

# A Preface to Silence: On the Duty of Vigilant Critique

*Norman K. Swazo*  
*University of Alaska Fairbanks*

Shmuel, the chronicler: *Memory...everything is in memory.*  
Moshe, the madman: *Silence...everything is in silence.*

-- Elie Wiesel, *The Oath*

...philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the  
anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness.  
-- Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," *Writing and Difference*

...it is wiser not to trust entirely to anything by which we have  
once been deceived.  
-- Descartes, "First Meditation,"  
*Meditations on First Philosophy*

**I.** *Why not silence rather than discourse?* With this question (and despite its oddness) I hereby initiate what, after Derrida, may be called an exercise in deconstructive reading. (*Caveat:* To say 'after Derrida' is not to imply a Derridean reading. What follows is, rather, a reading holding in tension the Heideggerian *Destruktion* and the Derridean *deconstruction*. To await "an excess of displacement," then, is to miss the point of a *deconstructische* reading, which is deliberately cautious of the Derridean strategy of deferral). In putting the question thus I express what is at issue in an opposition that inevitably governs the determinate features of both *philosophical* and *political* responsibility, viz., the opposition of discourse and silence. In this respect my concern is directed at the fragility of discourse *qua* 'written word' as it is ventured beyond what I shall call 'the preserve of silence i.e., 'preserve' in the sense of a domain which secures against a transgression of innocence. In my concern for this fragility, I seek to expose a transgression that occurs inexorably in the venture of the written word when it issues as philosophy *qua* "spiritual legislation." Philosophy *qua* spiritual legislation brings to the fore the general problematic of *responsibility* at the juncture of philosophy and politics. While this venture is intrinsic to the Western tradition since Plato, I have in mind what is to be learned from the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Derrida in particular. More specifically, my example for this transgression is historical and imaginative discourse on the Nazi genocide of the Jews, precisely insofar as such discourse is a response to the perceived *failure* of the philosophy of modernity. To expose this transgression, however, is to concede an ineradicable disquietude which the philosopher cannot escape as s/he stands at the juncture of political and philosophical responsibility. It is, in short, to expose --without disposing-- the question of *limit* at this juncture. This "question" is, perhaps, expressed most significantly thus: *Can European identity today successfully "assimilate in a decisive way the legacy of Occidental rationalism" without succumbing to that latent monstrosity which is the deformative power of Western reason?* (This "latent monstrosity" I take to be a matter of both *theoria* and *praxis*, and so I take Derrida's use

of 'monstrosity' in its "ironic seriousness" to be speaking about *both* the deconstructive task of deferral, placing monstrosity under a "different" heading – the "nonspecies" of reason -- and the fully political prospect of European fascism/totalitarianism).

**II.** So, I ask again: Why not *silence* rather than discourse? That, I submit, is the question that imposes upon the present an unavoidable, yet hazardous, decision. That is a question to which both philosophy and historiography give answers, affirming with at least presumptive justification the necessity and the desirability of discourse over the alternative of silence. Insofar as one speaks meaningfully of the history of "European" humanity, the human being is determined in his/her existence on the basis of the ancient Greek formula: The human being *is* as *zoion logon echon*, i.e., a living being capable of "speech," indeed a being who cannot but speak. Here, 'speech' is not just *phone*, i.e., mere voice, vocalization. Rather, the emphasis is on the essential quality of *publicness* that discourse has. Speech is, itself, a public deed, an engagement of and commitment to that which is other as the locus of a self-disclosure. In short, as Hannah Arendt put it, "men live together in the manner of speech."

Yet, while speech "brings together," it also "holds apart." As Jacques Derrida put it, "A sort of *polemos* already concerns the appropriation of language."<sup>1</sup> Berel Lang, in his work *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, had the following to say about this duality of language insofar as it presents both opportunity and danger:

Language is also, after all, a way of dispelling the alien, of opening passages among persons and between them and the world. Admittedly, there is a risk in the venture of the word, even a menace -- as the speaker or writer chances himself, substituting assertion for privation. The word itself, moreover, is mute: once spoken or written, it cannot answer *for* itself -- it too becomes an historical object. And if we were to look only at these dangers, then we might indeed think first of the precariousness of language, of its contingency, of the challenge it offers to silence with the odds of success heavily against it...But all these threats seem slight indeed when we compare them to the menace of a world *without* language: surely it is there, in silence, that isolation and contingency -- the truly alien existence would be met.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this venture of the word for the sake of *historically effective* discourse that, in and for the Occidental tradition, it is the philosopher who stands as the human being who speaks *par excellence*: The *bios theoretikos* affords the opportunity for eminent speech in a way that everyday discourse cannot. It is and ought to be the "first" (*prote*) speech that ever keeps watch over mere *doxa*. Such was the inaugural gesture of both Plato and Aristotle insofar as they *qua* philosophers addressed themselves to the basic

problems of politics.<sup>3</sup> Tacitly at least, philosophical discourse is the ideal speech which in its ideality becomes architectonic for the whole of public discourse.

This understanding is appropriated by medieval and modern European humanity in the respective determinations of the human essence as *animal rationale* and *res cogitans*, notwithstanding the tacit difference that is inevitably excluded in the course of translation/ interpretation from the Greek to the Latin. Here, too, the *vita contemplativa* (a la Aquinas) stands privileged in its speech in a way that of the *vita activa* is not. Here, too, it is the judicative authority of the self-grounding *res cogitans* (a la Descartes) which is the privileged discourse in a way that everyday discourse with its "uncritical assumptions" and "prejudices" is not. For modernity, thought in the mode of grounded judgment (affirmation and denial) must find its "declaration" in and as *foundational* discourse.

Even at the close of the modern period, represented by the thought of Nietzsche as a subversion of Platonism, the project of transvaluation nonetheless safeguards the idea of a privileged speech as *Fursprache*, "ad-vocacy." Here, again, it is the philosopher, even he who philosophizes "as with a hammer," who conducts the experiment with "truth," his advocacy bespeaking a self-determination and self-legislation given in the rejection of any transcendent source of obligation that is at once determinate and legislative for human existence. The *ego cogito*, having acknowledged and affirmed itself as *ego volo*, sustains rather than dispenses with the claim of philosophy to its architectonic status, even though it is now conceived in terms of the highest spiritual form of the will to power. Whether in and as the Platonic or Nietzschean "experiment with truth," philosophy never relinquishes its first and highest power, viz., its right of "spiritual legislation." Thus, the twentieth century begins with its distinctive, yet essential, declaration that knowledge is power.

Notwithstanding the problem of nihilism posed by Nietzsche's thought, the dream of philosophy as "rigorous science" could once again be pursued in this century by yet another German philosopher, Edmund Husserl. Even here the nexus of knowledge and power is admitted. Central to the task set forth by Husserl is a specific acknowledgment of "philosophical responsibility": The "crisis of European humanity," the "crisis of European science," is at its core a crisis of philosophical responsibility, calling forth the philosopher's recognition of his/her *privileged* and *accountable* status as a "functionary of humanity." Husserl was fully explicit in his meaning here. The philosopher is functionary of *humanity*, not just *European* humanity. Implicit in this notion is a commitment to "the hegemony of Western reason" and all that this hegemony entails in the Europeanization of mankind.<sup>4</sup> In Part I, S. 6, of his work, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl put it this way:

To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and thus to bring to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility -- this is the only way to put metaphysics or universal philosophy on the strenuous road to realization. It is the only way to decide whether the *telos* which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy -- that of humanity which seeks to exist, and is only possible, through philosophical reason, moving endlessly from latent to manifest reason and forever seeking its own norms through this, its truth and genuine human nature -- whether this *telos*, then, is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilizations and histories, or whether the Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its *entelechy*.<sup>5</sup>

Here there are several important ideas which not only bespeak, but also presumptively justify, the hegemony of Western reason even in the face of a discourse of dissent that issues from a pluralist stance. The idea of *telos*, of *entelechy*, is a powerful idea. As Husserl makes clear, the point is that "European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like 'China' or 'India'"; that what is yet to be decided is "whether the spectacle of

the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning. . ."<sup>6</sup> Significantly, it falls to the philosopher *qua* functionary of humanity to assure the actualization of a presumptive ideal not merely in philosophy as rigorous science. More to the point, at stake is the *transformation* of contemporary European humanity in the direction of the ideal of humanity, the absolute idea of which is given by classical Greek antiquity and the actualization of which is attempted again and again throughout the history of European humanity. In all this there is an explicit *deference* to the authority of the founding discourse and to its governing appeal (its "current efficacy") beyond its spatiotemporal situation.<sup>7</sup>

With the deconstructionist movement that is given expression in contemporary German and French philosophy after the transformation of phenomenology by Martin Heidegger, the "closure" or "end" of metaphysics announced by Heidegger did not bring closure to the possibility of (or demand for) "spiritual legislation." Despite his critique of modernity, Heidegger himself yielded before this "obligation" when, as Rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933-34, he became the self-appointed "spiritual *Fuhrer*" of the National Socialist revolution, seeking to lead even *der Fuhrer* himself.<sup>8</sup> Explaining his action of assuming the Rectorate, Heidegger wrote: "I saw in the movement that had gained power the possibility of an inner recollection and renewal of the people and a path that would allow it to discover its historical

vocation in the Western world."<sup>9</sup> At issue here is the world-historical status of the Occident in its assertion of global governance *qua* spiritual legislation.

Among the French intellectuals who have critically appropriated the thought of Heidegger is Jacques Derrida, the foremost French deconstructionist. "The name Derrida," notes political scientist William Corlett, "does not often inspire confidence in political theory. All too often it spells the death of our vocation, the trivialization of politics. . ."<sup>10</sup> Derrida, we are told by yet another interpreter, "is obsessively concerned with ethical and political responsibilities"; "he understands deconstruction as intrinsically political."<sup>11</sup> Concerning the deconstructive task as he performs it, Derrida himself has said: "As to the legacy we have received under the name of justice, and in more than one language, the task of a historical and interpretative memory is at the heart of deconstruction, not only as philological-etymological task or the historian's task but as responsibility in face of a heritage that is at the same time the heritage of an imperative or a sheaf of injunctions."<sup>12</sup> Deconstruction, says Derrida, "assumes the right to contest, and not only theoretically, constitutional protocols, the very charter that governs reading in our culture and especially in the academy." On the other hand, yet another interpreter sees Derrida "as a modern Penelope, unraveling by night what he weaves by day -- or, rather, raveling and unraveling at the same time."<sup>13</sup> How, then, we may reasonably ask, do we find Derrida's "position" on political matters, given his "supreme irony," given his "ironic seriousness"? How do we square his ironic discourse with his acquired reputation as leader of the European "avant-garde intellectuals"? What, indeed, is the sense of spiritual legislation when its mode of presentation is irony?

**III.** It is in this fact of continuous expectation of "spiritual legislation," I submit, that European history now in formation is affected fundamentally, precisely inasmuch as the question today once again concerns the status of European humanity in its prospect of self-affirmation. I have in mind an event that took place on May 20, 1990. On this date several prominent European thinkers gathered in Turin, Italy for a colloquium on "European Cultural Identity." This was no routine academic gathering. It was, instead, the commencement of yet another act of spiritual legislation for European humanity. As Derrida observed, the participants of that colloquium were "writers or philosophers according to the classic model of the European intellectual: a guardian held responsible for memory and culture, a citizen entrusted with a sort of spiritual mission in Europe."<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere Derrida has characterized this responsibility thus:

This responsibility toward memory is a responsibility before the very concept of responsibility that regulates the justice and appropriateness (*justesse*) of our behavior, of our theoretical, practical, ethico-political decisions. This concept of responsibility is inseparable from a whole

network of connected concepts (property, intentionality, will, freedom, conscience, consciousness, self-consciousness, subject, self, person, community, decision, and so forth). . .<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, on this view, the European intellectual must be a citizen *par excellence*. Responsible for "memory," he must speak. His discourse is an avowedly political discourse, his mission "spiritual"; hence his manifest claim to the rights to "publish," to "make public," and, thereby, to "teach." It is in this "teaching" that the intellectual also legislates. As always, it is legislation with a view to the future of European humanity and to its "world-historical" destiny.

Derrida, a participant in that colloquium in Turin, rightly observed that "Something unique is afoot in Europe, in what is still called Europe even if we no longer know very well *what* or *who* goes by this name."<sup>16</sup> He poses the appropriate questions: "Indeed, to what concept, to what real individual, to what singular entity should this name be assigned today? Who will draw up its borders?"

The "singular entity" is today lacking in substance or solidity. "Europe" is a fluid phenomenon yet in the throes of destructuring and restructuring: delayed implementation of the Single European Act ("1992"); removal of objective opposition of NATO and the Warsaw Pact; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, and that with all the precariousness about what may ensue; fragmentation of Eastern Europe as nationalism is challenged by vigorously militant assertions of ethnicity; ambivalence about ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht -- all are structures simultaneously fragmenting and seeking enhancement in the midst of shifting national and subnational loyalties. At the heart of this process is hope in a sociopolitical transformation that will heal the wounds of the past, relinquish a persistent resentment, overcome the practical crisis of Marxism (or at least the Soviet version), and celebrate the democratic union of a continent. Amidst the naive celebration of the "victory" of liberal democracy in Eastern Europe and the former USSR, Derrida, with his usual ironic seriousness, "decelebrates." He recalls that "Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance -- the avant-garde of geography and history" (one should recall Husserl here). Hope is not to be divorced from "fear and trembling" (as Derrida says), for the face of Europe --its *persona*-- is yet undisclosed. So, Derrida rightly asks: "will it escape monstrosity?"

This is at once a profoundly disquieting question and a tacit warning. There is no prophetic pretension here. The symptoms of latent monstrosity are only too apparent today-- "crimes of xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, religious or nationalist fanaticism." Moreover, one must be careful to recognize that the continuing fragmentation of Middle and Eastern Europe enhances the opportunities for "willing collaboration" concerning policies of "ethnic cleansing" (*ethnische Reinigung*).

Should the neo-fascist/neo-Nazi elements in the unified Germany emerge as political victors in the near-term, they will have their willing collaborators in all xenophobes across the continent now supportive of ethnic cleansing. This ought to be an alarming prospect for anyone who is an observer of the European scene. Already in this choice of word -- *Reinigung* -- an otherwise "benign concept" is converted into an ideologically persuasive power: *Reinigung*, like *Endlosung* (final solution), is not in its material implications intent on expulsion and deportation, but rather leaves torture and murder in its wake. Moreover, whereas *Endlosung* was a code word of limited circulation in Nazi Germany,<sup>17</sup> *Reinigung* is overtly articulated in an audacious display of unleashed fury.

We are thus faced with Derrida's question all the more starkly. "Europe" today promises for tomorrow the Janus-face of "exhaustion" and "zeal," neither of which secures the "body" of Europe from imminent collapse. Today more than ever before, but in simultaneous zeal and exhaustion, Europe seeks *to be* Europe, to find itself, to identify itself. In exhaustion Europe *seeks* its limit; in zeal (subject to duplicity) Europe would *transgress* all limit. "Exhaustion" bespeaks "decline"; "zeal" bespeaks "greatness." In this strained tension of decline and greatness Europe struggles to know itself.<sup>18</sup> Europe, held captive in the simultaneity of the temporal ecstasies of past and future, must ask-- as Derrida asks for it-- "for what 'cultural identity' must we be responsible? And responsible before whom? Before what memory? For what promise?"<sup>19</sup>

Neither memory nor promise is free of danger, free of the Janus-face of exhaustion and zeal, free of latent monstrosity. In its "sheaf of injunctions," whether in memory or in promise or both, Europe is forced to listen to its own most proper "quarrel between the ancients and the moderns," between Plato/Aristotle and Machiavelli/Hobbes, between Plato and Nietzsche, between the revolutionary appeals of 1789 and 1917, between 1789/1917 and the "glorious destiny" promised in 1933, between those who would rehabilitate Reason and those who call for a "post-metaphysical thinking," between those who champion the legacy of Athens and those who would sustain the legacy of Jerusalem. Liberal democracy, Marxist socialism, National Socialism -- all three "revolutionary" events are the legitimate offspring of Western reason, notwithstanding the "illegitimate" acts for which each may be indicted. As it listens to the entreaties of its offspring, Europe cannot -- indeed, I would say, *must not* -- underestimate the currently prevailing discourse of modernity and its power to shape both exhaustion and zeal present in the sociopolitical movement of the continent.

Derrida, for one, committed himself recently to the claim that "modernity is an imperative for totalitarianism."<sup>20</sup> Derrida's insistence on *differance*, on difference and deference, points politically towards a necessary corrective to the logic of inclusion

and exclusion -- (in the words of Berel Lang) to "a general mood of prejudice against difference and particularism"-- that has been with the Occident explicitly since the Enlightenment. Here we must recall the paradoxical self-assertion of ethnicity in contemporary Europe: Ethnic cleansing *qua* act presupposes a deliberate decision to exclude from citizenship on the grounds of difference, yet which act rejects even tolerance of difference. The consequence *by stages* of *judenrein*, we should recall, was the eventual Nazi genocide of the Jews.<sup>21</sup> Given an equivalent presentation of "opportunity" and "absence of resistance," ethnic cleansing heralds an ominous repetition of an exclusion that, sooner or later, sanctions genocide. Recent events in the former Yugoslavia in particular are patent demonstration of this fact.

By contrast with Derrida's claim about modernity, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe would have us be wary of modernity insofar as, in his view, its "humanism" is inseparable from the fact that "Nazism is a humanism."<sup>22</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe's location of Nazism within humanist reason is consistent with Berel Lang's provocative observation that "there is to be found in Kant, or, more broadly, in the Enlightenment, certain conceptual or ideological origins of the Nazi genocide...[T]he Enlightenment establishes a ground of historical possibility or causal evocation for the Nazi genocide."<sup>23</sup> Specifically, Lang argues, Kant's "formal principle of universalization" and "the ahistorical and asocial definition of the self" provide "a conceptual framework which would figure ideationally in the phenomenon of genocide." Concerning Kantian universality Lang observes, "emancipation and enlightenment based on the conception of a universal self meant that the self, too, was required to assume a new role, one integral to the life of the community; it was thus obliged to reject the particularist commitments -- those, at least, which could not withstand the scrutiny of 'reason' -- that had otherwise confirmed the diverse identities of individuals or groups." More to the point, "with the possibility of freedom and equality that was now open to them, all citizens of the new regime had an obligation to commit themselves to those ideals by renouncing the differences that had characterized (whether as cause or effect) their previous tutelage. To choose to maintain differences of cult or custom -- and thus, more fundamentally, of identity -- in the face of an offer of commonality could itself serve as evidence that the offer had been misconceived."<sup>24</sup> Thus, writes Lang, "The abstract, ahistorical self posited by the Enlightenment as an ideal of humanity entails in its converse appearance the implication that historical difference (and all the more, an historical definition of identity) will be suspect; the principle of universal reason or judgment implies that the grounds on which such distinctions are based may be -- should be -- challenged: not only can everyone be judged by the one criterion, but the consequences of being included or excluded by it are, in terms of the principle of universalizability, without limits. The 'difference' of the Jews was judged by the Nazis to be fundamental -- and with this decision, there was nothing to inhibit the decision subsequently made about

what followed from that judgment: there was no 'reason' *not* to destroy the difference."<sup>25</sup>

Thus, as the foregoing philosophical analyses seek to demonstrate, Nazi genocide and Western modernity are inexorably linked. Even sociological analysis is beginning to see the Nazi genocide not merely as a "failure" of modernity but as its "product." For sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, for example, "Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was, however, certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable."<sup>26</sup> To see the Nazi genocide of the Jews as a product, rather than as a failure, of modernity is to challenge the "orthodox" sociological analysis which conceives the Holocaust "as a unique yet fully determined product of a particular concatenation of social and psychological factors, which led to a temporary suspension of the civilizational grip in which human behavior is normally held."<sup>27</sup> This otherwise orthodox view, notes Bauman, seeks "to contain the Holocaust experience in the theoretical framework of malfunction (modernity incapable of suppressing the essentially alien factors of irrationality, civilizing pressures failing to subdue emotional and violent drives, socialization gone awry and hence unable to produce the needed volume of moral motivations)."

Against this view, Bauman articulates an alternative sociological analysis: "The Holocaust was not an irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity. It was a legitimate resident in the house of modernity; indeed, one who would not be at home in any other house."<sup>28</sup> This "legitimate resident," says Bauman, is Janus-faced (recall Derrida here): "The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust...is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust...would merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body. What we perhaps fear most is that each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the two sides of a coin."<sup>29</sup> Thus, sociological and philosophical analyses are now in accord: *modernity is Janus-faced; latent monstrosity is its ever possible disclosure.*

**IV.** Derrida is not alone among Europeans who speak to "today." The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, speaking from "the left," has engaged other intellectuals of Europe with the task of commenting on "the spiritual situation of the age." For Habermas, it is the duty of intellectuals to react with partiality and objectivity, with sensitivity and incorruptibility, to movements, developmental tendencies, dangers and critical moments.<sup>30</sup> There are, for Habermas, sufficient "denunciatory" blows assaulting European humanity from manifold directions such that intellectuals should feel impelled "to want to preserve for posterity the memory of an ethical document [*Sittendokument*] of our time." The problem, of course, is to

know whether (or even to propose that) there is "more than merely subjective unity" to the multiplicity of works that now circulate as "symptomatic of the *Zeitgeist*." After all, as Hans-Georg Gadamer has instructed us, interpretation is conditioned by prejudice, by an inescapable fore-understanding that informs the hermeneutical task, whether in text or in deed. Thus, one who speaks of *Zeitgeist* bespeaks himself, speaks even for himself. So *must* he speak, however; for he speaks from the duty of "vigilant critique," from the duty of *decision between discourse and silence*.

Vigilant critique is today uncertain and ambivalent in its confrontation with modernity, i.e., with the thought of modernity as well as with the transformation of European humanity which modernity brings about. For some, the techno-power of modernity accelerates the process of "democratization." For Derrida, as we have already noted, modernity is an imperative for totalitarianism. For Habermas, "we must bring to consciousness the dignity of modernity, the dimension of a nontruncated rationality." Habermas, however, appreciates the risk involved in a rehabilitation of "reason":

It has to protect itself on both flanks from getting caught in the traps of the kind of subject-centered thinking that failed to keep the unforced force of reason free from both the *totalitarian* characteristics of an *instrumental* reason that objectifies everything around it, itself included, and from the *totalizing* characteristics of an *inclusive* reason that incorporates everything and, as a unity, ultimately triumphs over every distinction.<sup>31</sup>

This is a tall order -- to recover for European humanity a rationality that precludes the totalitarian and the totalizing, that forgoes objectification and the annulment of difference. The question imposes itself upon us: Can European identity today successfully "assimilate in a decisive way the legacy of Occidental rationalism" without succumbing to that latent monstrosity which is the deformative power of Western reason? As Habermas himself notes, Heidegger's critique of modernity renders this doubtful, for "Heidegger sees in the political and military forms in which totalitarianism appears 'the completion of the European-modern dominance of the world,'" an "absolutized purposive rationality." Quite simply, Heidegger "places subject-centered reason on trial." Indeed, as Lacoue-Labarthe would add, "Only Heidegger can enable us to understand" the truth of Nazism and, more generally, totalitarianism -- i.e., the "infinitezation or absolutization of the subject that finds its operative effect in the principle of the metaphysics of the moderns."<sup>32</sup>

That Heidegger may be considered a thinker signaling the duty of vigilant critique is open to objection, of course. Heidegger's critique of modernity is not without its detractors. French political scientist Luc Ferry and French philosopher Alain Renaut

maintain that "intellectuals are obligated to serve a critical function in democratic societies."<sup>33</sup> Referring to the possibility of a "purified" appropriation of Heidegger's thought by French intellectuals, Ferry and Renault concede the value of Heidegger's critical stance: "[A]s a critic of both the totalitarianism of the East and the bureaucratic, repressive, disciplinary, and consumer-oriented society of the West, Heidegger could without demurrer personify *the weightiest critical authority* since the death of Marxism" (my italics). However, Ferry and Renault signal a "crisis of legitimation" in this appropriation: "what is happening to Heidegger is what happened to Marxism in the 1970s," viz., the linking of both "critical lines of thought. . . with totalitarian adventures."

Thus, Ferry and Renault would have us be "prudent" in dealing with Heidegger's criticism of modernity. For Ferry and Renault, Heidegger's "indictment of modern times and humanism. . . could at the very best lead to a radical criticism of every feature of the democratic world, the world of technology and mass culture, of course, but also the world of human rights and, more generally, the program of resolving through public discussion the questions constantly posed by the contemporary dynamics of a continual break with tradition."<sup>34</sup> This assessment was echoed also by American philosopher Michael Zimmerman: ". . . Heidegger could never straightforwardly admit that by 'deconstructing' what he regarded as the Enlightenment's insidious principles of universal economic and political rights, by declaring that traditional Judao-Christian moral beliefs had been vacated by the death of God, by claiming that new historical worlds arise from a primal source that is 'beyond good and evil,' and by working to found such a world based on artistic-ontological, not moral considerations, he helped to make possible the triumph of a truly radical evil."<sup>35</sup>

Zimmerman's remarks are, of course, grounded in his assessment of Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism. The recent uproar about this fact especially casts doubt upon the legitimacy of locating Heidegger among the European voices of vigilant critique. Yet, Victor Farias' *Heidegger et le nazisme* (the work which started the most recent round of discussion), for all its chronicling, for all its archival searches, neglects an important axiom: "By wanting to know too much, you end up understanding nothing."<sup>36</sup> Whether such chronicling moves us in the direction of apology or disputation, Heidegger's *oeuvre* is always such as to resonate in our day all the more "responsibly," making especially evident the juncture of philosophical and political responsibility as he experienced it and as it speaks to "today." (I have spoken to this point elsewhere and have not the space to rehearse that argument here<sup>37</sup>). I locate Heidegger among those Europeans concerned with the duty of vigilant critique. His critique of the history of metaphysics, his critique of modernity, his critique of *Nazi Dasein* in the interest of German *historical Dasein* -- all point to what for him

is problematic in representational discourse. This includes the representational discourse which is historiography. "[A]ll historiography," Heidegger tells us, "predicts what is to come from images of the past determined by the present."<sup>38</sup> Thereby, however, Heidegger warns us, historiography "systematically destroys the future": "the future must first win itself, not from a Present, but from the inauthentic future."<sup>39</sup>

V. In all the foregoing, it is clear that the contemporary European intellectual is wary of current sociopolitical developments that question the governing authority of the Western tradition, which question its efforts to instantiate one or another ideal of Western reason. In the public deed that vigilant discourse is, the European intellectual would pay his/her debt to memory: "A deed transmitted is a victory snatched from death" -- so speaks Elie Wiesel, one who experienced Europe's darkest moment firsthand, as victim. To transmit a deed, to deny death a victory -- thereby presence and absence, memory and promise, are given their unity. Derrida, I have noted, stands in the lead of current vigilant critique. Vigilant even about the seeming integrity of Husserl's project of philosophy as rigorous science with its attendant expectation of a transformation of European humanity, Derrida warns of "metaphysical racism" that is to be found even there.<sup>40</sup> As Ferry and Renault put it, Derrida is pointing out that "the worst is never far from the good humanistic conscience that Husserl, the unsusceptible, is here supposed to incarnate."

Yet, one cannot but wonder whether one can expect anything different from Western reason given the evidence of an "inner logic" which seemingly pursues hegemony with regard to the world's destiny. Ferry and Renault would defend the values of the Enlightenment and, thereby, seek to warrant democracy against critiques of humanism. But, they forget that "the politics of virtually all of the Greek philosophers descended from Socrates was antidemocratic"; that "Historically, few, if any, philosophers have given two cheers for democracy. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche: not a democrat among them."<sup>41</sup> If, indeed, Lacoue-Labarthe is right in linking Nazism with humanist reason, and Lang right in linking Nazism with Kantian universality, if the totalitarian and the totalizing, as Habermas noted, are inseparable from Western reason, I cannot but pose the question with which I began: Why not *silence* rather than discourse?

As we consider with all seriousness how it stands with being today, can we agree with Lang that there is more menace to a world without language, that in silence there is to be met the truly alien existence? My point is not that we can or must choose between discourse and silence to the total exclusion of the other, but rather that we must come to see *how* and *when* "to maintain silence in discourse," given that *madness is ineradicable from discourse*.<sup>42</sup> Therein is the Derridian challenge to the intellectual who would yet "speak" to "today."

Consider the example that obtains in the discourse on the Nazi genocide of the Jews. Lang has pointed to "the distance between discourse and subject," to "connection between ethical content and literary form in the subject of the Nazi genocide." *Imaginative* representation of evil is said to have its justification in "a particular sense of responsibility," instilled in the recipient of that representation. The presupposition here is that of "a shared consciousness," an empathetic sensibility to suffering, as well as a rationality that rejects the defensibility of such horror. Yet, quite to the contrary, the recipient sensibility and rationality can turn out to be neither empathetic nor moved to objection: Sensibility and rationality can all too readily conspire to a proximate *repetition* of the represented evil that could not and would not have been rendered possible had the evil been safeguarded in and by silence. This is evident in the current generation of German youth who reject responsibility for the genocide, who assume neo-Nazi sensibilities and actions, or who adopt a revisionist stance concerning the historical record.

The *ethical* question of discourse versus silence goes beyond a question of adequacy of representation of the evil that the Nazi genocide is. At issue here is not the *denial* of events and, therefore, a derivative rejection of any and all such representational discourse (e.g., as in A.R. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*; R. Faurisson, *Memoir en defense: Contre ceux qui me accusent de falsifier l'histoire*). No, at issue here is, rather, the uncanny affirmation of events after the fact which, in a display of audacity, at once *appropriates* and *sanctions* such representation for a proximate repetition. In this respect, affirmation has consequences morally repugnant in a way that denial does not. *This* kind of affirmation speaks of the devil that he may appear.

In this sense, then, the ethical question concerns the "calling to presence," indeed the *bringing into* the present, not merely a representation of evil, but its *repetition*. Both imaginative discourse and historical discourse, *qua* representations of evil, sustain and engender *ressentiment* (on the part of the victim) and *vengeance* (on the part of the sons inheriting the collective guilt of the fathers). "In the case of extreme injustice-- of which there is certainly no shortage in recent history-- it is difficult to avoid writing history (and evoking memory) in a spirit of revenge, even if the resentment of revenge will undoubtedly repeat and perpetuate in a different form the past events one is attempting to represent precisely in order that they may never happen again."<sup>43</sup> Such repetition in thought opens the way for a repetition in deed. It is in this consequence, I submit, that a repetition in thought is *a transgression of innocence*. The ethic of responsibility before the future begins with the proximate generation, that of our children. To them we ought not bequeath our guilt, our shame or our resentment. Yet, this we do so long as we do not see that "Silence is broken by writing but its madness lingers like an open wound."<sup>44</sup>

With our discourse on the Nazi genocide, do we or do we not speak of madness? Do we speak of that which is *excluded* or *included* in reason? If, as Foucault says, "madness is the absence of the work," and, as Derrida adds, "any philosopher or speaking subject. . . who must evoke madness from the *interior* of thought. . . can do so only in the realm of the *possible* and in the language of fiction or the fiction of language," then what is one to conclude about our discourse that has proximity to madness?<sup>45</sup> Is our discourse an evocation of madness from within the "interior" of thought? Do we, in both our imaginative and our historical discourse on the Nazi genocide (and all such "evil") tacitly, unwittingly, seek proximity to that interiority of reason which madness is, so that somehow we may finally hold captive that which eludes yet manifests?

The legacy of Athens which speaks through Descartes and then in Nietzsche, when it concedes the death of God, can no longer "certify the *Cogito* through God," as Derrida points out. In the absence of that certificate, does not madness lose its preserve? "For, finally, it is God alone who, by permitting me to extirpate myself from a *Cogito* that at its proper moment can always remain a silent madness, also insures my representations and my cognitive determinations, that is my discourse against madness. It is without doubt that, for Descartes, God alone protects me against the madness to which the *Cogito*, left to its own authority, could only open itself up in the most hospitable way."<sup>46</sup>

So, we must consider: what is the duty of vigilant critique insofar as it speaks at the juncture of philosophical and political responsibility? It is the duty of speech which delivers into the present its memory, links present and past, and indicts the present after the indictments of the past and the judgments of memory. But one feels compelled to ask: Is this strategy not to be rejected in principle? Is it not to be rejected even with regard to consequences, with regard to a judgment of historical efficacy? Must we forever "cling to our shame" and so hold the future hostage to our resentment? To speak the name is to call forth the thing -- to utter the demon's name is to call forth the demon. Such is the admonition of ancestral tradition. To name is to convey from non-being to being: *male dictus, male dictus*. . .

Speech, in its essential structure, is apophantic, as Aristotle already pointed out in his *On Interpretation*. Speech, as Heidegger reminds us in echo of Aristotle, "lets us see," "makes manifest what is being talked about," and thus "makes it accessible to another" (see *Being and Time*, Ch. II, Section 7B). To name, then, is to call out "into the distance," to call the temporally afar "into nearness." Such calling brings into nearness. To bring into nearness, to "bridge," is not to bring into presence-at-hand, granted. Yet, such calling ever remains an oblique invitation, a bidding to come, such that what is called thereby has bearing, i.e., bears upon us in our presence.<sup>47</sup> In this bearing, a world is borne by the word; thus, the word "gathers a world," unfolds and

discloses it in the manner of its bearing. That gathering of world, as a disclosure of a "referential totality," can be a benign gathering. It can also be a gathering of malignity: Some bridges are better left unbuilt. . .

Therein is the burden of the discursive venture; therein the indictment of discourse itself which ever calls the thinker to account for the world s/he gathers. And account s/he *must*, if the venture with the word is a venture of spiritual legislation or vigilant critique. At issue here is not a wholesale denial or censure of the past. At issue is how one is to incorporate the past without surrendering the future to the rigidity of a past making present. That is the always pertinent question for both imaginative and historical discourse explicitly or tacitly in the service of spiritual legislation.

Moshe, the "madman" in Elie Wiesel's novel *The Oath*, understands this even as the Jews of Kollvillag anxiously await their murder at the hands of the anti-Semites. Time and again, though whole communities of Jews have been murdered, "Jewish memory not only robbed the executioner of his final victory, it haunted and punished him by reminding him of his crimes and citing them as examples and warnings for the benefit of mankind present and future." In this strategy there is "an unshakable conviction" about the power of memory and vindication of the victim through speech: The word, preserved in memory, is to be "stronger than death." Moshe, however, profiles the reality he perceives differently-- for him the rigidity of the past must be nullified if indeed a future is to be won beyond that rigidity. In short, "the circle must be broken":

Now we shall adopt a new way: silence. . . We are going to impose the ultimate challenge, not by the absence of language, not by the word but by the abdication of the word. . . Let us take the only possible decision: we shall testify no more.

. . . If suffering and the history of suffering were intrinsically linked, then one could be abolished by attacking the other; by ceasing to refer to the events of the present, we would forestall ordeals in the future.

. . . Thus the chain would be broken.<sup>48</sup>

Abdication of the word-- the ultimate challenge. Truth-- historical truth, political truth, philosophical truth-- it is said, unfolds "in the space of 'language,'" such that "the word" is essential for this supreme disclosure. Yet, one must consider: Is there truth only in and as the unconcealment/disclosure that belongs to the spoken or written word? Is there no truth in the *abdication* of the word-- no truth preserved in and as silence, silence itself the supremely efficacious preserve, silence being that preserve which safeguards the innocence of the future from the transgression of the past?

Surely silence is not to be deprecated in favor of discourse, in the way the binary opposition of reason and madness excludes the latter in favor of the former and this on the basis of the principle of noncontradiction as the principle of all principles. In this logic of exclusion, the principle of noncontradiction is held to be "different from the unprincipled madness of self-contradiction or willful ignorance." Thus, the perennial Western quest for philosophy as rigorous speech, as rigorous science having purity of expression, would forestall madness and overcome ignorance. Yet, as Corlett remarks in thinking through Derrida's project,

One employs the principle of noncontradiction every day again and again, but it would be impossible, in principle, to call it the same principle if there were not, lurking in the silent margins and spaces, "moments" of madness.

If the origin of all reason and order requires an "other" of chronic bewilderment, then the possibility of purity in expression is out of the question. All meaning must necessarily carry trace elements of madness...[N]o form in political theory can be exempt. Spacing is necessary for meaning, and, if there are spaces, there is always already room for monstrosity. The sleep of reason produces monsters and we are never continuously awake, even for a short time.<sup>49</sup>

As we today live in the shadow cast by Nietzsche, we are forced to ask a formidable, hard-hitting question precisely because philosophical and political responsibility demand it. It is a variant of Nietzsche's claim that philosophy since Plato is "the history of an error"; "variant," I say, because the question I pose must include every thinker, Platonist and post-Nietzschean, who would even presume to legislate spiritually for European humanity. The question: *Is Western reason fundamentally a history of an error, such that European humanity, far from being the telos/entelechy of humanity, is the arche of a deformation of essence?*<sup>50</sup> To fathom this question is to see that the long-established commitment to spiritual legislation in the history of the Occident must yield before the demand for silence. Such yielding would be an act not of prohibition, but of affirmation. Perhaps it is in such yielding that responsibility, *philosophical* responsibility which is at once *political* responsibility, finds *its* most proper "binding" and "bonding."

Thus, can it be that the "vigilant critique" of past and present, letting be that which is called forth by the uttered word, must soon become a "preface" to silence? One cannot but wonder, in the moment of this question, to what extent our vigilant discourse-- itself indebted to a founding act having its own violent structure-- has ever been and remains a transgression of innocence. After all, as Elie Wiesel himself said, "To survive by error is perhaps the equivalent of being killed by error."<sup>51</sup>

## Endnotes

1 J. Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in D. Cornell, M. Rosenfeld, D. Carlson, eds., *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67. The text published here represents a unified whole Derrida delivered in two parts, the first in October 1989 and the second in April 1990.

2 Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 114

3 Of course, one may take the alternative assessment such as was given by Blaise Pascal (*Pensees*, No. 331, trans., F. Trother, Harvard Classics): "We can only think of Plato and Aristotle in grand academic robes. They were honest men, like others, laughing with their friends, and when they diverted themselves with writing the Laws and Politics, they did it as amusement. That part of their life was the least philosophic and the least serious. If they wrote on politics, it was as laying down rules for a lunatic asylum; if they presented the appearance of speaking of a great matter, it was because they knew that the madmen to whom they spoke, thought they were kings and emperors. They entered into their principles in order to make their madness as little harmful as possible."

4 On this theme, see R.B.J. Walker, ed., *Culture, Ideology, and World Order* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984). See also Walker's "World Politics and Western Reason: Universalism, Pluralism, and Hegemony, World Order Models Project, Working Paper No. 19" (New York: Institute for World Order, 1982).

5 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans., D. Carr (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 15.

6 Ibid, p. 16

7 For a relevant discussion of the idea expressed here (to which I am indebted for the observation made here), see Bernard P. Dauenhauer, "Discourse, Silence, and Tradition." *Review of Metaphysics*, 32-3, 1979, pp. 437-451. At p. 444, Dauenhauer notes: "This deference also points to the sort of finitude and awe which is implicated in the silence conjoined with political discourse. Since what the present participants in political discourse utter can be legitimate only if it has roots in some founding discourse, no present utterance can appropriately aspire to autonomy. But, on the other hand, since *the founding discourse can have current efficacy only by virtue of present utterances*, the present participants confront in awe the fact that without their utterances, the political world into which they have been introduced is doomed. Thus, the necessary dependence upon the moment of origin is coupled with an irremediable fragility." (Emphasis added)

8 The debate about Heidegger's entanglement with National Socialism continues without resolution. For two contrasting book-length accounts, see G. Neske and E. Kettering, eds., *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism* (New York: Paragon Press, 1990) and T. Rockmore and J. Margolies, eds., *The Heidegger Case on Philosophy and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). For what I take to be a balanced synoptic account of the controversy, see Michael Zimmerman, "The Thorn in Heidegger's Side: The Question of National Socialism," *Philosophical Forum*, 20:4, 1989, pp. 326-365. For my own views on this issue see my "L'affair: Heidegger," *Human Studies*, 16:3, 1993, pp. 359-380 and my "Gnothi sauton: Heidegger's Problem Ours," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 25:3, October 1994, pp. 263-287. Finally, for a discussion which more specifically treats the issue of discourse/speech in Heidegger's political engagement, see F. Edler, "Philosophy, Politics, and Language: Heidegger's Attempt to Steal the Language of the Revolution in 1933-34," *Social Research*, 57:1, 1990, pp. 197-238

9 Martin Heidegger, "The Self-Assertion of the German University/The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts," *Review of Metaphysics*, 38:3, 1985, pp. 467-502

10 William Corlett, *Community without Unity: A Politics of Derridian Extravagance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989)

11 Richard Bernstein, "Rorty: Liberal Utopia," *Social Research*, 57:1, 1990, pp. 31-72

12 Derrida, "Force of Law," op. cit.

13 Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). As it turns out, both Megill and Bernstein are right, given Derrida's recent pronouncements (see Derrida, "Force of Law," p. 10) X what is now called Deconstruction, while seeming not to address the problem of justice, has done nothing but address it, if only *obliquely*, unable to do so directly. *Obliquely*, as at this very moment, in which I'm preparing to demonstrate that one cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectize justice, say "this is just" and even less "I am just," without immediately betraying justice, if not law (*droit*).

14 Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992)

15 Derrida, "Force of Law," op. cit.

16 Derrida, *The Other Heading*, op. cit.

17 Lang, op. cit., p. 10

18 See P. Valery, "Notes on the Greatness and Decline of Europe," *History and Politics* (New York: Bollingen, 1962)

19 Derrida, *The Other Heading*, op. cit.

20 Ibid

21 This is Lang's (op. cit.) claim. See also K. Schleuner, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* (University of Illinois Press, 1970) and R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews, Vol. 1* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987)

22 P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990). What Lacoue-Labarthe has in mind (see p. 94) is what comes as a consequence of the collapse of Christianity and belief in humanity itself--Nazism is a humanism insofar as it rests upon a determination of *humanitas* which is, in its view, more powerful (i.e., more effective) than any other. The subject of absolute self-creation, even if, occupying an immediately natural position (the particularity of race), it transcends all the determinations of the modern subject, brings together and concretizes these same determinations (as also does Stalinism, with the subject of absolute self-production) and constitutes itself as *the* subject, in absolute terms.

There is a passage in Derrida's *The Other Heading* which, if I understand him correctly, accords with Lacoue-Labarthe's remarks. Says Derrida: "The value of *exemplarity* that inscribes the universal in the proper body of singularity, of an idiom or a culture, whether this singularity be individual, social, national, state, federal, confederal, or not. Whether it takes a national form or not, a refined, hospitable, or aggressively xenophobic form or not, the self-affirmation of an identity always claims to be responding to the call or assignment of the universal. There are no exceptions to this law. No cultural identity presents itself as the opaque body of an untranslatable idiom, but, always, on the contrary, as the irreplaceable *inscription* of the universal in the singular, the *unique testimony* to the human existence and to what is proper to man. Each time, it has to do with the discourse of *responsibility*--I have, the unique "I" has, the responsibility of testifying for universality."

23 Lang, op. cit.

24 Ibid, pp. 184-185

25 Ibid, pp. 194-195

26 Z. Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). For a "productive" as opposed to a "dysfunctional" view of the Nazi genocide, see H. Feingold, "How Unique is the Holocaust?" in A. Grobman & D. Landes, eds., *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust* (Los Angeles: The Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1983)

27 Bauman, p. 4

28 Ibid, p. 17

29 Ibid, p. 1

30 J. Habermas, *Observations on 'the Spiritual Situation of the Age'* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), p. 3

31 J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

32 As cited by L. Ferry and A. Renaut, *Heidegger and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 51

33 Ibid, p. 9

34 Ibid, p. 1

35 Michael Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)

36 Elie Wiesel, *The Oath* (New York: Avon Books, 1973), p. 195

37 See above, Note 8.

38 Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975)

39 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 386. With reference to my point of situating Heidegger in the camp of criticism, I mention also Heidegger's remarks given in the "Introduction" to *Being and Time*. In Section 6, Heidegger specifically understands the task of "destruction" (better, de-construction) of the history of ontology as a "criticism [that] concerns 'today' [*Kritik trifft der 'Heute'*]." Such destruction is, for Heidegger, a "critical confrontation" [*kritische Auseinandersetzung*] with ancient, medieval, and modern ontology. It is a critical confrontation with the "tradition" which the history of ontology delivers, i.e., with the possibilities of being which this tradition transmits while obfuscating the origin and, thereby, foreclosing authentic being and the authentic future.

40 Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)

41 Sheldon Wolin, "Democracy in the Discourse of Postmodernism," *Social Research*, 57:1, 1990, at pp. 5 & 15

42 The phrase I borrow from William Corlett, op. cit., p. 63. Corlett, at p. 183 of his book, notes further: "A politics of Derridian extravagance necessarily begins with the de facto presence of the subject in discourse, but this politics grows by maintaining silence, not by transgressing the limits of discourse."

43 J.-F. Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. ix

44 Corlett, op. cit., p. 158

45 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978): see the essay, "Cogito and the History of Madness," pp. 31-63

46 Ibid, p. 58

47 I am here appropriating aspects of Heidegger's remarks on language. See his "Language," in his *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

48 Wiesel, op. cit., p. 243-244

49 Corlett, op. cit.

50 This question, as I say, is a variant of Nietzsche's question. It is a question that does not take for granted an essentially benign meaning of the Western "civilizing process," which Zygmunt Bauman has characterized as an "etiological myth deeply entrenched in the self-consciousness of our Western society," "the morally elevating story of humanity emerging from pre-social barbarity." The question I pose is, of course, immediately open to object. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in "Supplement II" of his *Truth and Method* (pp. 491-498), asked a similar question: "So, with increasing urgency, we are led to ask, whether there may not be hidden, in our experience of the world a primordial falsity--whether, in our linguistically transmitted experience, we may not be prey to prejudices or, worst still, to necessities which have their source in the linguistic structuring of our first experience of the world and which would force us to run with open eyes, as it were, down a path where there was no other issue than destruction." And, again: "Has there been, perhaps, a casting of the dice which has made the history of the world before any other world history, which through our language has pushed us to our thought, and which, if it continues, will lead to the technical self-destruction of humanity?" Gadamer concedes that there is something to this "suspicion about ourselves," but he cannot accept the "artificial tutelage" into which this suspicion places our reason.

51 Wiesel, op. cit., p. 81