Löwith opted for a fifth-century BCE credo, like Platonism, it would, presumably, have made him even more irrelevant to contemporary problems. Notice, too, that Wolin *has already chosen* the outlook he thinks Löwith should have taken on the problems he thinks Löwith should have addressed, as if higher-order thinkers are necessarily conventional left-liberals. He has written a book of great interest, on a major subject. Nevertheless it brings out one's perverse tendencies. After nearly three hundred pages of academic left-liberalism's call for philosophers who think like Everyprof, Satan begins whispering in one's ear: 'Aww, go ahead, defend them all, even Heidegger.'

If the temptation is easily resisted, Wolin's annoyance with Löwith's indifference to social problems nevertheless reveals a bias in his work. The search for a thread that runs through the labyrinth of the West's history is *not* good if it takes the form of a *Seinsgeschichtliche* that explains everything and understands nothing. What *are* good are 'praxis' and a concern with 'historical intelligibility' that seeks the 'concrete' (Wolin, 'Sartre, Heidegger,' 134–35). These are the old code-words of a certain leftism that has no use for Stoic detachment or for the 'pseudo-concrete' analyses in *Being and Time* of idle talk, curiosity, and inauthenticity. It is thus no accident that in his comparative study of Heidegger and Sartre, Wolin concludes by remembering, to Heidegger's discredit, Sartre's 'exemplary life' ('Sartre, Heidegger,' 146). For Wolin the Sartre of the post-1952 period was still to be found on those commanding heights of social idealism.

The scourge of liberalism in the 1960s, Marcuse was yet another former student of Heidegger. Like the others, he was a Jew who had thought himself assimilated into German culture. He discovered the truth when the