



## Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse.

By Richard Wolin

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### Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse. By Richard Wolin

Martin Heidegger is perhaps the twentieth century's greatest philosopher, and his work stimulated much that is original and compelling in modern thought. A seductive classroom presence, he attracted Germany's brightest young intellects during the 1920s. Many were Jews, who ultimately would have to reconcile their philosophical and, often, personal commitments to Heidegger with his nefarious political views.

In 1933, Heidegger cast his lot with National Socialism. He squelched the careers of Jewish students and denounced fellow professors whom he considered insufficiently radical. For years, he signed letters and opened lectures with "Heil Hitler!" He paid dues to the Nazi party until the bitter end. Equally problematic for his former students were his sordid efforts to make existential thought serviceable to Nazi ends and his failure to ever renounce these actions.

This book explores how four of Heidegger's most influential Jewish students came to grips with his Nazi association and how it affected their thinking. Hannah Arendt, who was Heidegger's lover as well as his student, went on to become one of the century's greatest political thinkers. Karl Löwith returned to Germany in 1953 and quickly became one of its leading philosophers. Hans Jonas grew famous as Germany's premier philosopher of environmentalism. Herbert Marcuse gained celebrity as a Frankfurt School intellectual and mentor to the New Left.

Why did these brilliant minds fail to see what was in Heidegger's heart and Germany's future? How would they, after the war, reappraise Germany's intellectual traditions? Could they salvage aspects of Heidegger's thought? Would their philosophy reflect or completely reject their early studies? Could

these Heideggerians forgive, or even try to understand, the betrayal of the man they so admired? *Heidegger's Children* locates these paradoxes in the wider cruel irony that European Jews experienced their greatest calamity immediately following their fullest assimilation. And it finds in their responses answers to questions about the nature of existential disillusionment and the juncture between politics and ideas.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

"A provocative and erudite study of the affinities between Nazi sympathizer Martin Heidegger and his Jewish philosophy students. . . . [Wolin] provide[s] insightful portraits of the intellectual evolution of some of the last century's most ambitious political and social thinkers. . . . His case against Heidegger's children . . . sets a clear standard for those who wish to adopt an informed but cautious stance toward Heidegger's immense influence."--**James Ryerson, *New York Times Book Review***

"Anyone tempted to introduce Heidegger into the conversation should read this fascinating study."--**Lesley Chamberlain, *The Independent***

"This is a most thought-provoking and illuminating look at Heidegger's legacy. . . . Wolin's thesis grasps the profound and pervasive connection between Heidegger's thinking and the Holocaust itself. Wolin's reading of Hans Jonas's later work is highly original and path-breaking, as is his remarkable reconstruction of the significance of Löwith's work."--**Choice**

"*Heidegger's Children* presents an articulate and convincing account of the moral and political weaknesses of Heidegger's philosophy as well as highly informative studies of his influence on four of the twentieth century's most important philosophers."--**Brian J. Fox, *Review of Metaphysics***

"The Heidegger Myth, a monolith carefully sculpted by Heidegger and his devotees, continues to fracture. The Myth: Heidegger's Nazism was a brief, anomalous, flirtatious lapse with no intrinsic connection to his philosophy. . . . Wolin's book contributes to understanding Heidegger's influence on his students but even more to our appreciation of the fissures in the Heidegger Myth."--**John P. Burke, *Philosophy in Review***

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### **Review**

Not the least of Martin Heidegger's contributions to twentieth-century thought was his ability to inspire gifted disciples who read him against the grain, producing political theories very different from the ideology endorsed by the master, to his eternal disgrace, in 1933. Looking closely at four of the most talented of their number, Richard Wolin, with the provocative directness his readers have come to expect, argues that troubling residues remain not far beneath the surface of their influential work. *Heidegger's Children* is a book that many will seek to refute, but none can ignore. (Martin Jay, University of California, Berkeley )

### **From the Inside Flap**

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"This is an exceedingly important book that goes right to the core of debates about modernity and the human condition. It is both timely and enduringly important. It is also engrossing--provocative in some places, deeply insightful in others. More than a significant contribution to the field, it constitutes a new field in its own right. Wolin has defined a philosophical Pandora's box, and his interpretation is going to initiate some agonized soul-searching."--Michael Ermath, Dartmouth College

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