

Just as Heidegger spoke of “our German” as “harvesting” Heraclitus’s sense of *logos*, a Roman or Italian might just as easily, without offense to Heidegger’s real thrust, point out that “our Latin” or “our Italian” shelters the Heraclitean sense as well. *Lego*, in both languages, means “I bring together, I gather, I read aloud.” Similarly, a speaker of English might refer to “the lay of the last minstrel,” “the lay of the land,” and “the way things lie.”

Far from being political, in Rand’s sense (or lay) of revealing Heidegger’s continuing addiction “to the impenitent perpetration of evil [Nazism]” (446), Heidegger’s *logos-legein* hermeneutics has nothing ulterior to or residual in it, unless it is his Roman Catholicism, which asserts that only Christ the Logos can make the world and existence itself intelligible (a word derived from Latin *inter* and *lego*): it is Christ who binds things together and who is their foundation. Christ himself spoke of the harvest and the dearth of laborers in the field.

As for Rand’s silly assumption that Heidegger was sympathetic to Nazism as it unfolded before his eyes, did not Heidegger refuse the presidency of the University of Berlin when it was offered to him by the Nazis?

The “crypt” to which Rand leads us contains the procrustean bed of his own doctoral thesis.

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To the Editor:

In “The Political Truth of Heidegger’s ‘Logos’: Hiding in Translation,” Nicholas Rand wishes to point out that many—himself included, he is naturally careful to note—have been and continue to be slow, perhaps unduly slow, in weaning themselves from the seductiveness of Heidegger’s language. I happen to think that the matter of Heidegger is more complicated than that. Yet that is not the reason for my letter. While I may simply take exception to Rand’s version of Heidegger’s thought, I am aghast at the remarks made in the final paragraph of his essay. I quote in part:

A striking feature of the recent furor in Europe over the postwar status of Heidegger’s political convictions is that many of his defenders are Jewish. It is as though the victims could not bear the thought that a philosopher . . . might continue unperturbed to approve of the ideas of the Nazis. . . . Thus the victims close their eyes, suppress their questions, and undertake a rescue in the vain hope that he who refused to condemn death could somehow bring life. (446)

These words no longer touch on Heidegger at all. They are instead a bald and unconscionable affront to any Jewish intellectual who does not share the conclusions Rand has reached. How is it possible that an editorial board with a reputation for critical stringency like that enjoyed by the board of *PMLA* let this paragraph pass without demanding that the author explain himself? Is the reader supposed to accept this as an example of what the editor, in the editor’s column of the same issue, advertises as “the intensity and maturity of today’s theoretical discussions” (389–90)? I am dismayed that such unqualified ideological babble has passed muster at a publication that represents the institution of philology in America.

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Reply:

That the issue of the political and ethical dimensions of philosophical thought in the aftermath of World War II should be greeted with sarcasm merits reflection. A discussion of the Roman Catholic interpretation of “Logos” would be uneventful, as there is no support for that reading in Heidegger’s essay. Cervo passes judgment on a point that does not concern my argument: “Rand’s silly assumption that Heidegger was sympathetic to Nazism as it unfolded before his eyes. . . .” Whether this subject is “silly” or an “assumption” is not for me to decide. For quite some time the vast archival documentation assembled by historians has been seen as conclusive proof of Heidegger’s wartime sympathies for Nazism. The problem raised in my article is different: Do Heidegger’s thoughts (c. 1944–51) on language and specifically on the Greek *logos* imply that his stance may have been inherently nationalistic? Cervo’s remarks do not strip this question of its relevance.

Baker invokes the *PMLA* Editorial Board’s “reputation for critical stringency” as he reviles some brief thoughts on what I regard as the potential predicament faced by Jews who want to defend the ideas of a philosopher whose self-proclaimed sympathies with Nazism are beyond dispute. Scholars are free to question the appropriateness of my concern. Yet calling my expression of that concern “unqualified ideological babble” is perhaps not intended to engage one’s opponent in critically stringent discussion.

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