Essential Others, Aberrant Others: Heidegger's Nationalism and the Logic of Essence

The relation of Martin Heidegger's extreme German-nationalist politics with his thinking remains one of the most troubling issues for contemporary continental philosophy and critical theory. Undoubtedly one of the most transformative and influential thinkers of the 20th century, his legacy can no more be ignored than it can be accepted. Most commentators argue that the task of reading Heidegger today is that of salvaging his thinking from his politics, whether through disentanglement, reading against the grain, or revision. Against this, I argue that the situation is far more unsettling: Heidegger's nationalist politics are part and parcel of what is most timely in his thinking, namely a critique of the mendacious, imperialistic logic of universalism and an insistence on the embeddedness of thinking within singular relations of history, place, and language. Wrestling with this entanglement of what is most repugnant with what is most promising in his thought forces us to confront the on-going threat of violence and chauvinism in ontologies of relationality, singularity, and difference.

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