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## The Ontological Dimension of Violence in the Thought and Practice of Martin Heidegger

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Słowa kluczowe: administracja, Heidegger, ontologia, przemoc, technika, *Walten*

### Abstract

This article investigates two levels at which violence is disclosed in Heidegger's thought and practice: the ontological, as the structure of *physis*, and the ontic, as concrete administrative practice within the university. In *Basic Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929–1930), Heidegger introduces *Walten* as a novel ontological term, originally conceived as an innovative translation of Aristotelian *physis*, typically rendered as “nature.” Over time, however, *Walten* becomes interwoven with related terms such as *durchwalten* and *verwalten*, expanding its semantic range to include domination, coercion, governance, and administration. In this sense, *physis* is not simply the sum of entities within the world but the force enabling beings to appear as beings. *Walten* thus designates a prevailing ontological sway that structures human attunement to Being, most decisively in and through language. This ontological conception finds an ontic correlate in Heidegger's role as rector of the University of Freiburg, where motifs associated with *Walten* were enacted within the sphere of academic governance. The article therefore uncovers both the ontological dimension of violence and the problematic manner in which this structure was translated into the institutional and political domain of university administration.

Violence is an ambiguous and multifaceted phenomenon. Within phenomenological analyses, it is too often and too hastily reduced to the exertion of force upon another's will—an attempt to overpower and subdue it (Filek, 2010, p. 6). At the same time, violence is almost invariably qualified as an unequivocal evil (Drwięga, 2024, p. 55). Our collective thinking about violence has been shaped largely by its media portrayals, where it appears in extreme and sensationalized forms: a family annihilated by one of its own members; horrific crimes committed by prison inmates; a teenager driven to suicide by online harassment. Yet, by focusing on such extreme horrors—highlighted on the front pages of newspapers and framed in quantitative rather than qualitative terms—we may in fact fail to grasp the true nature of violence. A rational philosophical analysis might reveal, perhaps to our surprise, that beyond the spectacular and grotesque, there exists also a silent, nearly imperceptible violence—dispersed over time and not always immediately qualifiable as evil (Filek, 2010, p. 7). What if, moreover, life itself were to contain an intrinsic element of violence—such that, to live, one must either exercise violence, or at the very least accept it? After all, the passage of time leads inevitably to aging and death—phenomena we do not willingly embrace. In this light, the efforts of medicine or the discipline of a healthy lifestyle might be interpreted as justified forms of violence against the adverse forces that resist life.

These preliminary reflections are not meant to relativize violence, but rather to redirect our attention toward less obvious forms in which it manifests. Our concern is not merely with lesser degrees of violence, but with a kind of violence that does not arise from intentional human action. Instead, it seems to be embedded in the very structure of reality itself—even in the natural world. In this essay, I aim to uncover this fundamental stratum of violence, which I shall call ontological. I am not proposing an ontology of violence, but rather an uncovering of the ontological dimension of violence—that is, its manifestation in the very foundations of Being.

Our guide in this inquiry will be Martin Heidegger. He not only diagnosed the dictatorship of the anonymous “They” (*das Man*)—“this is how one thinks, feels, and lives” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 114)—but went further, uncovering structures of violence at the very core of the natural world. This insight, in turn, enabled him to legitimize violence (another critical issue in the philosophy of violence) within the context of concrete institutional action—in his case, the administration of a university (Knowles, 2020,

p. 126). The aim of this article is thus to identify and discuss two fundamental levels at which violence becomes manifest in Heidegger's thought and praxis: the ontological level, as the structure of Being itself, and the ontic level, as the administrative practice of the university. Even when subjected to well-founded critique, Heidegger's analyses may significantly expand our understanding of the phenomenon of violence.

## 1. Outline of a Phenomenology of Violence

Violence first becomes intelligible where it is not yet a concept but an experience. It interrupts the familiarity of the lived world and fractures the elementary confidence with which one moves among things and others. What is broken is not only the body, nor even primarily the body, but the texture of relations: trust, proximity, recognition, the tacit expectation that the other will allow me to remain myself. Violence, therefore, does not merely add a painful event to an otherwise stable reality; it reorganizes reality. It changes what can be expected, what can be risked, and what can be said. In this sense, violence is disclosed as a disturbance of worldhood itself.

This disturbance is inseparable from embodiment and temporality. Violence inscribes itself in the body not only as injury but as a heightened exposure, a forced vigilance, a dispossession of ease. It also alters time: it accelerates, arrests, or repeats it; it makes the future precarious and the past intrusive. The experience of being violated thus reveals a peculiar kind of compulsion—an imposed passivity that cannot be reduced to a mere psychological state, because it affects the very way the world is given. Only on the basis of such phenomenological evidence does it become legitimate to ask whether violence is merely one class of actions among others, or whether it indicates a more fundamental dimension that belongs to existence as such.

Before turning to Heidegger's thought, it is worth situating this experiential core within the broader landscape of violence and highlighting the diversity of its forms and manifestations. Only against this background does the claim about an ontological dimension of violence become justified. As previously noted, violence—though universally condemned and intuitively recognizable—remains a phenomenon with a deeply complex and multilayered structure. In public discourse and everyday thinking, it is most often reduced to spectacular instances of physical aggression—those easily

depicted, named, and condemned. A serious philosophical analysis of this phenomenon, however, requires us to move beyond simplified categories and the aesthetic of media images toward a reflection that understands violence not as a static fact but as a dynamic, event-like act, constituted by the relationship of at least two centers of will (Filek, 2010, p. 6). Violence, therefore, cannot be understood merely as physical force directed at the body, but rather as an act aimed at overpowering another's will—subordinating it, breaking it, excluding it, or reshaping it. What is primarily violated in violence is freedom—not as an abstract value, but as the concrete possibility for a subject to exist according to one's own convictions. In this sense, violence appears as a negation of another's freedom—and, simultaneously, as an unconscious recognition of that freedom, for only a free being can be subjected to violence. The very condition of violence is thus the possibility of resistance (Levinas, 1969, p. 18). Where resistance is absent, we encounter total domination—a condition that, paradoxically, may prove all the more destructive the more imperceptible it becomes and the more it takes on the appearance of voluntariness.

Contemporary analyses of violence therefore compel us to expand its concept to include less obvious forms: psychological, emotional, symbolic, linguistic, structural, or epistemic violence may not involve brutal physical means, and yet they can deeply violate the integrity of another. So-called theoretical violence—enacted through instruments of knowledge, cultural codes, rationalizations, and definitions—can also lead to objectification and subjugation (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 97–116). Particularly troubling are forms of violence that do not present themselves as violence at all, but operate under the guise of care, education, upbringing, or even therapy—when in reality, they represent an attempt to impose an existential project upon another subject (Žižek, 2008, pp. 8–9).

In this context, violence cannot be considered solely from an ethical or social perspective. It reveals an ontological dimension—not merely one form among others, but rather a primary and constitutive horizon (Drwięga, 2024, p. 54). Ontological violence does not result from human actions but is an immanent feature of human existence. The human being inevitably experiences a form of overpowering that arises not from without, but from the very structure of being: the passage of time, aging, illness, suffering, and death are events that occur independently of our will, and yet they occur within us and to us. This experience bears the mark of primordial violence:

it lacks a recognizable agent, and yet it strikes the subject in the most radical way (Heidegger, 1962, pp. 174–176).

In contrast to other forms of violence—interpersonal, institutional, symbolic—ontological violence is not intentional, but nonetheless possesses the structure of existential compulsion. Whereas social violence presupposes a subject and a goal, ontological violence unfolds on the level of fundamental human experience: being exposed to irreversibility, loss, and transience. This dimension marks a limit-point of human self-understanding, revealing that violence is not merely something one does or avoids, but something that constitutes the very condition of human existence (Knowles, 2020, p. 133).

Reflecting on ontological violence is necessary not only because of its universality and inevitability, but because only it enables a deeper understanding of all other forms. Physical, psychological, and institutional violence appear, in this light, as secondary responses to a prior experience of powerlessness. Violence inflicted upon others is often an unconscious reaction to a more primordial violence that resists identification: the violence of being, of time, of meaninglessness. What appears as a destructive act against another may, at its root, be a compensation for existential helplessness—a gesture of despair in the face of one’s own finitude (Butler, 2004, pp. iii–iv).

From this perspective, ontological violence not only deserves attention—it should become the starting point of any serious reflection on violence as such. It shows that violence is not merely an ethical problem, but also an ontological and phenomenological one. Only through its analysis can we grasp the full meaning of overpowering as a phenomenon inscribed in the human condition. Ontological violence constitutes the matrix within which all other forms of violence find their place and significance—as evasions, as responses, as imitations, or displacements of the original experience of being overpowered by Being. At the same time, an ontological approach to violence enables a more adequate ethical evaluation of concrete acts of violence. Only against the background of the awareness that all freedom exists in the shadow of ontological violence can we truly discern the boundaries and conditions under which instrumental violence—aimed at the good of another—is ethically justifiable, not by its effectiveness or the intention of the agent, but by the responsibility assumed for the consequences of acting within a world already marked by fundamental violence (Agamben, 1998, p. 10).

Violence, then, is not primarily an act of force but an existential event. Its analysis requires a mode of thinking that reaches beyond moral and social categories to touch the very core of human existence. Ontological violence does not erase individuality; on the contrary—it reveals that individuality, as contingent and fragile, is constantly threatened, and it is precisely this vulnerability that makes it the most profound locus of violence. For this reason, reflection on ontological violence is not a supplement to sociological or ethical analysis, but the very condition of their possibility (Nancy, 1993, p. 85).

## 2. Ontological and Ontic

The two levels of analysis of violence in Heidegger's thought, outlined in the introduction, are not merely rhetorical. From the outset, the question of Being (*Sein*) constituted the "guiding idea" of Heidegger's philosophy, and the very premise of *Being and Time* arose from the experience of the "forgetfulness of Being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*). However, the turn toward the thinking of Being should not be understood as a transition to the study of a new object hitherto neglected, for Being is not a being (*Seiendes*); it does not "exist," it is no thing, and thus cannot become an object of inquiry in any straightforward manner. It is therefore no surprise that the central question for Heidegger became one of method: how is the thinking of Being possible at all? How is it experienced in philosophical reflection?

The very first sentence of *Being and Time* states that the question of Being "has today been forgotten" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 21). It is the task of thinking—whether called philosophy or metaphysics—to retrieve this question. Metaphysics, as Heidegger puts it, is a questioning that "goes beyond beings to inquire into their beingness, in order to bring them as a whole back into intelligibility" (Heidegger, 2008, p. 95). Yet, metaphysics has traditionally asked not about Being itself, but about beings as a whole—about what is, rather than what it means to be. As Heidegger's thought evolved, particularly in his later period, he increasingly distanced himself from the metaphysical tradition, recognizing that it is within metaphysics that the oblivion of Being manifests most clearly. For one cannot answer the question "Why are there beings at all, and not rather nothing?" without first understanding what it means for something to be. Being, in traditional metaphysics, fills the

empty concept of beingness, yet metaphysics does not draw closer to the question of Being—it actually distances itself from it. It lacks the capacity to think Being as such. Since for Heidegger, “Being and thinking are the same” (a formulation influenced by Heraclitus), the search for Being must be undertaken within the history of thought itself—by reading in thought the extent to which it thinks that which is to be thought: namely, Being (Heidegger, 2000, p. 124).

This is what Heidegger calls “fundamental ontology.” As he famously writes: “Any ontological inquiry, no matter how rich and tightly knit a system of categories it possesses, remains fundamentally blind and a perversion of its innermost intention, if the meaning of Being is not clarified beforehand with sufficient explicitness and if this clarification is not understood as its fundamental task” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 31). Ontology must therefore become the basis of metaphysics and enable its radical reinterpretation. Heidegger offers two visions of metaphysics: the first, which merely thinks beings without awareness of the ground of their being, and the second, which seeks to think Being itself. The first must be overcome by the second for metaphysics to fulfill its true vocation.

With the discovery of the so-called ontological difference—the distinction between Being (*Sein*) and beings (*Seiendes*)—Heidegger introduces two levels of the disclosure of reality: the ontological and the ontic. Whereas the ontic pertains to beings and their properties, the ontological compels us to ask about the very way in which beings possess those properties—that is, about Being itself. Yet one must avoid the “hypostatization error,” that is, the tendency to treat the ontological and ontic as two distinct entities. Even when metaphysics deals with beings as such, it does not inquire into its own essence. The essence of metaphysics is something other than metaphysics itself: it asks not about beings, but about Being and its meaning. Still, in asking about beings, metaphysics always already operates within an implicit experience of Being. It examines beings in the light of Being (for there is no other way to understand them), but it does not inquire into what this light itself is. “Whenever metaphysics responds to its own question about beings as such, it is preceded by the presentation of Being. It proclaims Being necessarily and thus constantly. Yet it does not let Being itself speak, because it does not think Being in its truth, and does not think truth as unconcealment, nor unconcealment in its essence” (Heidegger, 2008, p. 93). This reveals an important relation between ontology and the ontic—not one of separation,

but of mutual implication. Thus, violence must be considered not only from both perspectives, but also in terms of the interplay between them.

Ontological violence, as it is used in what follows, does not designate a moral category, nor does it name a specific class of actions or agents. It should also not be confused with existential negativity as such, understood as finitude, vulnerability, or exposure. Rather, the term refers to a structural dimension of Being itself, insofar as Being discloses itself through forms of constraint, compulsion, and irreversibility that no subject can suspend or neutralize. In this sense, ontological violence names neither an ethical justification nor a metaphysical principle, but a condition under which existence is compelled to appear and to endure.

This conceptual distinction is crucial. To speak of ontological violence is not to hierarchize forms of violence or to relativize historical, political, or institutional harm by appealing to a deeper “ontological” level. On the contrary, the point of the distinction between ontological and ontic violence is to preserve the specificity of concrete practices and responsibilities, while at the same time accounting for the fact that such practices unfold within a horizon that is not ethically neutral. Ontological violence does not excuse ontic violence; it renders it intelligible as a possibility that emerges within the way Being itself is disclosed.

The focus of the present analysis will be the period between 1930 and 1936. These were particularly fertile years in Heidegger’s philosophical development, bringing about significant shifts in his thinking. They were also the years of *Gleichschaltung* and Heidegger’s intense involvement in bureaucratic and administrative functions. While his theoretical reflections brought new ontological insights, his administrative activity made manifest the foundational structures of violence within concrete institutional practice (Knowles, 2020, p. 126). Accordingly, this article aims to uncover and interpret the two planes on which violence is revealed in Heidegger’s thought and life: the ontological, as a structure of Being, and the ontic, as its administrative embodiment within the university.

### 3. *Physis* as Walten

Heidegger’s ontological investigations, initially undertaken through the analytic of *Dasein* (*Sein und Zeit*), gradually shifted—after his so-called

*Kehre*—toward a tracing of the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*), and in particular the obscuration and loss of the so-called “Great Inception” (*der Große Anfang*). Heidegger cautions against conflating this inception with the origins of European metaphysics: the latter—represented by Plato and Aristotle—signals, in his view, the very closure of what was once an originary unveiling (Heidegger, 2000, p. 12). During this transitional period, Heidegger explores a constellation of primordial Greek terms: *physis*, *aletheia*, *lethe*, *nous*, *mythos*, *poiesis*, *technē*, *doxa*, and *pseudos*. Through his often idiosyncratic interpretations, these concepts mark out an ontological topography in which Being can be thought not as an object, but as an event (*Ereignis*).

At the center of this rethinking stands the concept of *physis*, which Heidegger understands as the primal manifestation of Being itself. *Physis*, he insists, is not to be equated with nature in the modern, mechanistic sense, but rather denotes “the emerging abiding sway” (*das aufgehend verweilende Walten*) (Heidegger, 1991, p. 206). In this interpretation, *physis* is not a static noun but an active event: it names the process of emergence, the upsurge from concealment, and the dynamic process by which beings become present. As Heidegger writes, “*physis* is the fundamental Greek word for Being itself, in the sense of self-unfolding presence” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 14).

Heidegger traces two etymological roots for *physis*: one from *phyesthai* (to grow, to arise), suggesting an unfolding toward the fullness of essence; the other from *phainesthai* (to appear, to shine forth), suggesting a process of radiant manifestation. He insists that both roots are essentially intertwined (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 14–16). Thus, he famously defines *physis* as “the emerging sway that abides” (*das aufgehend verweilende Walten*) (Heidegger, 1991, p. 206).

In *physis*, beings emerge not by accident but as gifts—given, as it were, from out of nothingness. Such a view collapses traditional dualisms: there is no longer a firm boundary between nature and art, the physical and the spiritual, the natural and the historical. All these realms are enveloped by *physis*, even divinity itself. Heidegger polemicizes against the Latin translation of *physis* as *natura*, calling it a violent misreading of the original Greek sense. “It was not natural processes,” he writes, “that first led the Greeks to experience *physis*, but rather a poetic-thinking experience of Being itself” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 16). Accordingly, *physis* is better understood through analogy with *poiesis*, the emergence of form through creative struggle. Drawing from Heraclitus, Heidegger stresses that *polemos* (strife) is the

generative force of world-disclosure. *Polemos* is not war in the human sense, but a primordial strife whereby opposites unfold, allowing entities to find their essence, place, and unity. “The world comes to be through confrontation” (*Im Auseinandersetzen west die Welt*) (Heidegger, 2000, p. 67). This struggle does not destroy unity—it constitutes it. Unity (*logos*) is only possible where multiplicity arises through tension.

It is within this interpretive framework that Heidegger introduces the concept of *Walten*, first in his *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (1929–30), as an ontological term capable of translating *physis* (Heidegger, 1995, pp. 113–118). Over time, *Walten* becomes surrounded by a semantic constellation: *durchwalten*, *obwalten*, *umwalten*, *verwalten*, *überwältigen*, *vorwalten*, *Gewalt*, *Vergewaltigung*, and *Erwalten*. These terms gesture toward ruling, prevailing, overpowering, administering, and even violating. The German verb *walten*, historically rooted in Old High German *waltan* (8th century), evolved to mean “to rule,” “to have dominion,” “to govern,” but also “to care” (*sorgen*) (DWDS, 2025). Its semantic field thus oscillates between *Macht* (power), *Gewalt* (violence), and *Sorge* (care).

This ambivalence is not accidental. *Walten* is not merely domination; it names the inner law of *physis*, the elemental force of Being itself. Unlike *techné*, which produces artifacts, *physis* is the unmediated unfolding of what is. In this light, Heidegger reveals an ontological structure of violence (*Gewalt*): *Walten* is not a human power, but a force into which humans are attuned through poetic thinking and linguistic resonance (Knowles, 2020, p. 132).

This ontological interpretation of violence has been subjected to a fundamental critique in twentieth-century continental philosophy. Emmanuel Levinas, most notably in *Totality and Infinity*, argues that any attempt to ground alterity within the horizon of Being risks reducing the Other to a moment of ontological order, thereby neutralizing the asymmetry of responsibility that precedes ontology itself (Levinas, 1969). From a different angle, Jacques Derrida has shown that violence is not an accidental distortion of metaphysical thinking but is structurally inscribed in its very gesture of conceptual totalization, as he famously argues in *Violence and Metaphysics* (Derrida, 1978). Read in light of these critiques, *Walten* cannot be treated as a philosophically innocent description of the dynamics of Being: its ontological power is inseparable from the risk of normalizing *Gewalt* by

presenting it as an intrinsic feature of reality rather than as a disruption that calls for ethical resistance.

Language (*Sprache*) itself becomes the privileged locus of *Walten*. As Heidegger writes in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, language is “what rules in the relation of humanness to the twofold [*Zwiefalt*] and sustains it” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 123). This “twofold” may be understood as the ontological difference between Being and beings. Authentic language, spoken poetically (*dichtend*), speaks according to and through the sway of Being. To speak authentically is not to name domination, but to allow it to shine forth untrammelled. Poets—and thinkers—are tasked with translating this dominion into clarity without violating its mystery (Heidegger, 1971, p. 126).

This primal sway is a force to which humans must attune, even when technological forces strive to overcome it. In the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger speaks of “the struggle to free the ungraspable” (*kämpferische Freigabe des Unbegreifbaren*) (Heidegger, 2014, p. 29). On the threshold of his rectorate, he ties this poetic guardianship of Being to an administrative task: “The philosopher is never one who grounds; rather, he projects ahead and stands there, clarifying questioning and aiming at the rigor of the concept, thus administering (*verwalten*) the space-time of free poetizing toward the grounding of man in earth–work–struggle and descent” (Heidegger, 2014, p. 82). This passage should not be read metaphorically. It ushers us into the second plane of *Walten*: not only the ontological sway of physis, but the ontic sphere of administrative practice—*Verwalten*. The very vocabulary of governance, organization, and dominion is rooted in the ontological *Walten* of Being itself. Thus, the task of thinking must also unfold through the bureaucratic, institutional, and historical dimensions of reality. Heidegger’s engagement with *Verwalten* during his rectorate years illustrates how *Walten*, far from being an abstract philosophical principle, becomes incarnate in praxis.

The relation between *Walten* and *Verwalten* should therefore not be understood as a logical derivation or an ontological necessity. *Walten* does not “produce” administrative practices, nor does it prescribe political or institutional action. Rather, it provides a semantic and symbolic reservoir within which practices of governance, organization, and control can acquire philosophical legitimacy and appear as responses to an allegedly deeper historical or ontological mandate. This ontological perspective does not, however, suspend or relativize responsibility for ontic forms of violence. The fact

that violence can be analyzed as a structural dimension of Being does not absolve concrete practices of domination, exclusion, or destruction from historical and ethical judgment. Ontological analysis can illuminate conditions of possibility, but it cannot replace accountability for actions that occur in specific institutional, political, and historical contexts.

#### 4. Governance as a Philosophical Practice

The German philosophical tradition, perhaps more than any other current of Western philosophy, is a distinctive product of the university system. Herbert Schnädelbach succinctly captures this in *German Philosophy 1831–1933*: “German academic teaching is bureaucratic teaching [*Beamtenwissenschaft*]” (Schnädelbach, 1984, p. 23; Knowles, 2020, p. 125). In other words, German university instruction, including philosophy, has always been bound up with a specific form of administration—namely, the bureaucratic structure of the professor as a civil servant. German philosophy is a philosophy administered according to specific rules, a discipline that flourished within the particular context of administrative practices. And Heidegger, despite his ambitions to reform the German university, remained an unwavering product of that very system.

From April 1933 to April 1934, Heidegger held a significant bureaucratic post as *rector-Führer* of the University of Freiburg. Archival material from the Rectorate confirms that he was a conscientious, detail-oriented, and efficiently functioning state official, capable of negotiating among rival factions within the regime. Moreover, Heidegger consistently emphasized his position within the cultural politics of National Socialism and developed a research agenda deeply entangled with Nazi promotion of regional studies (*Heimatkunde*) and Nazi philhellenism. Throughout the Nazi period, philosophy as a discipline was notably active in the administrative restructuring of the German university system. Three universities were brought into *Gleichschaltung* with philosophers as rectors: Heidegger in Freiburg, Ernst Krieck in Frankfurt and Heidelberg, and Hans Heyse in Königsberg. In Berlin as well, numerous philosophers took part in educational governance, including Alfred Baeumler. Among the many ambitious professors seeking to influence the administration of higher education in Nazi Germany, Heidegger arguably enjoyed the greatest postwar reputation. It is therefore a legitimate question:

did Heidegger possess a philosophy of administration (*Verwaltungsphilosophie*)? Was administration for him a philosophical practice?

Illuminating this question are the first four volumes of Heidegger's philosophical notebooks, the *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*), which reveal that Heidegger conceived the administration of the university as a philosophical task, one tied to the exercise of power and to the key term *Walten*. Although Heidegger sought to control the narrative regarding his relation to National Socialism and to deflect attention from his administrative role (*Verwaltung*) at the university—what he once called the “violence of administration” (*Gewalt der Verwaltung*)—the *Black Notebooks* nevertheless offer crucial insights into what we might call his “philosophy” of administration.

The *Black Notebooks*, however, cannot be treated as a transparent window onto “deep ontology.” They are also a rhetorical site of self-interpretation, where Heidegger fashions a vocabulary capable of redescribing concrete institutional and political involvement in categories of destiny, historical necessity, and “essential” violence. Precisely for this reason, the conceptual density of terms such as *Walten*, *Gewalt*, and *Verwaltung* must be handled with methodological caution: they may articulate an ontological claim, but they may also function as a strategy of legitimation and, retrospectively, of self-exculpation. In what follows, I therefore read Heidegger's administrative lexicon both as philosophically operative and as historically situated discourse—one that can illuminate the translation of ontological motifs into institutional practice without dissolving responsibility into the supposedly impersonal sway of Being.

This critical perspective has been articulated with particular force by Cezary Wodziński, whose book *Heidegger and the Problem of Evil* offers one of the most sustained analyses of the entanglement between Heidegger's ontology and the problem of historical violence. Wodziński argues that the appeal to the history of Being risks transforming concrete acts of exclusion, domination, and destruction into moments of an allegedly impersonal ontological destiny, thereby suspending the question of responsibility in favor of a quasi-metaphysical narrative of error and necessity (Wodziński, 2016). While my approach does not adopt this diagnosis in its strongest form, Wodziński's critique remains crucial insofar as it exposes the philosophical danger inherent in any attempt to read political or institutional practices directly from ontological structures. Precisely for this reason, the present analysis treats the relation between *Walten* and administrative governance

not as a deduction or justification, but as a problematic translation of ontological motifs into practices that remain fully subject to historical and ethical judgment.

There is no doubt that Heidegger attached specific hopes to the emergence of the National Socialist state. These hopes concerned—in general terms—the overcoming of modernity and the creation of conditions for a new beginning, a proper realization of the history of Being (*Seynsgeschichte*). In his visions, Heidegger employed many of the same terms as the National Socialists: race, nation, history, power, Germany. However, he sought to endow these terms with meanings different from those circulating in the ideological discourse, believing he had arrived at their authentic essence. Initially, he may have naively believed that the practical force of National Socialism would facilitate their true realization, without fully grasping its destructive character. The *Black Notebooks* do not refute Karlfried Grönn's or Otto Pöggeler's conclusion that Heidegger harbored the naive hope of being “the leader of the leader” (*den Führer führen*) (Pöggeler, 1987, chap. 8). While they do not contain new sensational revelations about Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism, their novelty lies in a more sustained attempt to situate Nazism within the broader ontological-historical context of Being. At the outset, Nazism appeared to Heidegger as an opportunity, a way out of the impasses into which modern philosophical thought—and modern civilization with it—had maneuvered itself. He believed that only the Germans, like the Greeks of old, were capable of initiating a new beginning for human thought, one that could liberate Europe and the world from the ruinous effects of metaphysical thinking and the narrow ideologies of rationalism and liberalism (Wolin, 1990, pp. 96–108).

Heidegger believed that the National Socialist revolution would transform the German university into a “space-time of free poetizing” (*Raum-Zeit des freien Dichtens*) (Heidegger, 2014, p. 82), a site for the restoration of “the ruling world of the German” (*die waltende Welt des Deutschen*) (p. 55), and would re-establish the abyss between speaking to power and speaking with power by reinstituting what he termed “the violence of simplicity” (*Gewalt der Einfachheit*) (p. 46), thus preserving the “silent essential violence of things” (*die Stille Wesensgewalt der Dinge*) (p. 47). The preservation of this dominion, the violence of Being, was not only the task of thought (ontology) but also of administration (philosophical praxis).

In the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger describes his rectorship in terms of *Gewalttat* (act of violence) and *Verwaltung* (administration). He characterizes National Socialism itself as an act of violence, justified insofar as it was a response to a prior act of violence: “a brutal cowardice before Being” (*brutale Feigheit vor dem Sein*) (Heidegger, 2015, p. 376). This gives rise to the intriguing problem of how Heidegger translated the ontological structure of *Walten* into the concrete political practice of university administration as a form of ontic violence.

Although Heidegger later claimed before the Denazification Committee that friends persuaded him to assume the rectorship, the committee’s report indicates that Heidegger had been in contact with the Ministry of Culture in Berlin weeks before his appointment. Following the enactment of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service on 7 April 1933, *Gleichschaltung* began in German universities, and Heidegger’s task as rector was to purge the University of Jews and politically undesirable faculty. He adapted to his bureaucratic role with remarkable zeal. Documents signed on 19 April 1933 show him energetically implementing antisemitic measures at the professorial level (*Lehrstuhl*). By 28 April 1933, when he issued a decree requiring deans to “fully and clearly implement the measures of 7 April,” almost all Jewish professors had been removed.

In the sections of the *Black Notebooks* devoted to his rectorship, Heidegger describes the period in ontic terms: “A time is breaking in which all powers and institutions, all strivings and standards will be melted into a single whole” (*Eine Zeit bricht an, in der alle Gewalten und Einrichtungen, alle Strebungen und Maßstäbe eingeschmolzen werden*) (Heidegger, 2014, p. 178). Key terms here are *Gewalten* (powers) and *Einrichtungen* (institutions), which must, of course, be properly governed.

Heidegger also reflects on the term *Führerwille* (will to lead), contrasting it with *Geltungstrieb* (drive for dominance). While the dominant leader seeks recognition and praise, the one who truly leads finds fulfillment in the task itself. Yet the qualities Heidegger ascribes to the drive for dominance are striking: “It requires: administrative solidity, negotiating dexterity, lightness before great questions and tasks, joy in enterprise, and a certain ability to run with the wolves” (p. 139). Though one might be tempted to read Heidegger as opposing *Geltungstrieb* in favor of *Führerwille*, he seems rather to describe an ideal administrator as someone who integrates both (Bam-bach, 2003, pp. 78–80). Contemporary witnesses, like Adolf Lampe—an

economist from Freiburg, Auschwitz survivor, and member of the Denazification Commission—observed that Heidegger defended his positions with “fanatical and terrorist intolerance,” invoking the political strength of the party in his defense.

Heidegger understood that any movement aiming to revolutionize institutions and structures would require capable administrators—a theme explicit in his infamous rectoral address, “The Self-Assertion of the German University” (27 May 1933) (Heidegger, 1990). This interpretation is confirmed by a post-rectorship reflection, where Heidegger deepens his philosophical engagement with administration: “World-worlding occurs in the world-constituting, opening, coordinating violence of administration—care” (*Welt-weltung geschieht in der erweltenden, eröffnenden füğenden Gewalt der Verwaltung – Sorge*) (Heidegger, 2014, p. 211). By linking administration with care (*Sorge*), one of the central concepts of *Being and Time*, Heidegger points to the ontological complexity of administration within his thought. Administration opens the space of dominion by forcefully eliminating obstacles to its dominance. In other words, for administration to triumph, it must clear a space and remove impediments through a force requiring the dominance of administrative will.

In the fourth volume of the *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger reflects on the failure of the rectorship, again emphasizing his administrative capacities. A recurring phrase throughout is the “true error” (*der eigentliche Fehler*) of the rectorship. He offers a variation: “People will not soon grasp what was truly decisive in my 1933 decision, which nonetheless turned out to be a mistake—not for the reasons just mentioned, but in regard to the possibility within National Socialism, and to the moment and suitability of a thinker for administrative action in an institution of public education” (Heidegger, 2015, p. 127). Heidegger laments the timing and wonders whether, as a thinker, he was unsuited to the task—though archival evidence hardly supports such self-doubt. In retrospect, Heidegger judged his rectorship as an administrative failure. In any case, National Socialism disappointed him. But what exactly did he expect?

## Conclusions

Even if the concept of *Verwalten* (governing, administering) did not attain the status of a fundamental term in Heidegger's thought, *Walten* most certainly did. It seems justified to juxtapose and compare these two notions based on Heidegger's own philosophical practice. What, then, do these analyses reveal about the nature of violence itself?

First, for Heidegger, violence has primarily an ontological meaning and should not be attributed any immediate axiological connotation. It is not about war, aggression, or mutual combat, but about a force that manifests within Being itself—making it visible. In this sense, violence can even be considered positive: becoming aware of it enables a more attuned comportment toward reality. *Logos*, for Heidegger, is the gathering of opposites—but would such gathering be possible without first recognizing alterity itself, that is, *polemos*? At the heart of reality lies differentiation, which always implies opposition. *Physis*, when understood as *Walten*, is the force that maintains harmony through sovereign sway. Belonging-together and opposition coalesce. In such an experience of Being, conflict and strife (*polemos*) are constitutive elements (Heidegger, 2000, pp. 65–67). This demonstrates a deep Heraclitean influence, especially in the affirmation that “war is the father of all things.” However, these concepts should be interpreted in their original Greek context—not simplistically as a struggle for survival, nor dialectically as truth emerging from tension. *Polemos* pertains to Being itself, designating an original, originary “concealing unconcealment.” *Physis*, then, is a “polemic harmony” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 74).

If anything approaches the modern understanding of violence—characterized by a negative axiological valence—it would be, for Heidegger, *technē*. Technology embodies the mindset of domination. In a 1937 lecture, Heidegger elaborated the contrast between *physis* and *technē*: “This is what *technē* means: to apprehend beings as arising from themselves in the way in which they show themselves (...), to organize oneself [*sich einrichten*] within beings as a whole through production and institutions. *Technē* is a mode of proceeding against *physis*, not yet in order to overpower [*überwältigen*] or exploit it (...), but rather to maintain the sovereign sway [*Walten*] of *physis* in unconcealment” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 145). Technology configures nature as totality—not as an object, but as *Bestand*, a standing-reserve of resources, a stockpile of energies (Heidegger, 1977, pp. 17–22).

Although Heidegger later referred to his rectorship as a mistake (*Irrtum*), one must ask whether this judgment carries only empirical significance—concerning a historical episode—or rather an ontological significance, involving a rejection of the idea of philosophy as administration, as a “bureaucratic science” (*Beamtenwissenschaft*). Yet *Irrtum* can also be read as a retrospective rhetorical device that shifts the focus from responsibility for concrete decisions to the alleged mismatch between a thinker and an institution. Heidegger felt responsible for “safeguarding” the fundamental structure of *Walten* in praxis, which became for him *Verwalten*. Philosophy is not limited to a disinterested search for the truth of Being; instead, the truth as *aletheia* possesses a structure that calls for practical safeguarding, adaptation, and attunement. The philosopher-administrator serves this truth, akin to a poet who speaks with force (*mit Gewalt*) (Bambach, 2003, pp. 192–195). Heidegger’s remarks on the supposed unsuitability of the philosopher for administrative activity seem to be merely a defensive strategy. He deeply believed that philosophy ought to be pursued in the university mode, that is, within the bureaucratic-administrative machinery of the modern university.

The postwar fate of Heidegger may offer further insight. These remarks on the contemporary university are intended not as a sociological diagnosis or an empirical analysis of academic institutions, but as a philosophical reflection on structural continuities in the language and logic of administration that shape how such institutions understand and legitimize themselves. Heidegger was profoundly attached to his reputation and invested great effort into rehabilitating it. Yet he was an exception in receiving the support of internationally recognized scholars. Nearly all German academics involved in National Socialism were expelled from academic life after the war. If Heidegger’s rehabilitation succeeded, it may be because something in his thought continues to satisfy the inner demands of university philosophy. What made Heidegger so valuable to postwar universities? Why did he prove indispensable to our “administered thinking” (*verwaltetes Denken*)—to borrow a phrase from the Frankfurt School (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002, p. 232)? Perhaps, indeed, *Verwalten* is alive and well in the contemporary university.

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