

# **Heidegger, the First True Anarchist?**

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The question posed in the title of this presentation will—to state it right way—ultimately be answered in the affirmative. But first it will be necessary to ask several subsidiary questions. (1) Who is Heidegger, or better, what is meant by the name “Heidegger”? (2) What is anarchy such that it is possible to distinguish between true and false forms and attribute true anarchy to a signature that, for twelve years, could be found on the membership lists of the Nazi Party? And (3) given that the term “anarchy” and its cognates have been used pejoratively for over twenty-five-hundred years and positively—if rarely—for at least two-hundred, how can Heidegger or “Heidegger” (in scare quotes), of all people and things, be considered its first true representative?

Reiner Schürmann, the postwar, one-time Dominican who mostly refused to write in his native German, preferring, as though in deliberate defiance of Heidegger, French instead, answers these questions in his celebrated 1982 monograph *Le Principe d'anarchie: Heidegger et la question de l'agir*. (The French literally translates as: *The Principle of Anarchy: Heidegger and the Question of Acting*, although Schürmann changed—or at least agreed to change—the title to *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* for the substantially revised 1987 English version). Answers to these three questions—namely, what is meant by “Heidegger”? what is true anarchy? and why is “Heidegger” the first true anarchist—can also be found in Schürmann’s posthumous magnum opus *Broken Hegemonies*; however, the answers Schürmann provides there are more oblique and differ in important ways from those he gives in his earlier interpretation of Heidegger and in related texts. After examining Schürmann’s position in *Heidegger on Being and Acting*, I will briefly indicate in what sense, from the perspective of *Broken Hegemonies*, Heidegger might still be called the first true anarchist.

## §1. “Heidegger” as Discursive Regularity

From the outset, Schürmann is clear that he will be “moving in a direction the man Martin Heidegger would not have wished to be led” (PA: 11/HBA: 3; see also 419/293). This is nevertheless a move that, however violent, Heidegger’s own corpus invites. Anarchy would, as it were, be Heidegger’s one *Ungedachtes*, that which he could not, as such, ponder or see even though it had been guiding and weighing on him all along, like a single star. Or, if you prefer the language of post-structuralism, we are dealing not with the man Martin Heidegger but with “the body of writings which circulate, operate, put people to flight, or make them think—that is, which function—under the name of ‘Heidegger’” (PA: 11/HBA: 2). And if this body of writings should also prove to embody *our* site, if, in short, it should also function as a Foucauldian “discursive regularity” (PA: 11/HBA: 3), then to read “Heidegger”—now emphatically in scare quotes—or to read what is in Heidegger would be to read our present. Our age, too, would be moving toward anarchy ...

*Indeed it is, you might think, what with the unjustified use or abuse of power around the globe, the suppression of freedom and self-representation, and the rise of autocratic nationalism. It's no wonder that Heidegger is a beloved reference for the far right, from Bannon to Dugin ...*

This is not, however, the sense of anarchy that Schürmann has in mind. In fact, he shows how this so-called anarchy (we might instead call it the “anarchy of power” or “anomy”) relies on the posit of an absolute *archē* or foundation—manifest, say, in the will of those twenty-first-century

versions of the “Führer himself” who “alone is the [...] present and future German reality and its law,” to recall Heidegger’s notorious words from 1933 (GA 16: 184; cf. DHB: /BH:).

What then, does Schürmann mean by anarchy, and why is “Heidegger” its figurehead, especially when the words “anarchy” and “anarchism” appear very infrequently—and never positively—in Heidegger’s corpus; when it does not mean the anarchy of power or anomy; when the name “Heidegger” is missing from the indices of major historiographies of anarchism; and, to say it again, when the man Martin Heidegger, whatever his intentions, did not hesitate to submit himself and the institution he led to the total control of Hitler?

## §2. True Anarchy

Heidegger once defined metaphysics as “that space in which it becomes our destiny [*der Geschicksraum*] that the suprasensory World, the Ideas, God, the moral Law, the authority of Reason, Progress, the Happiness of the greatest number, Culture, Civilization lose their constructive force and become nothing” (GA 5: 221; cited in OP: 68–69). Departing from Heidegger, that is, both taking “Heidegger” as his point of departure but also parting ways with the decisions of the man and with questions about his intentions, Schürmann traces this devolution of metaphysical principles and draws its consequences for action.

However different from one another, each epoch, according to Schürmann, has been governed by one overarching principle dictating not just what it means to be but also—and here Schürmann develops the normative implications of Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics—what is permitted to be said and done within that epoch. This principle or *archē* thus not only inaugurates; it commands. What does it command? That everything be referred to it as the sole foundation, as the one *fundamentum inconcussum* that will “console the soul and consolidate the city” (DHB/BH: *passim*) if only we would heed it.

Now, if, as Heidegger also claims, metaphysics has in some sense come to an end, and if Schürmann is right that metaphysics is defined by its arch-subsumptive function, then not only have its principles “become nothing”; we, furthermore, are without principle. Ours is a time of *an-archē* ...

Or not quite. With Heidegger, Schürmann maintains that we are instead situated on a boundary line. Janus-faced, we look back to metaphysics for support even as we look forward to a period in which we will be able to live without ultimate foundation for every thought, word, and deed. Metaphysics, which here has the specific sense of attempting, however unsuccessfully, to provide such a foundation, is thus not, strictly speaking, over. Nor need it end. But it is complete in the sense that its possibilities have been exhausted, and a new possibility, that of true anarchy, has opened up or, if you will, unconcealed itself in Heidegger’s work.

To realize this possibility (which, again, and despite the teleological redolence of the English subtitle *From Principles to Anarchy*, is not a given, nor should “possibility” here be understood as subordinate to actuality)—to realize this possibility, it may be necessary to first deploy metaphysics against itself. (This is one of the reasons why Schürmann uses the oxymoronic phrase “principle of anarchy”). It may be necessary, as Schürmann puts it in an essay on “constituting oneself an anarchistic subject,” to engage in “micro-interventions aimed at resurgent patterns of subjection and objectification” (TM: 30). Indeed, to even understand this new possibility properly, we must begin to live differently. There is, in other words, a “practical apriori” in play. As

Schürmann explains, in the wake of Eckhart and Silesius's rose that blooms *ohn' warum*: "to follow the play without why of presencing [i.e., of the event of being as other than beings or things present and other than the putative stability of their presence or beingness], it is necessary to 'live without why'" (PA: 411/HBA: 287). Despite these caveats or preliminaries, Schürmann sees the anarchic, "motile path" on the horizon—"That part," to quote René Char, "never fixed, asleep in us, from which will spring TOMORROW THE MANIFOLD" (quoted in PA: 431/HBA: 303, 43).

What this means for action is that it is praxis need no longer be subservient to theory, at least if theory is taken metaphysically as establishing an ultimate ground for the knowable and the doable. As for philosophy, it need no longer serve as "civil servant" or "functionary" (to recall Husserl), let alone as handmaiden or king. Philosophy can now *think*, which in the strong sense for Schürmann means nothing less—and nothing more—than Heraclitean *poiein kata phusin*: "to follow the event of appropriation, to follow *phuein*" (PA: 414/HBA: 289; in reference to DK fragment 112 and GA 55: 367).

### §3. Heidegger the First

If it is not offensive to call Heidegger a true anarchist (although I recognize it may well be), the implication that he is the first true anarchist will surely be offensive to the long line of self-proclaimed anarchists who came before and who thus stand accused of falsity, by which I mean neither "concealed" nor the aforementioned anarchy of power, but rather "fake." Proudhon, Bakunin, Saurin—they are all pseudo-anarchists or anarchists only in name. For, according to Schürmann, they fail to exit the metaphysical field and simply substitute new principles—hence new *archai*—for old masters, such as science for domination (Proudhon), spontaneous life for science (Bakunin), or rational human nature for the power of authority (Saurin)—"as metaphysical an operation as has ever been," Schürmann declares (PA: 16/HBA: 6; see also 417/292, 421/295). Schürmann speaks accordingly of their "theoretical [i.e., their theory/principle-based] anarchism" (PA: 37/HBA: 20) as opposed to Heideggerian "ontological anarchy" (PA: 19/HBA: 10) or Schürmann's more politically inflected "economic an-archy," of which economics is only a part (PA: 381/HBA: 264). Schürmann uses "economy" more broadly to describe the way in which the house, *oikos*, of being is arranged, *nemetai*, at a historical conjuncture. "Economy an-archy" would signify a conjunction wherein things could enter into presence and constellate for us only for a while, without insisting on their our stability; wherein we could finally own up to our mortality and let things be.

Moreover, none of the aforementioned anarchists deconstructs the history of ontology, which is always also a history of the political. Yet, writes Schürmann, only the "deconstruction" or, as he adds more militantly in the French, the "pulverization" sufficiently "interrupts, throws out of gear, the derivations between first philosophy and practical philosophy" and hence "closes the era of derivations between general and special metaphysics" (PA: 9/HBA: 1). Only *it* frees action from *archai*. To the extent that "Heidegger" undertakes such a deconstruction, "he" can be considered the first true anarchist. And those who carry on this project—and a case could be made that it is a, if not *the*, defining feature of continental philosophy after Heidegger—are, *nolens volens*, to varying degrees, and more or less knowingly, true anarchists too.

## §4. Anarchy in Broken Hegemonies

In conclusion, and with the hope that we can discuss this further, I want to briefly note how the questions I initially posed would have to be answered differently from the perspective of *Broken Hegemonies*. First a word on Schürmann's final project is in order: *Broken Hegemonies* offers an account of being (as the strife of appropriation or phenomenalization and expropriation or dephenomenalization) and of the human being (as torn between natality and mortality or universalizing and singularizing tendencies) and puts this account to the test of a historical analysis, showing how philosophers have sought to deny, even as they remained indirectly faithful to, unruly singularity and the insuperable double bind at the heart of reality. Schürmann is indebted to Heidegger for many of his categories, but here I will turn just to the second part of Volume Two, which consists of an extended commentary on Heidegger's *Beiträge*.

In this portion of *Broken Hegemonies*, Schürmann still reads "Heidegger" as a discursive regularity or as the name for our site, but now he sees this site as constitutively tragic, as constantly pulled between the centripetal drive to subsume under the common and the centrifugal drive to let the singular be. Heidegger the man offers a lesson in the dangers of giving free reign to the centripetal. Heidegger the regularity does not, however, open the way to live by the centrifugal alone, as Schürmann's more enthusiastic, earlier book suggested. The task is rather to learn to love the tragic legislation of the double bind, rather than hearkening unto one law alone. Hence neither appropriation/universalization alone ("metaphysics") nor expropriation/singularization alone ("antimetaphysics") is binding, but rather both the one and the other constrain us in an irresolvable conflict (or what Schürmann also calls a "differend").

As for "anarchy," the term appears less frequently in *Broken Hegemonies*, but Schürmann does deploy it at crucial moments, such as in the book's conclusion:

The anarchy that appears not to have to truncate the phenomenologically originary conditions [of appropriation and expropriation, of natality and mortality] is completely different [from the idea that "the first arché is anarchic, since if, in its turn, it had an arché, it would no longer be first"], for singularization belabors every normative position from within. The appeal to remain faithful to singularization clashes with the appeal of principles legislating simply; the dissonance is ultimate that deprives us and has always deprived us of a simple appellate authority. The origin thus proves to be anarchic because in dissension with itself. (DHB: 722/BH 628; trans. mod.)

Finally, in *Broken Hegemonies*, Schürmann finds a similar appreciation for the anarchic double bind in Plotinus, Eckhart, and even Parmenides. The only sense in which Heidegger seems to be first is that, with him, we can learn to avoid the institution of yet another epochal principle (or what Schürmann now calls "hegemonic fantasies"). We can learn to keep our universalizing drive in check. We cannot, for all that, escape it altogether. Indeed, the desire for escape, for an end not just to metaphysics as securing ultimate moorage but to any traces of it or of the "natural metaphysician in us," may be just as fantasmatic as its celebration as the only source of meaning and truth. The extent to which Schürmann himself fell prey to this desire in his earlier work, indeed the extent to which Heidegger, and the *Beiträge* in particular, may have helped him see this, is an issue I can only raise here. In any case, Schürmann's earlier enthusiasm for plurification,

difference, dislocation, and dissolution gives way to something more akin to tragic wisdom. The poetry of René Char gives way to the following haiku by Ome Shushiki:

Dead my old fine hopes  
And dry my dreaming  
But still—  
Iris, blue each spring.

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