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The Intellectual Background of Reiner Schürmann's Heidegger Interpretation

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The work of Reiner Schürmann's which has received the most intense reception has been his monumental book on Heidegger. Both Emmanuel Levinas and Hans-Georg Gadamer have praised it warmly,[1] and it is regarded as an astonishing work, combining both a thorough knowledge of Heidegger's thought and an original and intriguing philosophical claim. In the following, I shall concentrate primarily on this philosophical claim and not on the question whether Reiner Schürmann's reconstruction of Heidegger is sufficiently philologically accurate.[2] I do not harbor any doubt in this latter respect, but this lack of doubt on my part does not prove anything, for my knowledge of Heidegger is infinitely less deep than his. My concern will go to the philosophical ideas which he tries to defend, not to determining whether they are genuinely Heideggerian or more representative of Schürmann's own position. In section one, I shall expose what seems to be essential to me in these ideas. In section two, I shall criticize and try to confute them. If not cogent reasons, personal and social causes must have led, as I see it, Schürmann's quest in a wrong direction. In section three, I shall analyze these causes, since I believe that they are symptomatic of the best minds of our time. Finally, in section four, it will become possible to evaluate those ideas in more positive terms. In fact, it is always more difficult to see the greatness of an enterprise rather than its errors, and even with regard to the latter one should recognize that certain errors are indispensable and much more important than plain truisms. It is with great grief that I criticize a dead friend with whom I would prefer incomparably more to have this discussion openly. But, besides being an exellent philosopher, Reiner was an extremely noble and fine human being and he would accept the two maxims I have decided to follow in this lecture: *Amica veritas, ergo legendus Reinerius*; and *Omnium hominum amicorum magis amica veritas ipsa.*

I

Although I shall quote Schürmann's book in the English translation by Christine-Marie Gros (done in collaboration with the author),[3] it is necessary at least to cite the title of the original: *Le principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir*.[4] The English version renders it harmless by inverting the order of the title and subtitle, adding 'being' to 'acting', and trying to avoid the manifest contradiction in the French title by interpolating a 'to' between 'principles' and 'anarchy', thereby giving the impression that anarchy is a condition occurring after the principles and is no longer itself a principle. This operation is significant, and we should ask whether it really solves the logical problem or is only a verbal device which diverts the reader's attention away from a contradiction that, albeit no longer in the title, is still present in the book. In any case, the book is dedicated to the consequences Heidegger's thought has for the concept of acting, one of the central concepts of practical philosophy. Since Heidegger himself not only never wrote an ethics, but even rejected such a demand as a misunderstanding, Schürmann's project is of particular interest. If it is successful, one of the most frequent objections to Heidegger, namely, that he (as most philosophers of this century) failed to elaborate a practical philosophy, could be answered by pointing out that Heidegger's overcoming of philosophy in general could not leave untouched the regional branches of philosophy, but that nevertheless his way of thinking did address in a new and perhaps deeper way the problems dealt with by traditional practical philosophy. Indeed, Schürmann's main claim is that Heidegger's work is a prelude to a new era of history which is characterized by the fact that it lacks any principle at its base. Whereas the former phases of human culture were determined by different principles which structured the essential traits of the single epochs, the series of epochal principles as a whole is now coming to an end.

> In the answers that they have traditionally brought to bear on the "special" question "What is to be done?" philosophers have relied, in one way or another, on some standard-setting first whose grounding function was assured by a "general" doctrine, be it called ontology or something else. From this doctrine, theories of action received their patterns of thought as well as a great many of their answers. Now, the deconstruction of metaphysics situates historically what has been deemed to be a foundation. It thus closes the era of derivations between general and special metaphysics, between first philosophy and practical philosophy.[5]

Insofar as after this act of deconstruction the anchoring of praxis in a first principle becomes impossible, we can speak of an-archy.

Schürmann insists on the differences between his own concept of anarchy and that of Proudhon and Bakunin who performed "as metaphysical an operation as has ever been,"[6] for they tried to replace one principle by another, namely, authority by rationality. In general, utopianism has nothing to do with Heidegger.[7] In the new Heideggerian framework not only the quest for a single principle withers away, but also the relation between action and thought is inverted and subverted. "Heidegger *makes action deprived* of *arche the condition of the thought which deconstructs the arche*."[8] No longer is thought grounding action; a new concept of action—a "chaotico-practical" one[9]—supplies the foundation for the new type of thought.

After having sketched his main systematic thesis, Schürmann develops in the second section of his introduction some hermeneutical ideas. Particularly important are the rejection of the division of Heidegger's work into two parts, and the proposal that Heidegger be read backwards, from the end to the beginning. Against the *opinio communis* which regards *Being and Time* as his main work, Schürmann favors the later works as shedding more light on the earlier ones than the other way round. One of the major faults of *Being and Time* is "the still entirely insufficient conception of technique."[10] If this insufficiency is taken into consideration and Heidegger is read backwards, Heidegger's compromising political declarations of the 1930's will also appear in a more favorable light. Since, in 1933, Heidegger still believed that technology could be modified and redressed, he could embrace the National Socialist movement as a seeming alternative to Russia and America. "It is only towards the end of the thirties that Heidegger discovers the understanding of technology that will remain his: the force of totalitarian and monolithic enframing, to which he will continuously oppose a manifold thinking of presencing as manifold. Then, 'the global imperialism of technologically organized man' will encompass 'Americanism' as well as 'man who wills himself as a people, breeds himself as a race and finally empowers himself as lord of the earth'."[11]

The first part of the book, after an introduction, treats the "Genealogy of Principles." A principle, according to Schürmann, manifests itself both as a foundation that provides reasons and as an authority that dispenses justice—as *principium* and as *princeps*. Ultimate reasons are unquestionable, but only for a certain time during which they are accepted without being doubted. Their time, however, is always finite: "They have their genealogy and their necrology. They are epochal. They establish themselves without a blueprint and collapse without warning."[12] Schürmann exemplifies his ideas about the function and the reversal of principles by describing the mental patterns

that dominated the Inca culture and were destroyed by the Spanish conquest. (The initial chapter devoted to Cuzco, the puma-shaped city, are particularly refreshing, insofar as therein Schürmann frees himself much more than elsewhere from Heideggerian jargon.[13]) But this is only one example: in general every epoch is characterized by a code elevated to the rank of a principle which opens a field of intelligibility. A first principle can be brought to thought only when it loses its importance for the culture. Therefore, only the reversals of history make it intelligible. "The focus that an epoch ranks supreme—the code that holds together the activities and the words in which it recognizes itself—comes into sight in the crises that are fatal to its rule."[14] Such crises, such phases of interregnum between the rules of different principles, are always fascinating, but they have a particular interest for our time since it is itself such a phase. "What we are attempting to understand is the caesura that marks the end of the metaphysical epoch."[15] The essence of a past historical constellation becomes most clearly intelligible through its philosophy; and it displays itself most intensely in the political realm. Whereas the traditional principle-oriented metaphysics, particularly Aristotle's *pros hen*-relation was "totalitarian,"[16] its deconstruction finally recognizes our mortality which the defense mechanisms of metaphysics had tried to forget. Heideggerian thinking—which, unlike knowledge, "does not rest on proofs or accumulated evidence"[17]—is fundamentally anti-humanist. Here Schürmann sees similarities to Marx and Nietzsche. But his Heideggerianism is still more radical: man "appears even less as history-making, as a person responsible for his acts, as the initiator of a new order of things, in short, as a moral agent."[18] The epochal economies of presencing "articulate themselves in us in unforeseeable ways."[19] Nevertheless he regards Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics as a continuation of the Enlightenment. "Pointing out the representations fictitiously endowed with ultimacy is the apogee of the Enlightenment."[20]

The economies of presencing—the different ways in which presencing manifests itself in single epochs—are shown to be the very issue of phenomenology in the second part. Schürmann accepts Heidegger's claim to be the legitimate heir of phenomenology, even if he turned away from the Husserlian phenomenology of transcendental consciousness. Existential phenomenology as fundamental ontology, the phenomenology of historical *aletheia*, and finally the topology of the "event," are the three steps of his overcoming the subjectivist limits of Husserl's phenomenology. Whereas in *Being and Time* the "constitution of truth" is still partly understood as *genitivus objectivus*, after the *Kehre* it is grasped as *genitivus subjectivus*: it is not we who constitute

truth, but rather we are constituted by it.[21] However, *Being and Time* is already characterized by what Schürmann admires most in the late Heidegger—the lack of anything normative. Even the phenomenology of *Mitdasein* "can actually 'ground' opposed political theories,"[22] and this means that it cannot ground anything at all.

The third part is devoted to the various concepts of origin. Schürmann deals with the Greek, Latin and German words *arche*, *princeps/principium*, *Anfang/Ursprung*. The Greek *arche* is understood both as cause and as telos of the productive-poietic act. The Aristotelian *Physics* being interpreted as the *Grundbuch* of western philosophy, Schürmann reproaches Aristotle with having generalized "modes of thought appropriate to only one region of phenomena—artifacts."[23] The differences between *arche* and *principium* consist in an eclipse of time particular to the Latin concept.[24] No longer human production, but the divine government of the world becomes paradigmatic in medieval philosophy. Furthermore, the *arche* becomes a principle of propositions—as in Leibniz. In the German words *Beginn*, *Anfang*, and *Ursprung* the temporal difference forgotten in the Latin version of the concept reappears vigorously. Indeed, Schürmann's point is just "a historical-ahistorical dialectic"[25] and an overcoming of "the opposition between diachrony and synchrony—or between left-wing Heideggerians, who read in him only deconstruction, and right-wing Heideggerians, who read in him only the Poem of Being."[26] He himself distinguishes between that which is "original" and that which is "originary." The first concept designates the phenomenon of historical beginning, the second the phenomenon of ahistorical beginning. Only the simultaneous consideration of the original origins and the originary origin of presencing can do justice to Heidegger's enterprise.

The fourth part of the book is certainly the most demanding and innovative. In order to gather the originary from the original Schürmann develops the program of a historical deduction of the categories of presencing. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger is less and less interested in individuals and more and more in collectivities. He understands that everydayness itself has a history. The history of the principles of the different philosophical positions is at the same time a history of being itself. However, Heidegger does not expect

> any legitimation from a *narrative* (as is the case in myths). The history of being-there is narrated only for the sake of discovering the categories of its unfolding. Those categories, the conditions for history, are gathered in a second-order discourse which, although called *Seinsgeschichte*, history of being, no longer tells any story. It is a discourse *about* that unfolding and its story.[27]

Thus Heidegger's project avoids both the Scylla of a quasi-theology of history and the Charybdis of historical positivism.[28] The table of the categories reconstructed by Schürmann consists of three classes with six categories in each. He distinguishes six prospective, six retrospective, and six transitional categories. Whereas he believes these three classes to be exhaustive, he does not deem exhaustive the categories included in them. To which one may add that the correspondences which he draws between the single categories of the three classes are quite arbitrary. For completeness' sake, let me name them all: *eon*, *phusis*, *aletheia*, *logos*, *hen*, *nous* are the prospective; will to power, nihilism, justice, eternal recurrence, transmutation of values/death of God, overman the retrospective; ontological difference/word and thing, "there is"/favor, unconcealment/event of appropriation, epoch/clearing, nearness/fourfold, corresponding/thinking the transitional categories. Obviously, the prospective categories stem from an interpretation of Presocratic thought and the retrospective ones from an elucidation of Nietzsche's philosophy—the beginning and the end of metaphysics. To be more precise, one should say that the retrospective categories "speak *formally* about Nietzsche, but *materially* about technology," technology being "metaphysics come to fulfillment."[29] However, every category is valid for the entire history of being.[30] This is true also of the retrospective categories; Schürmann speaks of "the curious status of an a priori that operates regressively."[31] The transitional categories are particularly important; without them Heidegger's enterprise could not be distinguished from contemporary French deconstruction.[32] But these categories do not at all guarantee anything positive. Heidegger is not "dreaming of a better world, a world to come, and waiting for it. [. . .] The 'saving essence' of technology does not hold any automatic salvation in stock for man."[33] This depends on the extreme formality of the transitional categories. "The concept of event (if it can be called a concept) is, in a sense, the one most devoid of content that is conceivable."[34]

The consequences of this analysis for the concept of action are drawn in the fifth part. Schürmann recalls that already in *Being and Time* Heidegger criticizes the classical ontologies for arising from inauthentic existence. This charge may be rash, but

> it indicates first and foremost that the retrieval proper of the being question is bound to fail unless it is preceded by what he then calls an *existentiell* modification. This requirement is less a summary condemnation of the Ancients than a statement of method unlike almost any ever made by philosophers—apart, doubtless, from Plotinus and Meister Eckhart.[35]

Also, for the later Heidegger a radical change in our behavior is indispensable in order to grasp the question concerning being. Thought presupposes a practical *a priori* as "a loosening of the reifying hold"[36]; but Schürmann concedes that Heidegger has not been very specific "about the precise actions that are to allow for an entry into the event."[37] In any case, we have to learn to let be, we should give up the goal-directedness of our actions, interpret as responsible those acts "that follow the direction or grain of a given economy,"[38] protest against "busy-ness," and no longer be ruled by principles, but by the event of presencing. As for ethics, it amounts to an accounting enterprise; as such, the search for it should be abandoned.[39] The violence of the technological age cannot be removed by recommending "some program calculated to neutralize the offensive of the will: such calculus would only enforce the offensive."[40] According to Schürmann's final piece of advice, we are to do in our public life explicitly "what we always do and cannot help doing: conforming to presence as it comes about, to the event of presencing—but henceforth without the fiction of some ultimate stabilizing ground."[41]

II

To begin with the last sentence, I must confess that as the result of a large book about a great philosopher, Schürmann's advice seems somewhat too modest to me—even if the other most influential thinker of our century agreed with Heidegger on this point.[42] And not only is it too modest; it is self-contradictory to criticize the idea that philosophy is mainly and essentially a normative discipline. For either this critique presupposes that something is wrong with our common normativism, in which case it is obviously itself normative and not descriptive; or it describes what we do anyway, namely, conform to the event of presencing. In the latter case, it is superfluous, and, furthermore, does not fit the facts. The normative dimension cannot be eliminated; any metaphysics which tries to do so is doomed to fail, although we have yet to see that an absolute dualism between Is and Ought cannot be the last word either. Heidegger's and Schürmann's antipathy towards normativism is, of course, a consequence of the type of thought to which both belong, radical historicism. Of course, Schürmann denies that Heidegger is a mere historicist;[43] and I am willing to concede that Heidegger's genius consists in having elaborated a metaphysics of historicism. (Of course, he would resent my calling him a metaphysician; but I see no reason to adopt his peculiar vocabulary when dealing with

other philosophers or even with him. 'Metaphysician' will designate a person who thinks about being, not necessarily a person who does it in the tradition of the metaphysics from Descartes (or even Plato) to Nietzsche.) As a metaphysician, Heidegger transcends historical positivism, but ultimately his aim is to found historicism in a deeper way. In a certain way, this is already true of *Being and Time*, and therefore I do agree with Schürmann that the division between Heidegger I and Heidegger II is misleading. Despite important differences, there is a fundamental continuity between the early masterwork and the later writings; this continuity centers around the dialectic of metaphysics and historicism. Almost every really innovative conception consists in a synthesis of different traditions which had ignored or even fought each other until that moment. This general statement also holds good for *Being and Time,* which combines at least four types of philosophy. There is, first, the transcendental tradition founded by Descartes and Kant, and continued by Heidegger's mentor, Husserl. Husserl had elaborated even more than Kant the temporal dimension of our consciousness; this temporality was to become the main subject of *Being and Time*. But temporality in man necessarily includes mortality, a topic of great existential relevance, which, however, had been ignored by the transcendental philosophy prior to Heidegger, and had been left to a type of reflection which was not foundational, as, for example, that of Kierkegaard. The combination of the topics of transcendental temporality and mortality was possible only after the immanence of consciousness particular to Husserl's later phenomenology had been overcome: for death inevitably transcends the stream of consciousness. This new attitude towards the world into which *Dasein* was reinserted seemed to justify the claim Heidegger made in *Being and Time*, namely, that he was addressing the question of being for the first time. Transcendental philosophy, existential pathos, and ontology seemed to merge in a fascinating way in this famous book. But we have still not named the fourth, and, in my eyes, decisive philosophical school present in *Being and Time*. I have in mind, of course, Dilthey's historicism, which is dealt with in the fifth chapter of the second part, "Zeitlichkeit und Geschichtlichkeit." Without exaggeration, one may state that already in *Being and Time* Heidegger is closer to Dilthey than to Husserl and at least to what the tradition had regarded as acceptable ways of studying ontology. In fact, one can hardly overrate the impact historicism had on German intellectuals in the first (and, I am afraid, also in the second) half of the twentieth century. Whoever did not get a solid education in mathematics or science (as Heidegger did not, despite his having begun with the study of mathematics) could hardly avoid the dominance of historicism in a country which may claim to have elaborated many of

the methods of modern historical and philological research. Heidegger understood that the Husserlian concern for temporality, linked to a foundationalist conception of philosophy, could become useful to obtain a deeper understanding of history.

However, in the course of the application of subjective temporality to history, much changed. First, Heidegger realized more and more that history presupposes an intersubjective starting-point. No longer a single individual, but a nation, a culture became his concern. This change can be linked without difficulty to what has been called (by the second Frankfurt School, that of Apel and Habermas) the shift from the second paradigm of philosophy, which was focused on subjectivity, to the third one, which is based on intersubjectivity. Secondly, Heidegger comes to reject the whole project of transcendental philosophy. It is not the structures of finite subjectivity which determine truth; on the contrary, it is something anterior to both subjectivity and intersubjective communities which manifests itself to them. Here, certain similarities to the tradition of objective idealism are manifest. Now, it is certainly a merely terminological debate whether we are still willing to call Heidegger's thought after the turn 'transcendental' or not; Schürmann does so against Heidegger's own use of the word, as others have done with regard to Hegel, who also rejected the concept as being too subjectivistic. Nevertheless, there are radical differences between Heidegger's and Hegel's critique of subjectivism. For even if Hegel wanted to overcome the subjective idealism implicit in Kant's version of transcendental philosophy, he was still interested in a system of the presuppositions of all possible validity claims, whereas Heidegger abandons even that enterprise. Therefore, in my eyes it is much more meaningful to call Hegel's philosophy transcendental than Heidegger's after the turn. Schürmann himself writes: "Clearly transcendentalism has come a long way from thought as regulating the knowable through subjective *principles* to thought as regulating the knowable through epochal *inceptions*."[44] In fact, according to historicism, there is not one system of the presuppositions of validity claims with one generating principle. There are many such systems: every culture and every historical epoch has its own.

No reasonable and knowledgeable person will deny that different cultures have had different norms and codes in accordance with which they solved their problems. However, I am not at all sure that every such code has had at its base one principle only. Most cultures have acknowledged an irreducible plurality of principles. The monism ascribed by Schürmann to all epochs and philosophies anterior to ours is a historically falsifiable claim. This is particularly true of Aristotle, who in Schürmann's study becomes a monist, which he certainly was

not. Since Schürmann likes to quote the *Physics* as the *Grundbuch* of western metaphysics, let me recall the first book of this work. It is here that Aristotle confutes the monism of the Eleatics as being incompatible with the natural facts, and opts for a dualism or even trialism of principles. And with this I have spoken only of physical being on which, for example, the principles of ethics can certainly not be grounded. No less absurd is the thesis that the model of *poiesis* dominates the whole thought of Aristotle, that he has wrongly generalized the categories of the regional ontology of *techne*. *Theoria* and *praxis* are independent forms of our relation to the world, and, in the whole of Aristotle's system, they are clearly superior to *poiesis*. It is, of course, not difficult to understand why Schürmann, in his Heidegger interpretation, provides such a forced reading of Aristotle: Schürmann is, like Heidegger, deeply interested in establishing a continuity from ancient metaphysics to modern technology. We have thereby identified another structural problem in Heidegger's and Schürmann's interpretation of Europe's intellectual history. On the one hand, the different epochs and their principles are assumed to follow each other in discontinuous fashion; on the other hand, an expression such as "from the Platonic Good to today's consumer goods"[45] suggests that from Plato to Macy's the same objectifying and reifying attitude is at work. Certainly, there is a hidden reason to this recognition of continuity, without which it is not easy to understand how a reflection about history in general would be possible.[46] Nevertheless, the carelessness with which Heidegger and Schürmann speak about the steps that have finally led to modern technology is hardly tolerable. It may be that Plato's metaphysics was a necessary presupposition of the technological transformation of the world; however, a sufficient presupposition it was not. This has to be urged, even if great respect is due to Heidegger's effort to understand technology as the fate of our time. Schürmann even goes so far as to regard this fate as the starting-point of Heidegger's transcendental reflection: "Just as transcendental criticism in Kant starts from a fact, that of experience, and asks the question of its *a priori* conditions, so does Heidegger's historical criticism. Its starting-point is the contemporary phenomenal order, technology as the age without a beyond."[47]

But the main objections to Heidegger's and Schürmann's construction of history do not concern their interpretation of single events. The central criticisms have greater philosophical depth. First, one cannot help feeling that Heidegger and Schürmann are always confusing genesis and validity.[48] The concepts mankind elaborates of the principles may and do vary; but this does not imply that the principle itself or the principles themselves change. Modern ideas about nature have a genesis; but to have shown such does not yet confute the claim modern sci-

ence may make of describing nature in an objective, timelessly valid way. To be frank, I myself harbor strong doubts about such a claim; but valid arguments are necessary in order to confute it, and the mere narration of a story about our scientific ideas will not do.

Secondly, it is not at all clear how radical historicism can make any validity claims at all. This problem concerns both the hermeneutical and the metaphysical efforts of our authors. If every philosophy is determined by the principle which Being has just decided to manifest to the epoch to which that philosophy belongs, how can the philosopher of one epoch understand the philosophy of another? Is Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle more than the epochal way in which the twentieth century must see Aristotle, not more or less objective than, say, the medieval interpretation of Aristotle? And how can Heidegger's thought avoid being valid only in his own epoch? If the principles of an era cannot be argued for or against, but are born and die in accordance with the whims of Being, what guarantees that our principle is somehow more reasonable than an earlier one? Schürmann recognizes that "when Heidegger is asked to account for the injunction his own thinking obeys, he can . . . do no more than point to our historical site by which it is 'bound to the essential destiny of being' . . . ."[49] Nevertheless, Schürmann rejects the charge of decisionism against Heidegger, since it is not human decisions that change the history of principles.[50] But is a non-human, topological decisionism really better than a subjectivist one? Leibniz seems right to me when he declares the voluntarist God to be nothing else than an omnipotent tyrant[51]; and I fail to see how Heidegger's Being can avoid the same reproach.

Thirdly, given the premise of historicism, the question of how we are able to grasp the voice of Being in our epoch remains. Heidegger does not have any method at his disposal and even rejects all attempts to search for such a method as expressions of a search for certainty which ought to be overcome. But does this mean that we shall deliver ourselves over to Heidegger's interpretations without any critical distance? Does Heidegger's critique of modern subjectivism not end up in the crudest version of subjectivism conceivable?[52]

One last point directed against Heidegger's and Schürmann's particular version of historicism concerns the claim that after the rule of the epochal principles the rule of anarchy has set in. This claim is remarkable for its implicit tendency to overcome the whole of history; it stands in strange contradiction to the historicist pathos, but it is known from another mainstream philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as in Marxism, after the diverse forms of class rule, the classless society is expected to bring history to an end, so too, according to Schürmann, an anarchic situation will replace all earlier efforts

which focused on principles. Despite his critique of utopianism, Schürmann hopes that the new principle of anarchy will yield not less, but more freedom than Marxism could ever promise. Of course, it is not at all clear how Schürmann is able to ground his conviction that the anarchic principle should be the last of a long series. I am afraid that it is even difficult to show that this alleged principle is a principle at all.

Indeed, the intrinsically contradictory nature of the principle of anarchy is all too obvious. For, as the French title of the book rightly suggests, it is a principle, i.e., it is something which is at the base of a whole culture. But although the negation of principles functions as a principle, insofar as it determines at least a large part of the code of post-technological society, it claims not to be one: the principle thus contains a contradiction between form and content which renders it not better, but worse than all the others. Ancient, medieval, and modern thought at least acknowledged the unavoidability of principles; the post-technological age believes that it no longer needs principles, but it remains entrapped in them. It is, indeed, a true sign of principles that one cannot escape them, that one presupposes them when one fights against them. This structure is timeless; and indeed not much can and need be added to what Aristotle developed in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics* regarding the principle of non-contradiction. It is curious that Schürmann so often quotes the *Physics* and so rarely the *Metaphysics*, and he wrongly identifies the concept of *arche* present in the *Physics* with that of cause. Principles are not only causes that necessarily belong to the real world, but they can also be reasons that belong to another order, that of validity claims, which are ignored by both Heidegger and Schürmann. It is in the context of validity that the problem of principles must be taken up, and every philosophy which shuns it can be taken seriously only to a limited degree. I must confess that the amalgam of the highest pretentions concerning the overcoming of metaphysics in a never before conceived of type of thinking and a false modesty regarding the preparatory character of such thinking is impalpable to me.

Schürmann's most original attempt, the doctrine of the categories developed in the fourth part of his book, is a strange *mixtum compositum* of the theory of principles in the traditional sense (i.e., a theory of the principles presupposed by the very theorist of principles), and a historicist description of the principles which have been accepted by others. Indeed, what shall a "historical deduction" be? We understand what a transcendental deduction is; we understand what a historical analysis is; but the concept of a historical deduction is new and awkward. At first glance, the categories named by Schürmann seem like past concepts from our tradition, from its beginning and its end; but

then we are told that they have transhistoric validity. The reasons for this last claim have not become clear to me. How can "overman" be a general category and not merely the description of the *noema* of a particular mind from the late nineteenth century? It is, however, obvious why Schürmann must try to interpret them as transhistoric, for only thus can he avoid the Scylla of complete historicism. The curious blending of metaphysics and historicism so typical of the late Heidegger is not satisfied with a mere interpretation of the metaphysical ideas of others. Through the interpretation of, for example, *phusis*, Heidegger aims at the truth of Being itself. But why should the table of categories be mediated by such hermeneutical acts? Why should we not be able to speak immediately about the categories without taking a detour via the Presocratics or Nietzsche, whose concepts may be misleading? The principles of the thinkers of the past are inner-worldly entities, and such entities cannot ground anything at all, as Schürmann rightly states.[53] To which one may add that the more general reflections on the categories are hardly satisfactory. It is, for example, never convincingly argued why Being is more than the sum of all entities. It is an interesting assertion, by the way, that the event conditions all that can occur, something which traditional metaphysics was saying about principles.[54] However, this category is so empty that it does not really allow us to conceive the world in a more precise way. Hegel's argument that categories must be concrete in order to contribute to knowledge is lost on Heidegger, whose thinking is in many ways reminiscent of the tradition of negative theology. Heidegger and Schürmann oppose thinking to understanding,[55] while the concept of a reason that transcends the method of the sciences, but is nonetheless concrete, remains alien to them. Because of its emptiness, thinking is necessarily "neutral with regard to the moral law, values, and the like."[56] It cannot legitimize anything, except delegitimizing.[57] Therefore the question "what we ought to do" can only be answered thus: "Love the flux and thank its economic confluences . . ."[58] But it is not difficult to see that this answer deprives one of any critical distance towards the powers that happen to be ruling one's society. It follows from such a maxim that one has to adapt to what is going on, in Nazi Germany no less than in the time of global destruction of the environment. With the obliteration of *logos* and of its normative dimension, violence will inevitably increase. How else will conflicting claims be resolved? I even cannot help feeling angry about Schürmann's explanation of Heidegger's political lapse. According to him, it was mainly due to his lacking an elaborated philosophy of technology in 1933. Although this answer would have met with Heidegger's approval, it is intolerable. It is unbearable because it presupposes, as in fact the late Heidegger believed, that the essence of

National Socialism and that of modern technology are the same, and that it is necessary to have understood the latter in order to criticize the former. Fortunately, this is not the case. And it is an unacceptable apology of National Socialism to suggest that it was not really worse than modern technology, even to someone who is disposed to be very critical of the latter. Heidegger's political error may have been facilitated by a still superficial analysis of technology in 1933, but the main reason for his lapse lies in the fact that his philosophy lacks a normative, ethical dimension. This lack is what accounts for his error, and it is sad, albeit true, that neither the early nor the late Heidegger, whom Schürmann praises so highly, ever even attempted to overcome it. In fact, it was Hans Jonas, among Heidegger's pupils, who contributed most to a reappraisal of the normative dimension on the basis of metaphysics. Schürmann is certainly right when he writes that Hans Jonas' great attempt at forming an ethics for technological civilization "points in the opposite direction" to his own,[59] but this may well speak against Schürmann more than against Jonas.

III

Why could as noble and intelligent a person as Reiner Schürmann become so deeply attracted to the late Heidegger? It is too simple to answer that these ideas were in the air when he studied in Paris. In fact, French deconstruction is only a popularization of the Heideggerian program.[60] Schürmann was too earnest a man to follow intellectual trends. I had the pleasure of knowing him quite well and even of enjoying his friendship, and, as such, I believe that I may treat the complex causes that drove him towards the late Heidegger, even if, given the complexity of his character, any such explanation can be no more than a mere suggestion. Since we have gathered to remember this remarkable man, we may be allowed to speak about the originary experience which influenced the person and the philosopher Schürmann most deeply. Obviously, a psychological explanation can never replace a refutation, but as I have attempted one, reflections on his personality may be allowed, particularly because they will make possible a more positive evaluation of his thought.

It is a *topos* that at the beginning of any serious philosophical life there is an originary experience which determines the whole style of thinking of a person: the trial of Socrates settled many of Plato's convictions, as, for example, his mistrust of democracy. What, then, is Schürmann's *Urerlebnis*? One need not have read his remarkable autobiography to suspect that it is linked to the date and place of his birth,

namely, the year 1941 in the German-occupied Netherlands. In fact, the events that took place in Germany and in a large part of Europe during Nazi rule are so unique in human history that it is quite plausible to assume that, particularly for Germans, the date of birth determines much. It has often been said that the four chancellors who have had the strongest impact on the Federal Republic of Germany are distinguished from each other mainly by the consequences their different birth dates had on their respective lives. Adenauer (b. 1876) who was thirteen years older than Hitler, and to whom Germany had to turn four years after Hitler's death, had already had a political career in the Weimar Republic; Brandt (b. 1913) had the option at least to decide consciously against Nazi Germany and to flee to Scandinavia; Schmidt (b. 1918) was a boy when Hitler came to power and did not have any real alternative to serving in the Reichswehr; Kohl (b. 1930) likes to speak of the grace of his late birth. It is useful to compare the birth dates of German philosophers with those of the just named politicians. Almost all contemporaries of Adenauer had their philosophical career in the Weimar Republic; none of them played a decisive role after the Second World War: they were too old and most of them emigrated under the Third Reich. A philosopher whom we may compare with Brandt is Hans Jonas, even if he was ten years older; both German men achieved intellectual and moral maturity in the Weimar Republic and were able to decide to fight National Socialism, and both succeeded in playing an important role in the later Federal Republic (Jonas during the nineteen eighties only). A near contemporary of Schmidt, Karl-Otto Apel (b. 1922), also had to serve in the army, and for him this experience remained a starting-point for all his philosophical work.

Now, Schürmann (b. 1941) is a fascinating case. Being eleven years younger than Kohl, he could have claimed the grace of the late birth with much more right than the present chancellor: what responsibility can a four-year-old child bear? The most noteworthy feature about Schürmann is that he did not make use of that claim. The first chapter of his autobiography, entitled "Comment j'apprends à serrer les poings," describes an atrocious experience which he had on the day of his fourth birthday. A worker at the factory where his family lived showed him in the basement the decomposing corpses of two Ukrainian prisoners who had been forced to work in the factory. The child was, obviously, shocked.

> C'est là que quelque chose s'est déchiré en moi. . . . Depuis cette excursion, j'ai vécu dans la crainte d'avoir à souffler des bougies. Le soir du même jour, tout le monde me chantait: "Joyeux anniversaire." J'aspirai profondément, vérifiai rapidement le nombre des petites flammes, me penchai en avant. Puis le gâteau fut couvert de vomissure.[61]

A few lines later, he sums up what his life has been: "Fuir. Je fuis. Je passe mon temps à m'éclipser. Je feins d'être intéressé, en fait je prépare une dérobade. Avec les années, je suis devenu expert pour organiser mes fuites. J'aime qu'elles s'enchaînent sans perte de temps."[62] In fact, his life as we find it described in *Les origines* was a continuous flight: Israel, France, Greece, and the United States being the main stations. One could compare Reiner Schürmann to Conrad's Lord Jim, taking care to note two important differences, however. First, it is a personal weakness from which Jim flees, whereas it is the guilt of the collective identity in which Schürmann took part that haunted him. Secondly, the place where he was finally able to settle and which became his *oikeios topos* was not Indonesia, but the New School for Social Research, which had a particular relation to Germany, and was the right place for Germans having problems with their fatherland, but who nevertheless felt that they deeply belonged to their country. The latter was certainly the case with Schürmann who named his first book *Les origines*. It has two mottos, one drawn from Feuerbach, the other from Böll: "Nous autres Allemands, nous sommes les contemporains du présent dans la philosophie, sans être ses contemporains dans l'histoire," and, "C'est en découvrant la malédiction que constitue le fait d'être allemand que j'ai pris conscience de mon appartenance à ce peuple. Parce que l'Allemagne était méprisée, je me suis aperçu soudain que, pour rien au monde, je n'aurais refusé d'en faire partie." Using the language of psychoanalysis, one could say that Schürmann had an ambivalent relation to his German identity. On the one hand, he suffered from it. On the other hand, he was deeply attracted to it, not despite, but rather because of the suffering it entails and the unjust treatment to which Germans were sometimes subjected after the Second World War, merely because they were Germans. The fact that Schürmann was rejected in Israel, although he had done his best to cope with his German origin, without doubt strengthened his feeling of national identity. But how could he satisfy this feeling, given the political past of his country? The quotation from Feuerbach contains an answer. A German could still be proud of his intellectual tradition and believe that the political faults were compensated by the intellectual merits of his nation. This solace has been for more than two centuries an antidote against many of the identity problems of the Germans. After the catastrophe of the Third Reich, the one thinker who offered such medicine was a man whom I did not mention when I compared the diverse chancellors and philosophers, for he was an exact contemporary of the chancellor who preceded Adenauer, namely, Hitler.

Heidegger (b. 1889) had a tremendous impact on the philosophical culture of the nineteen fifties; and since the success of a thinker never solely depends on the intellectual level of his achievements, it may be safely stated that one of the causes of Heidegger's popularity in the early days of the Federal Republic was just the fact that he was the greatest philosopher of National Socialism. The phrase is intentionally and maliciously ambivalent: Heidegger was, besides Gehlen and Carl Schmitt, the greatest thinker to be temporarily allured by National Socialism; he is one of the few who thematized National Socialism and even elaborated a philosophy of history that had a place for National Socialism. Probably, the second sense of the predicate 'greatest philosopher of National Socialism' is a consequence of the first: Heidegger had an inner view of National Socialism which allowed him to grasp some of its features which remained alien to others. In general, it is to be regretted that only a handful of philosophers have dealt with National Socialism, not to mention how incredibly feeble the anticipation of this century's horrors has been (incidentally, almost all prophets have been conservative Catholics). The lack of philosophical reflection is all the more astonishing as the events that took place from 1933 to 1945 have rendered both the traditional theodicy problem and a philosophy of history based on progress much more difficult than in the past. What made the Heideggerian philosophy of National Socialism particularly fascinating to Germans, as well as to Schürmann? First, in sharp contrast to all the Marxist theorists, Heidegger clearly understood (as did also his pupil Hannah Arendt) that National Socialism is part of a larger phenomenon, namely, totalitarianism. It is obviously dull to reduce National Socialism to a specific stage in the development of capitalism. Not all capitalist countries, and not even the most advanced ones, accepted fascism or National Socialism. Furthermore, the similarities between National Socialism and Stalinism (despite important differences) are manifest enough not to warrant reducing totalitarianism to an aspect of the capitalist world. I am even willing to discuss Heidegger's claim that not only Stalinism and National Socialism are manifestations of totalitarianism, but that there is something totalitarian in almost all modern political systems of the twentieth century. Clearly, the concept "totalitarian" is used here in a very broad sense: it does not imply the violation of human rights, but it does presuppose a will to transform reality which has never existed before in human history. One can indeed partially agree with Heidegger's thoughts about the links between the will to power which is so characteristic of modernity in general and which was rendered explicit by Nietzsche and the phenomena of modern technology and totalitarianism. But this is not to say that there are not important *differentiae specificae* among the vari-

eties of totalitarianism in the broad sense. It means even less that there are no morally relevant distinctions. Heidegger would not have so profoundly fascinated the Germans who suffered from their history, if he had not denied any personal guilt. Already in *Being and Time*, his concept of guilt is completely amoral. With the *Kehre* every idea of personal responsibility vanishes: there are no longer moral agents, but merely manifestations of Being, and as a consequence no one needs to acknowledge personal guilt, the German nation having simply been led by Being itself. In comparison with the simplistic assignment of responsibility to every single German after the defeat, Heidegger does have a point: there are events which transcend the individuals, and which therefore cannot be imputed to them. A four-year-old child must not be terrorized by being shown corpses. But this does not mean that the other extreme, defended by Heidegger, is correct. There may be different forms and degrees of responsibility which are ignored by both moral individualism and historicism, with which it is, however, extremely important to deal for an adequate practical philosophy.

Of course, I do not want to say that Schürmann admired Heidegger because he made it easier to be a German. This was the attitude of many German intellectuals, but not of Schürmann himself, who was much more subtle. His operation is more complex. He believed he could discern in the end of metaphysics an end to any possible temptation of totalitarianism. According to him, the obsession with *arche* is at the root of this phenomenon: that is why he reproached Aristotle for being totalitarian,[63] calls National Socialism an "exceedingly 'metaphysical' regime,"[64] and regards Heideggerian thinking as standing "at the antipodes of any apology for totalitarianism."[65] I do not think that it is too difficult to see why these arguments, albeit quite widespread, are untenable. Totalitarianism is a specifically modern phenomenon. As such, it has nothing to do with Aristotle. The ideology of National Socialism understood itself as being radically opposed to traditional metaphysics, and Heidegger's lapse is hardly accidental. (I confess that Schürmann's comparison of Heidegger to Socrates and his statement "that the Athenian Senate perceived the danger in such essential questioning better than the German Chancelleries following 1935"[66] sounded quite outrageous to me.) An interest in principles as such has nothing to do with totalitarianism. Whether a principle is totalitarian depends on the content of the principle, and about that Schürmann says almost nothing. His generic aversion to principles is all the more awkward as his autobiography deals with origins, themselves a type of principle, as we may learn from his main work. By its title he both recognizes the unavoidability of principles and manifests a certain laceration of his mind. Schürmann tried to free himself from principles, and it is proba-

bly not coincidental that on several occasions in the Heidegger book he links principles with the figure of the father.[67] But he could do so only by returning to a father figure from his own culture, with similar origins and at least an involvement in the ugly Nazi story. Martin Heidegger remained for Schürmann an intellectual father guiding him in his attempt to liberate himself from all fathers: a contradiction analogous to that present in the phrase 'principe d'anarchie'.

IV

I shall end with some remarks on what has to be taken seriously in Schürmann's work on Heidegger. It is still considerable. Even if philosophy rises and falls with, first, a theory of principles in general and, secondly, a theory of the principles of ethics, it can and should learn several lessons from Schürmann's enterprise. First, one must recognize with Heidegger and Wittgenstein that there is discontinuity in history, that our representations of the principles do change. The times of such changes are full of dangers, for with the crash of fundamental representations human beliefs and behaviour become unstable. Not much intelligence is needed to grasp that we are living in such a time. Of course, it is only a perspectival error induced by the present situation to think that all our ideas about principles are withering away: some will necessarily remain, and we only fail to notice them because change captures more of our attention than the stable background, without which, however, we would not even perceive the change. New representations are emerging, even if it is still very difficult to recognize them, more difficult certainly than to witness the decay of the old ones.

Secondly, Heidegger and Schürmann are right in teaching that in the change of fundamental paradigms (as one could say with Kuhn) something more than human manifests itself. Humanism is one of the representations of modernity doomed to fail, not only because we now understand more deeply our ties to nature than at the beginning of modernity, but because man cannot be the measure. We have made neither the world nor the moral law; these erroneous beliefs have done enough harm to mankind. This does not mean that the assumption of a completely transcendent absolute is the right solution. The idea of the autonomy of reason must be combined with the recognition that reason is not exclusively a human faculty. Probably a synthesis of left Hegelianism and Heideggerianism is necessary. Whereas the former teaches that the transcendent God of the Middle Ages was nothing other than a projection of the human mind not yet capable of grasping itself, and whereas the latter sees the modern wish of autonomy as a

manifestation of Being, of a power greater than the individual, the future will have to find a synthesis of both conceptions. In such a synthesis, being will be recognized again as timeless, even if it is not accidental that being realizes itself in nature, man, and history with their different and ever more intense ways of being temporal. Such a synthesis will furthermore acknowledge that "ought," on the one hand, cannot be reduced to being, but that being, on the other hand, is not indifferent toward the "ought"—to deny this would indeed be nihilistic.

Thirdly, Heidegger's philosophy of technology remains one of the greatest intellectual achievements of this century. That the technological attitude towards the world has changed nature, the relations between the different cultures, and our soul in the most radical way conceivable, should not be denied. One can also agree that without the European interest in metaphysics the project of modern science and technology could not have evolved. And, I am willing to concede that modern technology might signify an end to the human quest for principles, not, however, because we could live without them, but because technology might destroy us, our essence no less than our existence. The ideology which does not see the self-destructive tendencies at work in the project of modernity and still believes that all problems can be solved by expanding our lifestyle across the entire planet has much to learn from Heidegger. Reason, which presupposes principles, should not be given up, but the false and limited understanding which has dominated the world during the last centuries does need censure, especially if we wish to remain faithful to the Enlightenment.

Fourthly, a search for principles able to tame technology cannot be an exclusively theoretical one. In fact, Heidegger and Schürmann are completely right when they state that philosophy is more than an intellectual game. Not only Plotinus and Meister Eckhart considered philosophy a form of life; every reasonable philosopher did. One has to live in a certain way in order to grasp what philosophy is all about; and one may entertain reasonable doubts about whether the present academic business is really compatible with the requisite form of life. In particular, I agree with Schürmann's remarks on the "busy-ness" of ethics. On the one hand, I have already stated why I believe that ethics is indispensable, and it speaks not for, but against Heidegger, that he regards ethics as necessarily belonging to the sphere of accounting. The moral law is something absolute which transcends the sphere science deals with, as Kant rightly understood. But one cannot deny that much of what is going on today in order to solve our problems only magnifies them. The energy wasted to transport all these intellectual businessmen to ecological conferences is hardly worth the declarations of good intention such events bring forth. The dangers of modern technology

can hardly be overcome by becoming dependent on it, even if this happens in the service of aims which one considers, of course, moral and critical. Perhaps Reiner Schürmann has shown by the probity and simple decency of his life and of his death, even more than by his books, that he was a true philosopher. And perhaps we do act in his spirit by gathering to do something which is utterly useless in terms of technology: to remember and mourn a dead friend and colleague.

NOTES:

1. The remarks by Levinas are quoted on the back of the cover of the English edition of the book, and Gadamer's review appeared in *Philosophische Rundschau* 32 (1985), pp. 18-20, and was published in English in *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 13:1 (1988), pp. 155-58.
2. As such, I shall not quote Heidegger himself, but only Reiner Schürmann's book. Obviously, the exact places in Heidegger to which Schürmann refers can be found in his book. I myself have dealt with Heidegger directly in *Die Krise der Gegenwart und die Verantwortung der Philosophie* (München: Beck Verlag, 1990), pp. 88-97; "Heideggers Philosophie der Technik," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 23 (1991), pp. 37-53; "Sein und Subjektivität. Zur Metaphysik der ökologischen Krise," V. H., *Praktische Philosophie in der modernen Welt* (München: Beck Verlag, 1992), pp. 166-197, particularly pp. 177ff. There, both Heidegger and the literature on him which most impressed me are quoted.
3. Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), hereafter cited as *HBA*.
4. Reiner Schürmann, *Le principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).
5. *HBA*, p. 1.
6. Ibid., p. 6.
7. Ibid., p. 20 n.
8. Ibid., p. 7.
9. Ibid., p. 14.
10. Ibid., p. 15.
11. Ibid., p. 16.
12. Ibid., p. 25.
13. This is not to say that he paraphrases Heidegger only in his own vocabulary. But despite the announcement (*HBA*, p. 21), he remains quite close to it.

14. *HBA*, p. 30.
15. Ibid., p. 31.
16. Ibid., p. 43.
17. Ibid., p. 45.
18. Ibid., p. 46.
19. Ibid., p. 55.
20. Ibid., p. 60.
21. Ibid., p. 73.
22. Ibid., p. 89.
23. Ibid., p. 105.
24. Ibid., p. 108.
25. Ibid., p. 130.
26. Ibid., p. 127
27. Ibid., p. 156.
28. Ibid., p. 159.
29. Ibid., p. 182.
30. Ibid., p. 169.
31. Ibid., p. 186.
32. Ibid., p. 203.
33. Ibid., p. 207.
34. Ibid., p. 219.
35. Ibid., p. 237.
36. Ibid., p. 242.
37. Ibid., p. 244.
38. Ibid., p. 263.
39. Ibid., p. 262.
40. Ibid., p. 277.
41. Ibid., p. 292f.
42. See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 124: philosophy "läßt alles, wie es ist."
43. See *HBA*, pp. 353f. n. 24.
44. Ibid., p. 138.

45. Ibid., p. 327 n. 16.
46. See ibid., p. 282: "Without a form of systemic self-regulation, it would seem difficult to speak of identity and difference in history, that is, to think change."
47. Ibid., p. 285.
48. Ibid., p. 295.
49. Ibid., p. 212.
50. Ibid., p. 248.
51. G.W. Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée, Discours préliminaire*, 37: "Car quel moyen y auroit il de discerner le veritable Dieu d'avec le faux Dieu de Zoroastre, si toutes les choses dependoient du caprice d'un pouvoir arbitraire, sans qu'il y eût ny regle, ny égard pourquoy que ce fût?" (ed. Gerhardt, VI, p. 72; see p. 35).
52. See K. Weimar's and C. Jermann's brilliant criticism in "'Zwiesprache' oder Literaturwissenschaft?", *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 23 (1984), pp. 113-157.
53. See *HBA*, p. 90.
54. See ibid., p. 127. When he speaks of "a condition that is *ultimate without being a ground*" (*HBA*, p. 285), he is merely playing with words.
55. See ibid., p. 273.
56. Ibid., p. 137.
57. See ibid., p. 156.
58. Ibid., p. 81.
59. Ibid., p. 380 n. 30.
60. See Schürmann's brilliant critique of Derrida in ibid., pp. 361f. n. 12.
61. *Les origines* (Paris: Fayard, 1976), p. 14.
62. Ibid., p. 14f.
63. *HBA*, p. 43.
64. Ibid., p. 290.
65. Ibid., p. 322.
66. Ibid., p. 267.
67. See ibid., pp. 147 and 286.