

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Anarchism as Political Ontology in Martin Heidegger

Simón Royo Hernández

13/06/2008

The former Dominican priest of Dutch origin and German parents, taken in by Hannah Arendt in the United States who died of AIDS in 1993, Reiner Schürmann, was the one who, in his 1982 book, *Le Principe d'Anarchie. Heidegger et la Question de l'Agir*,¹ has bequeathed us the best interpretation of the possible ethics and politics that would derive from Heideggerian ontology. Schürmann presents the politics that would derive from Heidegger's thought as a refusal of the principles (archai) and foundations for action, as well as of the meaning or finality (télos) of action.

Schürmann thus offers us the political correlate of Heidegger's ontology in terms of an anarchic mysticism in which two options are common, the first being life without why and for what, as a project thrown into the world of the first Heidegger,

¹ Un resumen de su propia obra por el propio Schürmann puede encontrarse en: http://www.heideggeriana.com.ar/comentarios/fin_metafisica.htm

Simón Royo Hernández
Anarchism as Political Ontology in Martin Heidegger
13/06/2008

Translated from rebellion.org/el-an-arquismo-como-ontologia-politica-en-martin-heidegger/

theanarchistlibrary.org

which would lead us to the emanation of the sense of the individual self, as in the Oscar Wilde of *The Soul of Man under Socialism*,² man as that entity who gives the law individually and singularly to himself, and the second, life without why or for what, but as an opening to being in its unfolding. The latter leads us to *Gelassenheit* as the attitude of a mysticism of acting without work, which arises from abandoning oneself and letting things be through us, so that events can happen to us. Between these two options there would be a third option which could be called rootedness, which would be the opposite of uprooting. But this option for tradition, the root, taken up and urbanised by Gadamer, would take us back to the foundations and meanings with which each community envelops its members, so that for this reason other forms of linkage such as the Deleuzian rhizome would be taken into account. Heidegger could not entirely consider rootedness in a cultural way; his counter-figuration of the *Heimatlosigkeit*, of uprooting, would be co-pertinancy with *physis*, seeking to understand this in a deeper way than that which refers to the biological life of the entities of nature.

We thus see three respects or alternatives to the metaphysical positions that are legitimised by their appeal to principles and finalities:

. Man as the thrown entity, as a project that singularly has to forge his own ethics, create his own values, valid exclusively for himself. Here there is individual choice and decision, like that of the Kierkegaardian ethical subject, the artist of Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde or the free individual of Sartre. It is not in Schürmann's approach but implicit in his references to the first Heidegger, that of the existentialism of Being and Time.

² Escrito en 1890 el texto de Oscar Wilde puede encontrarse en: <http://wilde.thefreelibrary.com/Soul-of-Man-under-Socialism>

y véase sobre Wilde la noticia biográfica de Higinio Polo en: <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=52877>

. Man as the entity linked to being insofar as he strips himself of everything that characterises him and abandons himself to an action that no longer belongs to him, but which happens through him as a force of indeterminacy or of the bottomless abyss that constitutes him. Here there is no longer any choice or decision, but mysticism, fusion with Nothingness.

. Man as the entity in harmony with nature who allows physis to pass through him and seeks to take root in it. And here too there is no human decision or choice, only concordance or fusion with nature understood as Becoming, being as a flowing pluriform multiplicity.

In Meister Eckhardt's formula, "the rose is without why", the mystical approach and the co-belonging to physis are mixed up, which is why points two and three are difficult to distinguish, given their common link with happening. The second point is about not getting in the way of happening, about Gelassenheit as abandoning oneself, letting oneself go, a sort of phenomenological suspension beyond the level of consciousness until reaching ontology; while the third point is about letting oneself go through. In musical terms, it could be said that Nothingness refers to silence, while Becoming refers to sounds piercing through us. From this point of view, fertiliser, cultivation, education within civilisation and culture would not have been able to emulate physis and produce a rose. Immediacy and spontaneity will oppose all processes of mediation, such as the one which, by means of propositions, language, grammar, forces us into this roundabout way of explanations.

Language will be the home of being as long as it belongs to physis, but it will be clothed in metaphysics as long as it has to express itself by means of propositions.

The questions of foundation, purpose and meaning may well apply to those who engage in philosophical studies. For what, why and what is the point of such an activity. In the past, public universities spent money training professionals (e.g.

telecommunications and industrial engineers or physicists and mathematicians) so that they would almost inevitably have to work for private companies on things like making our mobile phones download 25,000 songs as fast as possible or making our word processors open faster. The mechanisms are more refined now. But anyone who studies philosophy will certainly not do it, unless they are very stupid, to make money, and not even to teach in a high school or even to teach at university.

Already the ancients differentiated between training for the betterment of the human being (*epi paideia*) and professional training to earn a living (*epi techne*), but once the foundations and the purpose are lost, the idea of technical progress and human betterment, that of civilisation and culture, must both fall. The master becomes a metaphysical idol who will only be sustained by the voluntary servitude³ of those who dare not speak in his presence because they consider that there are degrees of knowledge and that while some know, because they hold a title, others are ignorant. The Heideggerian moment of ignorance is not really a pretence, it is not entirely a mask, but is rooted in Socratic irony and in the philosopher's profession of ignorance, that is, of the one who seeks the truth but does not have it. But this is far from a democratism in which every oaf wants to have the floor without having given the slightest thought to what he is going to say. The Socratic principle of permanent ignorance emerges, beyond pretence, as the irony of philosophy, the irony of the dedication of life to knowledge without why or what for, which excludes all individual, gnoseological, epistemological and collective progress. In this sense, the similarity in *isegory*, *isonomy* and *parrhesia* will be given by the pretension of coming to think, for which all knowledge will be nothing but an insufficient but unappealable *propaedeutic*.

³ Sobre la servidumbre voluntaria, véase: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89tienne_de_La_Bo%C3%A9tie

much more consistent in its advocacy of inconsistency than the sophistry of '68.

Heidegger devoted his life after Nazism to the task of trying to make it possible for someone to think one day, and he devoted himself to working for this through metaphysics. Such a task presupposes familiarity with metaphysics and its search for fissures and cracks that could give way to ontology. But there will be no — metaphysical — idea of improvement or progress: does such a task of deconstruction improve the human being? Heidegger's answer is a categorical negative. Through thought and poetry, he will tell us at the end, it is only possible to prepare what may be a future world in which human improvement takes the place of technology and culture or *paideia* the place of civilisation.

Nietzsche had anticipated him in such a modest task by killing God and working for the advent of the superman, the new man postulated by nineteenth-century socialism⁸ as a goal and libertarian communism for the here and now.

⁸ Sobre la confluencia de marxismo y Romanticismo, véase: <http://www.rebellion.org/izquierda/lowy230102.htm>

call biopolitics. Modernity reveals itself as an immense Totalitarianism in continuity with Nazism. To the old Marxist mole is added the ambushed of Jünger or the masked of Vattimo, a Heideggerian line would lean towards the path of concealment and the mask, in the direction of what Vattimo would call *pensiero débole*, the Italian Red Brigades inspired by a Toni Negri who read Deleuze and Marx in unison, for the former. Great personalities such as Günther Anders⁷ would swing from one to the other. Hence the anti-systemic and anarchic vocation of postmodernity and its relationship with the double variant of nihilism, that of the literary nihilism of the nineteenth-century antizarists and that of the philosophical nihilism of the Romantic thinkers.

The pacifism and non-violence of Heideggerian mysticism in Schürmanian interpretation will open the doors to the search for thought through oriental wisdoms, the rites of anthropological cultures or drugs, lost paths or cracks in metaphysics. The anarchism of the '68 revolution found its philosophical justification in post-modernity, twenty years after its occurrence, starting with Nietzsche and Heidegger, with Bataille, Foucault, Deleuze, Vattimo, Lyotard, Derrida, Sloterdijk, Negri and many others. What will be considered as a philosophical hippism of certain educated elites of post-Fordist capitalism, a youthful hangover of contemporary thinkers, a useless movement when it comes to generating social transformations. This will be wielded against it by both its enlightened detractors and its critics of the classical left in the Marxist tradition, if not as a neo-Nazi conservative reactionaryism due to misguided readings such as that of Habermas. In reality it will be a new-generation neo-anarchism or libertarian communism, philosophically

⁷ Sobre G.Anders véase: <http://periodicocnt.org/289abr2003/opinion/index.htm> <http://periodicocnt.org/290may2003/opinion/index.htm>

An egalitarianism then emerges which breaks with all grades and hierarchies, as well as with any archon, director, guide, leader, supraconscious vanguard or ruler. A radical democracy grows up in which a surgeon knows more and better about medicine than a nurse and an architect more and better about building infrastructures than a bricklayer, but neither will be wiser than the other, because in relation to wisdom they will be at the same level, that is, at the level of *doxa*. They will not differ in human thought and excellence, but only in the particular knowledge they have been given to attain. This conviction is the only one that can lead them to dialogue, to listening to each other, to a *philia* and esteem for what the other can say, and to forms of listening and reciprocal consideration that are extremely rare in the Hegelian world of degrees and hierarchies, which are crossed by power relations and distinctions that are poorly disguised behind humanist universalism. Hence, conversation in an inoperative or idle community is preferable to university education⁴ and the latter must be complemented by the former, thus seeking spaces not traversed by power, cracks, gaps, epicurean places in which, without why or for what purpose, the miracle of thinking can take place.

A philosopher will therefore be, beyond knowing, anyone who ever comes to think, and therefore the professor of philosophy, although he may know more than his pupils in terms of knowledge of the history of philosophy — which makes him a historian and not a thinker — will be in no way ahead of the others as far as wisdom is concerned. But since one cannot speak from nothing, we see that tradition has already agreed on a ground of discussion on which to pronounce oneself in equality and similarity of cognitive effort, which makes it nec-

⁴ Sobre los déficits de la Universidad como lugar de adquisición de conocimientos y mejora individual y colectiva, véase: <http://www.almendron.com/tribuna/?p=19427>

essary to have some text or source of metaphysical knowledge on which to let the conversation take place, so that thought can operate through the history of metaphysics and serenity can overcome egos.

Knowledge does not guarantee human improvement, and even if Socrates said that excellence is knowledge, knowledge by itself, although it has always been believed since Plato to be an invaluable propaedeutic for human improvement — a postulate derived from metaphysics — and even if it could be and no other better way of education has been discovered, is not enough. Knowledge may be in most cases necessary, but it is not sufficient. Heidegger like Plato in the Menon will suggest that only by relying on divine favour, depending on the destiny of being, can man improve himself. What is needed is an extra that comes from outside, from being, from physis, from destiny or from the bottomless bottom that constitutes us.

The pragmatic-political stance of Heideggerian ontology could then be egalitarian to the extreme, as has been pointed out, but it could also be elitist and even more aristocratic than the one derived from metaphysics. It may be that Heideggerian thought constitutes an even greater elitism than that of the history of metaphysics, which could be explained by considering that those who for 10 years have been practising the piano for 10 hours a day would be those who would have the necessary but not sufficient knowledge to gain access to divine favour and go from being technically perfect instrumentalists to being masters and sages of the piano. Perhaps only the composer is an artist and never the performer, who is not a creator of new forms. A correlate of the aesthetics maintained by Nietzsche and Heidegger would take us in the same direction if we think that it is when the instinct is recovered after passing through all the stages of culture, learning and performance, when the artist becomes a child again and plays the piano by nature, in consonance with the physis, that he is authentically an artist. This would place us in the ultra-elitist romantic genius theory.

In each century, only three or four geniuses would emerge who would drive the transformation of reality, against whom all the rest of us mortals would sink into mediocrity.

Nietzsche wanted culture to succeed in producing genius⁵ by emulating nature, which produced roses. From his cultural endeavour it was fatal that he should slide the insinuation into the territory of biological science, which from Dr. Mengele to the genome project has followed a slogan of civilisational progress that originates in Nazism, a drift provocatively revealed by Peter Sloterdijk in his *Rules for the Human Park*.⁶ The whole history of metaphysics culminates in Nazism, where the West fulfilled its destiny. The Greek hybris of culture phagocytised by modern civilisation culminated in Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Heideggerian critique of modernity and technology will not in the end be so far removed from the critique of capitalism and mass society of the neo-Marxism of the late Frankfurtians.

Heidegger had a vast philosophical culture, he was well acquainted with all the thinkers who preceded him and his studies were probably vocationally inspired by a desire for individual and collective improvement. After climbing all the rungs, like Germany, of culture and civilisation, one day, after the experience of 1933, he would realise that all his training and elevation, like Germany's, had not made him any better and that it was therefore possible that he had never been able to think. The distance between thinking and knowing would then become abysmal. Knowledge no longer serves to improve but is implicated in evil, subjection and managed life, what we now

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche *El Anticristo*, §3: «No qué reemplazará a la humanidad en la serie de los seres es el problema que yo planteo con esto (-el hombre es un final-): sino qué tipo de hombre se debe criar, se debe querer, como tipo más valioso, más digno de vivir, más seguro del futuro. Ese tipo más valioso ha existido ya con bastante frecuencia: pero como caso afortunado, como excepción, nunca como algo querido».

⁶ Véase a este respecto: <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=48392>