William Leiss: Education and Formation
Replies to Questions posed by Laureano Ralon

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August 2011
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1) When you entered New Jersey's Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1956, did you imagine becoming a professor? If not, how do you think your academic career would have come about?

Like many others in that period, I was the first in my family to go to university; I was 16 years old, because I had been skipped two grades in the one-room schoolhouse I had attended (one teacher, eight grades, 20 pupils) in rural northeastern Pennsylvania. I came to university with a very poor educational background, from a high school in a small town, with advice from a guidance counsellor to study accounting, based on the results of a rather crude psychological profiling instrument (the Kuder Preference Record) then in use. So I did as suggested, remaining an accounting major for my first two years, before sensing a vague dissatisfaction which I expressed to the arts dean. (Accounting is more interesting than it might seem, by the way.) FDU had been founded only about 12 years previously but was expanding rapidly, with lots of new young faculty. The dean sent me to one of them, an American history professor named Herbert Gutman, then just out of graduate school. Gutman was a great teacher and scholar and later became an influential and much-loved academic mentor for many others; in his company I had my first academic epiphany, and realized that I wanted to be a university professor. But it was also the first indication that my career would have a somewhat accidental and erratic nature.

I had always been an obsessive student; I was class valedictorian, with almost a straight-A average for 4.5 years of coursework, and was the first-ever FDU student to win a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship for graduate work. Gutman sent me to Brandeis, where his good friend Ray Ginger had just been hired to help start a PhD program in American Civilization. When I arrived in September 1960, I was informed that this program had been postponed, and it was too late to go anywhere else; I was told to enter the History of Ideas graduate program and transfer back after one year. When I was registering with Professor Edgar Johnson for my courses in History of Ideas, I was advised to take his graduate seminar on "The Fathers of the Church," whereupon a heavily-accented voice boomed across the aisle, saying, "Edgar, when are you going to give a course on the mothers of the church"? That was my introduction to Herbert Marcuse, whose course on "The History of Political Theory from Plato to Hegel" I also registered for.

Very soon I had my second epiphany: After three weeks in Herbert's course I lost all interest in returning to the American Civilization program. I was also in a bit of trouble, since I was completely unprepared for graduate work in European intellectual history, and I just barely avoided failing out of the program at the end of the first year. I recovered sufficiently to complete my two years of coursework and pass my PhD oral comprehensives, but I still did not have a sufficiently good grounding to do thesis work. I left after four years and taught one year at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester, Mass., whereupon Herbert, feeling unwelcome at Brandeis once he turned 65, announced he would be going to UC San Diego. I immediately asked if I could go along, and he said yes; I was one of only two students who followed him from Brandeis to UCSD in 1965. Even though I had to do another two full years of coursework and a second rigorous set of PhD comprehensive exams, I finally felt that I was in my element, and I was enormously pleased to become Herbert's senior student assistant.

My "second Herbert" was a truly great teacher, demanding but always helpful, serious but always playful, a profoundly original thinker whose activism went back as far as 1918, a gentle soul beloved by all who had fled for his life when the Nazis took power in Germany, arriving in New York in 1934 with one suitcase to his name. [As far as his famous sense of humour is concerned, I am one of the few still alive who know the exact text in German of a slanderous and obscene four-line rhyming ditty he composed about Hannah Arendt, but I will not repeat it here.] Our days in San Diego were fully occupied with activities against the war in Vietnam, including a little fun: For example, in October 1967, the 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, we flew a handmade Viet Cong flag in the free speech plaza, which was spotted by US Navy planes flying overhead, on their way to training sessions over the Pacific Ocean, who radioed back to their base commander, who in turn called university officials, who calmed him down.

In the evening we entered Herbert's Hegel seminar, where the text was "The Doctrine of Essence" from the "Greater Logic," a rather difficult work which opens modestly with a 2-page section on "the dialectic of being and nothing." No secondary sources were used, certainly not Herbert's own writings (which he never referred to). Just "open the book, read the first sentence, and tell me what you think it means in your own words." Sentence by sentence, three hours per weekly seminar, twenty weeks in duration; we averaged five pages for each 3-hour session. Since one could always kid around with Herbert, one of the students (I think it was Lowell Bergman) remarked, "Isn't the pace a little slow?" So Herbert related his experience in Heidegger's seminar on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: In a seminar which met weekly for six months, they never advanced further than the first paragraph. There was reason to think that we had been brought inside a tradition of dialectical thinking that spanned a period of 2500 years.

I was enormously proud to have been, by then, fully accepted into this fellowship. When I had my PhD thesis oral, I was told that I had earned the approval of my thesis advisor (the lovely German appellation, "*doktorvater*") and the examining committee by virtue of the single sentence that concludes the thesis, where I reversed a famous Hegelian maxim (turning "the cunning of reason" into "the cunning of unreason"). Much expanded the thesis became my first book, *The Domination of Nature*, published in 1972 (dedicated to Angela Davis, who was then in prison on trumped-up criminal charges) and still in print.

The accidental character of my university education, from beginning to end, put me on a very unusual career trajectory in university life: 2011 marks my fifty-fifth consecutive year in a university setting, at a total of ten different universities (three as a student, seven as a tenured professor). At every stop I changed fields; as a professor, I have never held an appointment in a field in which I hold a degree. [This is the sequence: (1) as a student: accounting /American history – European intellectual history – philosophy; (2) as a professor: political science (Regina) – social & political thought/environmental studies (York) – sociology (Toronto) – communication (SFU) – policy studies (Queen's) – business or management (Calgary) – risk studies (Ottawa).] I would not blame anyone who detects a bit of fraud here. I like to remark about my professorial career that I wrote one book at each stop, and by the time the specialists in that field figured out that it was not very good, I had already moved to a new field, so their views were irrelevant.

But the Canadian academic community is very forgiving: Despite the erratic nature of my career, I was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society of Canada (our oldest and largest national academy) in 1990 and served a term as its President a decade later.

2) Has teaching changed since you began in the classroom and seminar? How do you manage to command attention in an age of interruption and information overflow?

Of course it has changed. Among other things, in most public universities class sizes have increased enormously since I started. But universities are very old institutions, and the essentials remain: If you have some talent and are highly motivated to do academic work, *with a bit of luck* (such as I had) you can find yourself in the master-student apprenticeship relation that has been the essence of the university experience for a very long time. In that relationship the distractions of everyday life become irrelevant. For most students, on the other hand, university life is just job training and socialization (this is not meant as a criticism: they are the ones who keep the whole enterprise afloat).

I am one of those who was born to be an academic: My earliest childhood memories, having to do with starting school at the age of five, are about wanting to attract the teacher's attention and praise by knowing the answers to every question and never getting anything less than a 100% score on examinations. My migraine headaches undoubtedly were related to this severe performance ethic. In my high school class I won every academic medal on offer; my only grade lower than an A was in gym class; of course I was also a social disaster, since I was both morbidly shy and two years younger than my classmates. (I can't resist mentioning that my first part-time job, during high school, was in a sporting-goods store where I learned how to disassemble and clean hunting rifles and to reload ammunition.) I simply don't know where this urgency about performance in schooling came from; neither of my parents had gone past the eighth grade, both leaving school in order to begin working, my father as a house painter, my mother as a corporate secretary before her children arrived.

3) Have the demands on graduate students changed since you earned your PhD from the University of California, San Diego in 1969? What or who made the strongest impression on you during your graduate studies? Do you think your generation of senior scholars is as demanding as the people who taught you?

In addition to Gutman and Marcuse, I was fortunate indeed to have been able to study with other outstanding scholars who were also good teachers, both as an undergraduate (I remember the famous Theodor Gaster at FDU) and as a graduate student (at Brandeis Frank Manuel, who wrote many fine books such as *The Prophets of Paris*, and Alexander Altmann; at UCSD Richard Popkin and Stanley Moore). Of the seven named here, the first six of them were of Jewish origin (although among them only Altmann was a religious believer), and this fact is of considerable personal importance to me (see #5 below).

These were true apprenticeships. At FDU I spent some portion of every day of the week, during the last two years there, in Gutman's company: He would sit in the cafeteria with a few students and just talk for hours about the craft of understanding history. Marcuse was always available for his students; during my three years at UCSD he spent a great deal of time with his graduate students, both in philosophical conversations and in our shared antiwar activities. Both Gutman and Marcuse were deeply committed to social justice as well as to intellectual life.

If one wants to be an academic the performance impulses come from within. Then you need to be lucky in finding mentors who will challenge you and bring out your strengths. The best university mentors are neither brutal nor exploitative nor even strict; they are the ones who will just give you the opportunities to show what you can do. They know that they don't need to motivate their best students to work hard.

4) Edmund Husserl had many students, most notably Martin Heidegger who, in time, betrayed him but also took his phenomenology to a whole new level. Heidegger had many students, most notably Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse – both of whom grew disappointed with him personally and rejected his existential philosophy. Marcuse had many students as well, including Andrew Feenberg and yourself; however, in a recent interview I did with Feenberg, he declared that he was "by no means a Marcusean." A mentor, it seems, is destined to be 'killed,' metaphorically speaking. How did you come to study with Herbert Marcuse, and which flaws in his thinking compelled you on your own course of thought?

Note on Marcuse's career: The number of his graduate students is quite limited, due to the simple fact that he was already 56 years old when he obtained his very first full-time academic position at Brandeis in 1954. Before then he had been essentially a private scholar subsisting on small stipends from research institutes (after having run an antiquarian bookstore in Berlin in the mid-1920s, financed by his father, which went bankrupt after his partner in the venture was discovered committing fraud). During the decade when he lived off the funds of the Institute for Social Research – until he joined the U.S. government during the war – he was very poorly paid by his colleague Max Horkheimer, who lived quite well off the Institute's monies.

Many of Marcuse's contributions will be studied as long as people still read serious intellectual work: the astonishing essays from the 1930s and 1940s collected in *Negations* and *Studies in Critical Philosophy,* and the books *Reason and Revolution,*

Soviet Marxism, and *Eros and Civilization*; for me the rest of his body of work is interesting but not enduring. His best work is, in my opinion, far superior to anything that his erstwhile colleagues Horkheimer and Adorno ever produced.

The difficulties in the teacher-student relations between Husserl and Heidegger, on the one hand, or Heidegger and Marcuse / Arendt, on the other, are in my view special cases, specifically related to Heidegger's adherence to Nazism and to anti-Semitism in Germany (see below). There was no necessity in the falling-out between those mentioned. In my own case, I was propelled into working out my own intellectual path by the great example Marcuse himself set, for there was no pressure to become a "disciple," to follow slavishly the lines of the master's thought. Quite the opposite: As I mentioned, Herbert never assigned his own writings in the classes he taught and never even referred to them in class discussions. In fact the clear obligation that was laid upon us was to find our own way.

To this day I remain inspired, at both an intellectual and a deeply emotional level, by my experiences with Gutman and Marcuse (especially the latter, since I spent much more time in my apprenticeship with him). I revere them both as my chief mentors. I regard myself as being most fortunate in having had such opportunities, given my prior life-background and the low probability that, except for certain accidents of fate that I have detailed above, I would ever have had a chance to work with such thinkers over extended periods of time, and later to be regarded as a friend and colleague on an equal footing.

I should note that, since I grew up in a very poor family, I relied on scholarships and part-time work (first in an accounting office, later with teaching assistantships and a position as dorm counsellor) in order to finance my education. I spent 11 years as a full-time university student, and when I finally started my first job (to the great relief of my teachers, I'm sure), I had accumulated only one small loan that was easily paid off. This included seven years at two institutions with outstanding academic reputations, one private (Brandeis) and one public (UCSD). In my day the great University of California system was basically free of charge for graduate students. All this too has changed.

5) Following up on the previous question, Martin Heidegger was your teacher's teacher – at least Marcuse did study with him before turning his attention to Critical Theory. What do you make of the recent interest in Heidegger? Is his work still worth reading?

This is a very, very serious issue for me, and what I have to say will certainly displease some others. But it must be said.

Background: The nature and tone of the following exposition is related closely to my original formation as a young academic in the twin disciplines of history and philosophy. For history empirical detail matters; in fact it may be said that truth is to be found in the details (as opposed to the broad sweep used in the philosophy of history). Whether it is the bitter details about the fate of the murdered peoples of Europe during the Nazi era, or the use of federal troops to kill striking miners and terrorize their families in the 19th-century American West (Gutman was first a labour historian), details matter. I was also trained primarily in intellectual history, the history of ideas, which blends concepts and contexts in order to fully understand both, without dissolving one into the other. (Of all

philosophers Hegel comes closest to representing well this interaction.) So, for example, how can one understand Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the last (longest) section of which is entitled "The Kingdom of Fairies" (by which he meant churches), except by reference to the wars of religion in Europe? His contemporary Descartes, author of the *cogito ergo sum*, also wrote, "He lives well who stays well hidden," for he too sought to survive the era in which the lands of Europe were drenched in blood, as deadly debates raged about, for example, whether or not the communion wafer *literally* contains the body of Christ. Ideas matter, as anyone who reads Hitler's words should realize, as do the specific conditions under which their intended meanings may be actualized.

I'm not sure that Herbert was ever in a close "mentoring" relationship with Heidegger, although he did attend a fair number of Heidegger's seminars in the late 1920s. (If anyone was his long-term mentor, it was certainly Horkheimer.) There is useful background on this phase of Herbert's life in the wonderful book written by Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* [original German 1986, English translation 1994; see especially pp. 102-4]. As Wiggershaus shows, Herbert was then seeking "concreteness" in philosophy and thought at first he had found it in *Being and Time.* The book he wrote out of that period, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* [original German 1932, English translation 1987] includes a rather offhand acknowledgment at the end of the Introduction: "Any contribution this work may make to the development and clarification of problems is indebted to the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger."

Wiggershaus notes that Heidegger blocked the acceptance of this study as a basis for Marcuse's *Habilitation,* which in the German university system would have prevented him from being offered a position as a professor – had he not been preparing to flee for his life, it must be said. In that same year (1932), and clearly still engaged in his intellectual search, Herbert finally found what he had been looking for, in Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, then just published for the first time; his instantaneous recognition of its importance is contained in one of his finest long essays, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," published in English translation in *Studies in Critical Philosophy* – something that I regard as "must reading" still today for anyone interested in social theory.

The really important issue, of course, is what happened in 1933 and thereafter. On 30 January 1933 Hitler came to power; on 22 April 1933 Heidegger became Rector of the University of Freiburg im Breisgau; on 28 April 1933 the Reich law under which all Jewish professors in Germany were summarily dismissed came into effect; on 1 May 1933, on the very day when the Nazis arrested all of the union leaders in Germany and threw them into concentration camps, Heidegger took out a membership in the NSDAP, Hitler's party. His mentor Husserl had already been put on "enforced leave of absence," since the Nazi leaders in Baden Province had anticipated the promulgation of the Reich law; but thereafter Heidegger did nothing to help Husserl (a Jew who had converted to Christianity) or Husserl's son Gerhard, a professor of law elsewhere, who was also dismissed. Marcuse and his new colleagues at the Institute for Social Research had already fled, first to Switzerland and later to the USA.

I must explain my special degree of attention to the issue of Heidegger's Nazism. In terms of ethnic background I am of 100% German ancestry; although both of my parents were born in Brooklyn, each was a member of a German family that had recently immigrated to the United States. I myself was born four months after the beginning of

World War II, marked by the German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939. The world-historical crimes committed by the Nazis in that era – from the late 1920s until 1945 – are the responsibility of the German people as a whole, and they are a perpetual torment for me. Within Germany these crimes were first committed against the Nazis' political opponents and, once Hitler was in power, against homosexuals, the mentally ill, Gypsies, and others – above all, against German Jews, who composed no more than 1% of the population then; all of the members of these groups were categorized by the perverted expression, "life unworthy of life."* Once the Nazis were at war, however, they broadened their monstrous policies of extermination to include Poles, Russians, and others, but always with special attention to the Jewish communities.

[*See the Appendix at the end of this paper, "Death unworthy of death."]

The results are usually compiled in terms of numbers of nameless victims killed (perhaps as many as 17 million in total): At Yad Vashem a project is under way to find the names of all the Jews who were killed, and so far almost 4 million have been named. But one must never, ever overlook the "preliminaries": the protracted acts of terrorism, intimidation, torture and beatings, eviction from homes, looting and destruction of property (including synagogues and ancient religious treasures), forced marches, long suffocating transports in rail cars without food or water, the torment of children, being worked to death, imprisonment in ghettos, incarceration in hellish camps under conditions of constant brutality and extreme deprivation, gruesome "medical" experiments, the violation of bodies after they were removed from the gas chambers; or, above all, the moments of terror endured as the poison gas started seeping into the crowded enclosures, or spent awaiting the bullet in the back of the head while standing naked at the edge of pits and gazing down on the heaps of bodies of friends and relatives below, while watching infants being thrown into the air and then caught on bayonets or shot on the arc into the pit, to the accompaniment of raucous drunken laughter – one must never, ever forget these and other acts of the most appalling sadism that preceded the deaths of most victims, *millions and millions* of such acts, perpetrated one by one.

One struggles to comprehend how these savage crimes could have been committed in such numbers by so many different individuals brought up in a supposedly civilized nation – especially as we now know that the relatively few Germans who refused to participate in them went unpunished. The only comfort I have (small comfort indeed) is that modern-day Germany is the first and only nation in history to have made an honest effort to come to terms with its crimes and to seek to ensure that they are never forgotten, through public installations such as the vast "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe," composed of 2,711 concrete stelae placed above ground, with a huge underground museum beneath them, located in Berlin close to the Reichstag and the Brandenburg Gate (video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wgke23Hfuw.) – and many, many others. The contrast with Japan, which refuses to this day to acknowledge and show contrition for its equally horrendous wartime crimes, is striking.

The key point is that long before April 1933 no German of even average intelligence could have had any doubt about the character of Hitler and his party. Beginning in 1928 Nazi violence and intimidation directed against their opponents steadily escalated, and beginning in 1931 it was widespread, continuous, and vicious. This is the political grouping that Heidegger joined in May 1933. When he became Rector of his university the Nazis were in the process of replacing all such university officers in Germany with those known to support the party, and also of increasing their administrative powers.

Heidegger became a very willing participant in the explicit effort to destroy the autonomy of the universities and to "bring them into line" with Nazi policies generally.

There is a notorious German word – *Gleichschaltung* – used to characterize this process. (This is one of those words – *Endlösung* ["final solution"] is another – that have on the surface apparently "neutral" connotations but which acquired sinister meanings in practice, something that readers of Kafka will appreciate.) *Gleichschaltung* can be translated as "bringing into line," but has other connotations as well, which include "homogenization" (making things all the same) and "coordination." What the Nazis intended by it was straightforward: All institutions and practices in German society, encompassing the totality of personal, family, and societal life, were to be "infected" with, and thus brought into complete conformity with, Nazi policies. *Gleichschaltung* of course applied to the universities as well, and at Freiburg im Breisgau Heidegger was its first willing, indeed enthusiastic, instrument and champion.

I must pause here to address a key potential objection: Whatever Heidegger did in his practical life between 1933 and 1945 is one thing; surely his philosophical work was not, and could not be, contaminated by it. [This is the thesis of Julian Young's book, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* 1998.] (I leave entirely aside another issue, namely, the claims by Heidegger and his friends in the postwar period that he had not been a committed Nazi and that he actually had tried to protect his university's autonomy. Such claims are so implausible as to be ludicrous. The administrative officials accompanying the victorious Allied armies were not easily fooled; he was, quite properly, banned from participating in university affairs thereafter.) But what are we to make of the objection?

A plausible rejoinder to it can be constructed on the basis of the extensive quotations from Heidegger's course notes and speeches (including the original German texts) from the period 1933-35 that are found in Emmanuel Faye's book, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935* (original French edition, 2005; English translation, 2009). This material includes the notorious *Rektoratsrede* ("rector's address") he gave when he assumed that office. The point I wish to make about this abundance of evidence from Heidegger's own hand is, in fact, not made (at least in these terms) by Faye himself, and so is not dependent on the interpretation he himself puts on these materials. The point is that *Heidegger methodically carried out, entirely of his own volition, a policy of intellectual* Gleichschaltung *on his very own concepts and writings, including many key concepts used in his most famous work from 1927.*

In specific terms, Heidegger brought his own prior thinking into line with the key concepts of Nazi "philosophy," including concepts such as the *Führerprinzip* [leader-principle], *Rasse* [race], *Blut und Boden* [blood and soil], *Macht und Machtigkeit* [power, powerfulness], *völkish* [ethnic], *Seyn* [the archaic spelling of *Sein,* or being], and many others. The evidence for this contention is overwhelming and is found throughout the entire French or English text, as well as in the abundant quotations in the original German contained in the footnotes, of Faye's book. In other words, Heidegger turned himself into a Nazi philosopher beginning in 1933, in order to curry favour with the new political masters and to increase the scope of his own political influence. His keenness to serve is well indicated by an episode in September 1933, when through the good offices of the Bavarian Minister of Culture (a Nazi, of course) he was recommended for a chair at Munich that became vacant once the Jewish incumbent had been dismissed. He wrote to a correspondent (quoted in Faye, p. 48): "I am not yet bound [by this offer], but what

I know is that, to the detriment of any personal commitment, I must decide in favour of the task I will best serve the work of Adolf Hitler by accomplishing."

Alas, a faculty group at the University of Munich, charged with filling the chair, was not impressed by his candidacy and they put their views on record as follows (Faye, 48): "The faculty would also be loathe to suppress their suspicion that the effectiveness of his philosophy might prove to be less academic than inspirational, and especially that younger students, particularly, might allow themselves to be more readily intoxicated by the ecstatic language than instructed by the rather allusive deep content of that same philosophy." (I quote this because this was always my own reaction whenever, during my graduate philosophy years, I opened one or more of Heidegger's texts. Later I came across Adorno's *The Jargon of Authenticity* and decided that I could no longer justify trying to make sense out of what appeared to me to be the intellectual emptiness that is masked by this "allusive deep content.")

Emmanuel Faye's book includes in an Appendix the text of a secret-police [SD: *Sicherheitsdienst* or security service] report on Heidegger dating from May 1938 and attesting to his continuing political reliability and ongoing support for the NSDAP. I regard this as a credible evaluation, since the SD had a fair amount of experience in assessing the loyalty of German citizens! I also quite like the last part of the remark in Section 5 of the SD report, entitled Psychological Evaluation: "Character somewhat withdrawn, not very close to the people, lives only for his scholarship, does not always have a firm footing in reality." [Appendix A, pp. 325-9.] The 1938 SD report affirms that he has a current subscription to "the Nazi press." Thus almost certainly the daily edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, a scurrilous hate-filled rag filled with the vilest antisemitic rants, would have been delivered to his home; perhaps his wife Elfride, a longstanding Nazi supporter, discussed some of its contents and insights with him over leisurely family meals.

Heidegger was a loyal and committed supporter of Nazism throughout the war. He was an enthusiastic and willing enabler of the Nazis' destruction of the autonomy of German universities. He spent years bringing his own philosophical terminology into line with Nazi philosophy. And, while it is true that he could not have known about the appalling crimes being committed outside Germany during the war – although many first-hand accounts of them were circulating inside the country, especially from soldiers home on leave from the Eastern front (Heidegger had two sons serving there) – more than enough evidence stared him in the face each day about the criminal nature of the regime he supported politically. Concentration camps were scattered by the dozens across Germany, including in his own region. Heidegger was there for the regular disappearances, public humiliations and boycotts of Jewish businesses, street violence, and activities of the secret police; for the passage of the Nuremberg Laws (1935); for *Kristallnacht* (1938); and for the deportation of all remaining Jews still living in Freiburg to Camp Gurs in France on 22 October 1940 (the survivors were later sent to Auschwitz). If he needed more insight into the party and leader he supported, he could have read or reread *Mein Kampf,* and also listened to the ravings of Hitler, Goebbels, Streicher and other Nazi luminaries as their speeches were broadcast on the radio.

The most salient fact is that after the war, when what happened abroad had become well-known, he never once expressed in his own name and conscience the collective shame of the German people for the horrendous crimes committed by the Nazis in their name. Instead, he sought to cover up the truth about his willing participation and presented

implausible reasons and excuses for his behaviour. His own pathetic attempts at self-justification, found in his replies to letters addressed to him by Marcuse in 1947 (http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/40spubs/47MarcuseHeidegger.htm), including an outrageous comparison between the fate of the Jews under the Nazis with East Germans after the War, is sufficient proof of this fact.

Thus it is Heidegger's own activities that "compromise" the integrity of his thought.

What I mean by this statement may become clear if we compare Heidegger to other well-known academic figures who also continued to live in Germany between 1933 and 1945 (none of whom were Jews, of course). I have in mind great scientists such as the chemist Otto Hahn and the physicist Max Planck. Hahn refused to join the Nazi party and was dismissed from his leadership of two research institutes as a result; Planck, who also never joined the party, made a desperate (and failed) attempt to save his Jewish-born colleague, Fritz Haber, from being dismissed from his university position in 1933, including making a personal visit to Hitler. The case of the physicist Werner Heisenberg (who was also never a party member) is more complex, chiefly because of Heisenberg's postwar refusal to clarify his motives in visiting his great teacher, Niels Bohr, in Nazi-occupied Denmark during the war. [This is the subject of Michael Frayn's play, *Copenhagen.*] There is an exhaustive study of this issue in Thomas Powers' fine 1993 book, *Heisenberg's War,* including a reference quoting a highly reputable figure, Fritz Houtermans (a physicist imprisoned in both Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany who managed to survive both), who smuggled a message to his friends then in exile in the United States, telling them that he and Heisenberg and others were trying to slow down the development of an atom bomb in Germany.

This contrast justifies, in my view, the contention that by virtue of his many actions in supporting Nazism, including "homogenizing" his philosophical concepts with those of Nazi philosophy, *Heidegger turned his own texts into blood-soaked documents*. (This is the real blood of the millions of Nazi victims, not the idiotic metaphysical substance referred to in the phrase *Blut und Boden*.) He himself – and no one else – placed his thought at the service of vicious criminals and mass murderers, acting entirely voluntarily and under no external threat to his personal safety. This is to me a fair evaluation of the situation, based on a documented record of events.

What follows from this? In the first place, it is a matter of historical accuracy. But I would never suggest to anyone that they should not read those texts and draw whatever insight they can from them. I would only add the caution that they are compromised texts, by which I mean that their author placed them, deliberately and with full knowledge of the surrounding events, in a specific context – namely, the great Nazi crimes, which can be understood and memorialized but never forgiven – that is relevant to their meaning and significance in the history of philosophy. I would further suggest, to anyone wishing to undertake a reading of these texts for the first time, that they should be studied along with others relevant to that context. On this other list I would include titles such as Saul Friedländer's monumental two-volume study, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (vol. 1, *The Years of Persecution*, 1997; vol. 2, *The Years of Extermination*, 2007); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996); Ian Kershaw's celebrated two-volume biography of Hitler (1998, 2000); and the works by Heidegger from the period 1933-1935 extensively cited by Emmanuel Faye in his book. (See the list of such works in Faye's Bibliography, pp. 411-413, and note especially his contention that the "official" *Gesamtausgabe* of Heidegger's writings is not a critical edition, and

therefore later changes made by Heidegger in the postwar period to the original texts of some of his earlier writings and speeches dating from the Nazi era are not identified.)

6) The following question was drafted by Andrew Feenberg himself: "What do you think is the relation between the rational aspect of technology (the scientific side) and the cultural aspect (the meanings technologies take on in everyday life)?"

In my take on modernity I always refer primarily to modern science and only secondarily to technology, which is both derived from and enables scientific discovery. (It is certainly true that the public confronts this nexus mostly in the form of useful technologies, such as medicine, although science itself is sometimes publicly contested, most obviously in the case of climate science today.) In my later work I developed a distinction between *inventive* and *transformative* science; the former is science & technology as instruments of human power, the latter, as the promotion of Enlightenment values in social life. I have shown that in the great, original conception of this idea in a famous work by Condorcet (1794), there was supposed to be a productive, ongoing, dialectical relationship between the two aspects of science. But this interaction fell apart during the nineteenth century; the ongoing, unresolved tension between the two, in my view, leaves the fate of modernity hanging in the balance. This exposition can be found in my essay, "Modern Science, Enlightenment, and the Domination of Nature: No Exit?" in Andrew Biro's new (2011) collection, *Critical Ecologies: The Frankfurt School and Contemporary Environmental Crises.* In writing this essay I returned to themes in Hegel and Marx that I learned first at the feet of my master, Marcuse.

7) Among your students at Simon Fraser University were Ian Angus and Roman Onufrijchuk, both of whom were, in turn, among my own mentors. It was actually Professor Onufrijchuk who got me interested into media ecology and Canadian Communication Studies, and as far as I know, it was you who actually supported his decision to write his PhD dissertation on Marshall McLuhan. That was a courageous advice on your part, I think, at the time when McLuhan was still being stigmatized in academic circles and had not yet been re-discovered in light of the Internet revolution of the late 90s. Did you read McLuhan yourself as a graduate student in the 1960s? What's your opinion of his work, and why do you think he didn't get the respect he deserves?

Ian Angus continues to do important and original work, and I am proud to count him as one of my former students (at York, in the Social and Political Thought Program). As far as Roman's excellent doctoral work on McLuhan is concerned, it takes no courage on the part of a thesis advisor to sponsor this kind of effort; the courage is shown by the student in taking it on. I had never heard of McLuhan or communication theory until I arrived at the University of Regina for my first job, in 1968, and met one of the people there who had hired me, Dallas Smythe, who was dean of social sciences then but who was also, as is well known, a pioneer in Canadian communications studies. But I didn't really get very deeply involved in that area until I showed up as chair of SFU's department of

communication in 1980 and had to make an effort to get to know something about that field of study. I hate to disappoint Roman (and you, Laureano), but unfortunately I do happen to think that McLuhan was a shallow thinker, who knew mostly how to construct an attractive turn of phrase, and that whatever is of value in his approach was derived from Harold Innes.

8) I actually believe that there are important points of contact between McLuhan's system (with its emphasis on the senses, embodiment and mediation) and phenomenology (with its emphasis on experience, perception and meaning). Would you agree with this assessment? If not, why not? If yes, then do you think this connection should be further explored?

I fear that I have nothing useful to say in response to this question, since unfortunately I am unsympathetic to McLuhan as a thinker and I could never really get a handle on Husserl's phenomenology. Even with the eclectic range of interests that I have, there are limits.

9) One of your main areas of specialization and research interest is Risk Communication. How would you define this sub-field and in what ways did your background in critical theory inform and communication studies influence your contributions?

As an applied academic discipline, risk communication emerged in the U. S. about 1985. At first it was just an offshoot of marketing communications, which I knew from my work with Steve Kline and Sut Jhally that is published in our big book, *Social Communication in Advertising*; in theoretical terms it was derived from Claude Shannon's famous message transmission scheme. (I wrote about these developments in my Southam Lecture, "On the Vitality of our Discipline: New Applications of Communications Theory," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 16 (1991), pp. 291-305.) Later, largely under the influence of the great Paul Slovic, there developed a close connection between the sub-fields of risk perception (differences between experts and the public about how risks are perceived), risk communication, and decision analysis (how risk management decisions are influenced by the ways in which risks are perceived and communicated). There are now 25 years of academic publications in these three areas, with hundreds of titles, and there is no sign of a falling-off in this activity.

Apart from the purely academic aspects of this activity, there is a strong practical dimension with a clear public-interest benefit. If we look only at the matter of health risks, which cover hundreds of different major threats to the well-being of individuals and families, the public is strongly motivated to seek information on both likely causes and potential cures. But risks are tricky (serious illnesses such as cancer can be festering for years or decades without symptoms), the scientific apparatus needed to characterize them adequately is immensely complex (e.g., epidemiology and statistical probabilities), and both plain frauds and misleading information occur on a daily basis. As a result

people can make bad mistakes by relying on partial or fraudulent information; the best-known example has to do with vaccination (notoriously the MMR vaccine for children), where there can be complex trade-offs between risks and benefits.

In its best forms risk communication seeks to be helpful to the public in their search for reliable information when they are navigating the shoals of scientific and statistical complexities. (For one example see the website www.emcom.ca, which I helped to establish and which is devoted to helping the public understand the risks associated with chemicals known as endocrine disruptors.) In its worst forms it becomes a branch of corporate and governmental public relations, adding "spin" to issues in order to soothe public concerns about health and environmental risks. The tension between these two forms is ongoing.

10) Let's change the subject. The back cover of your recent book *Hera, or Empathy: A Work of Utopian Fiction*, reads as follows: "Ever since Plato, philosophers have been imagining future utopian societies. In more recent times, many of these fantasies have been about the doings of scientists because modern science fascinates us with the prospect of changing every aspect of our lives. Hera is one of twelve sisters genetically modified by their neuroscientist parents to have superior mental faculties. During their teenage years the sisters were forced to flee for their lives from the remote Indonesian village where they were born. Later, Hera challenges her father's right to have engineered his children, using the Biblical story of creation against him. But one day she discovers that the sisters' genes contain modifications that their parents didn't intend." The following question was drafted by Professor Roman Onufrijchuk: "Your utopian novel appears to have marked a change in the trajectory of your work, a real departure. Is this the case? Or, is there a link in your mind connecting your classic *The Domination of Nature* work on risk, and the apparent "turn" to utopian fiction? *Hera* is part of a trilogy; when are you expecting publication of the other volumes?"

Clearly – perhaps understandably – Roman stopped reading before he got to about page 500 of *Hera*, where the connection to my first book, *The Domination of Nature*, is alluded to. I started this new project for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I have always been interested in the small but important body of literature known as utopian fiction. That literature is an integral part of political theory, which is my only true academic specialization; and, through the great work which invented the genre, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), it links back to antiquity's best-known work in philosophy, Plato's *Republic.* [A book that has been in print for almost five centuries must have something going for it.] And of course the idea of utopia was mentioned frequently by both Marcuse and Horkheimer in their essays of the 1930s.

Both More's work and a later equally significant one, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1625), are discussed in *The Domination of Nature;* Bacon is especially important because he linked the project of fantasizing about a better future to the enterprise of modern science, and others followed him along this route thereafter. Between the 16th and the 19th centuries there were many important works in this genre, in both English

and French; some of the noteworthy 19th-century French thinkers are discussed in Frank Manuel's wonderful book, *The Prophets of Paris.*

Inspired by Plato's example, the modern genre of utopian fiction was usually cast as a series of dialogues in which the advantages of a radical reordering of human society were explained to neophytes by a traveller who had actually witnessed or participated in its realization – which was assumed to have already occurred "somewhere" at a hidden location on this earth. This is why I structured by own foray in this area as narratives oriented around a series of key dialogues among participants in the experiment.

It was during the 19th century that optimism about a better future began to be linked to industrialism and machine technologies (the evident promise of reducing the burden of labour and increasing leisure time). And yet, at the same time, early in this same century there arose a darker vision about the negative aspects of industrialization and mechanization, beginning with a great essay by Thomas Carlyle, "Signs of the Times" (1829); I analyzed this turn in my essay, "Sublime Machine," which can be found in my collection, *Under Technology's Thumb* (1990, still available from McGill-Queen's University Press). The last great "optimistic" work in this tradition was William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), where Morris compromised by presenting a future based on machine-assisted craft labour rather than the large-scale factory system.

By the early 20th century the tide began to turn toward the negative or pessimistic scenarios, beginning with E. M. Forster's short story (1909), "The Machine Stops." Ten years later the Russian naval engineer Yevgeny Zamyatin had completed the first full-length anti-utopian novel, *We* (its first publication was the English translation of 1924), and from Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) right through to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the negative side came to predominate. What is known as "science fiction" is a quite different (but related) genre; there the primary emphasis is on technologies that do not now exist, and the location of action is often somewhere else in distant planets in our galaxy or beyond. There are many exceptions to these generalizations, of course, that represent crossovers between the two genres; I think especially of authors such as Philip K. Dick, Isaac Asimov, and Ursula Le Guin.

I had a specific reason for trying to pursue the themes first discussed in my book *The Domination of Nature* in an entirely new way, namely an attempt to revive the genre of utopian fiction. First, I had refined my conception of the key historical dynamic in modern history, interpreting it as the internal dialectic between two different forms of significance of modern science, namely, operational (inventive) and transformative [see above, #6]. This internal dialectic remains "hidden" to social actors – it develops "behind their backs" (Hegel); it is revealed through conceptual analysis, but such a revelation cannot automatically be converted into *praxis.* So, my second step was: Imagine that this tension is manifested (actualized and made concrete) in the real "bodies" and reflective awareness of some specific social actors: Thus Hera and her sisters, whose bodies and minds are engineered by their scientist-parents. What I had in mind was that these individuals would quite literally embody the dialectical tension within themselves; then the final step was to imagine a sequence of accidental events in their lives that bring this latent truth into consciousness, through self-reflection, so that they begin to act in real life in accordance with their own understanding of this truth.

Thus the paradox that Walter Benjamin first identified in 1928 – the paradox that is at the centre of my conceptual analysis in *The Domination of Nature* – is actualized. As

Benjamin formulated it, the fulfillment of the hidden task buried within the historical project known as the domination of nature is the becoming aware by human actors of the need to achieve “mastery over the mastery of nature.” This is explained by Hera to her various interlocutors during the course of the intense dialogues, which build upon each other in succession, that are set out in volume one (*Hera, or Empathy* 2006) and volume two (*The Priesthood of Science* 2008) of my planned trilogy.

11) What other projects are you working on these days?

My new short book, my eleventh, was published in November 2010: *The Doom Loop in the Financial Sector, and Other Black Holes of Risk* (University of Ottawa Press) presents the idea of catastrophic or black-hole risks, where it is difficult or impossible to estimate the ultimate downside (negative) consequences of certain types of events. My primary example is the global financial crisis that began in 2007/8 and remains very much in play (it may last for many more years). I am tracking the latest episodes in this matter through short blogs posted on my website and regular Tweets.

I hope to have completed the manuscript of *Hera the Buddha,* the third and final volume in my utopian fiction series, in twelve months or so from now.

Appendix to Section 5: "Death unworthy of death"

Emmanuel Faye's book contains the following passage from one of Heidegger's four so-called "Bremen Lectures" written in 1949, entitled "The Danger." (Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* [2005]; English translation by Michael B. Smith, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 305; the original German, from vol. 79, p. 56 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, is quoted in the footnote section on pp. 406-7.)

> Hundreds of thousands die *en masse.* Do they die? They perish. They are put down [*umgelegt*]. Do they die? They become supply pieces [*Bestandstücke*] for stock in the fabrication of corpses. Do they die? They are liquidated unnoticed in death camps. And also, without such – millions in China sunken in poverty perish from hunger. But to die means to carry out death in its essence. [*Sterben aber heißt, den Tod in sein Wesen austragen.*] To be able to die means to be able to carry out this resolution. We can only do this if our essence desired [*mag* (the past tense of *mögen*): translation changed] the essence of death. But in the middle of innumerable deaths the essence of death remains unrecognizable. Death is neither empty nothingness, nor just the passage from one state to another. *Death pertains to the* Dasein *of the man who appears out of the essence of being* [italics in original: the spelling *Seyn* is used]. Thus it shelters the essence of being. Death is the loftiest shelter of the truth of being, the shelter that shelters within itself the hidden character of the essence of being and draws together the saving of its essence.
>
> This is why man can die if and only if being itself appropriates the essence of man into the essence of being on the basis of the truth of its essence. *Death is the shelter of being in the poem of the world.* To have the capacity for death [*vermögen*: translation changed] in its essence means to be able to die. Only those who can die are mortals in the apposite sense of the word.

Is it not fitting that those who while alive were deemed to be a form of "life unworthy of life" should, at the brutal termination of their existence in the extermination camps, be deemed to have suffered a death unworthy of death?