

ACT 2

A panel of three philosophers faces Martin. Only one will speak.

Philosopher. Martin Heidegger you have been called to this tribunal, appointed by the French occupying power, to answer the charges;

1. As a member of the National Socialist Party you promoted their interest at the University of Freiburg while you were Rector.
2. That you publicly supported them and did not oppose their methods.
3. That you gave a philosophical and personal credence to their ideas given your pre-eminent position in the philosophical field.
4. That you are still a member of the Party and have not publicly renounced your allegiance to their ideas.

If one or more of these statements is considered true by the tribunal, and depending on your explanation, will determine whether you continue at the university as a teacher or researcher, whether in suspension or permanent dismissal. This may also effect your pension rights. We have had various letters of support and detraction and Professor Hannah Arendt gave a personal testimony in your support yesterday. You may now make an opening statement in reply to these charges before we examine them one by one according to the evidence provided to us.

Martin. Thank you. I first want to say that I do not understand why I have been singled out for punishment when many others more culpable have not been arraigned. I feel I am being made a scapegoat and a sacrificial lamb for the university to satisfy its conscience.

My membership of the party was purely practical and did not entail any endorsement of the party. This was the elected ruling party in 1933, at the time of my one year rectorship, which by then was supported by the majority of Germans. As Rector and in order to gain access to the educational powers in Berlin party membership was necessary and so to gain influence on behalf of the university I was a member.

Now we can see the horrors of the third Reich but in the middle thirties much of value happened. There was full employment, the country was economically vibrant, there was a sense of national purpose, the contrast from the Weimar days was startling. Also there was the bolshevik threat from Russia which only a strongly armed and determined Germany could resist. This threat had also to be dealt with in the university at the intellectual level. These ideas of which some belonged to the National Socialist Party I did promulgate but not at the expense of students or teachers.

Their controversial methods in those days were not apparent to us except by gossip. It was true that the anti-semitism was clear but this appeared to relate to jewish support for bolshevism and we did not realise it was a form of racial bigotry. At the beginning I did think this was a breakthrough into a new spirit for Germany but I was quickly disillusioned.

In particular I spoke out against the corrupting influence of technology and the Party's servitude to materialism. Anyone acquainted with my work will know that this has always been a fundamental position of mine. It is argued that I was not public enough in my opposition but by the time war broke out I had two sons serving in the German army and by then it was clear that perceived deviation from loyalty might also threaten them. A risk I could not take while the war lasted. Now the war has ended it is really a formality to give up party membership which I thought was dissolved by our defeat.

You three are professors at universities and you survived, how come? No doubt by lying low. Can you be sure you made no compromises in order to support your family, protect yourself and even your country!

That is the end of my opening statement.

Philosopher. We will now look specifically at the charges against you. First that you promoted the interest of the Party above that of the university of Freiburg while Rector. In your rectorial address you spoke of a new programme for the students-labour service, military service and then service to knowledge. Don't you think the first two are totally inappropriate.

Martin. On the contrary a revitalisation of the academic programme was necessary, it was becoming moribund under the old paternalistic and conservative regime. The students would benefit by a commitment to practical and social objectives in society, it would get them out of the ivory tower and realise how things worked for most people. The specialisation of courses was leading to narrowness and away from a university education.

Philosopher. In a speech soon after in Heidleburg you explicitly rejected the humanising Christian ideas in a very militaristic fashion.

Martin. Earlier in my life I thought I would be a catholic professor and so I had great insight into the danger of Christian thinking. I was anxious to be free of all sentimentality and to base the new struggle for Being on new thinking.

Philosopher. But you then introduced the Fuhrer principle into Freiburg. "the Fuhrer was the law of Germany" concept was being applied even before the authorities demanded it. You failed to call the Academic Senate into session for months. In one circular among many you said and I quote "we seek to cleanse our ranks of inferior elements and thwart the forces of degeneracy in the future." Is that the language of the head of the university?

Martin. I felt that by staying ahead of the coming reforms I would be in a better position to safeguard our independence. We had to impress the authorities that we knew our obligations and could be relied on to get ahead without their interference. Also I was saving everybody time by cutting out needless beurocracy and administration by taking most of the decisions myself. Most academics were not interested in university politics and those who were were awful. So I took on all this myself and there could be no excuse for wasted time.

Philosopher. So you were completely in agreement with the Baden proposals for a new type of university.

Martin. Yes.

Philosopher. This also leads on to the April 7th law, of the reestablishment of a Permanent civil service. Did you oppose the enforced leave of absence of Professor Husserl, your mentor, because he was jewish.

Martin. I was not Rector at that time.

Philosopher. But did you do anything to oppose it in some way or offer commiseration.

Martin. No.

Philosopher. Did you have anti-semitic feelings.

Martin. No.

Philosopher. Why in a letter to the ministry of education concerning the future employment of Professor Frankel and Professor Von Herg you used the phrase "jews of the better sort" in supporting them.

Martin. That was purely a tactical step. I knew the anti-semitic nature of the new rules and in order to keep my jewish colleagues I drew this distinction so that the authority would itself have an excuse to enact exceptions.

Philosopher. During the time you were Rector jewish academics, professors, doctors, were leaving Germany in large numbers including Professor Arendt. Jewish students had been brutally attacked, proscription lists were circulated but you took no action.

Martin. I defended my jewish colleagues as you can see from letters given to you.

Philosopher. We feel your defence was half-hearted and indeed that there is evidence of you shunning contact for example with Professor Husserl. In the end you did not even attend his funeral in 1938, your principal mentor and supporter, to whom you

had dedicated your great work "Being and Time" and later editions withdrawn it.

Martin. I was ill at the time of the funeral.

Philosopher. In a speech in Leipzig in November 1933 you concluded your observations on the new university as having the support of the I quote "eminent will of our Fuhrer" This appears to demonstrate your uncritical admiration of Hitler in an area where you of all people should have understood the dangers of this new concept.

Martin. Hitler was laying down the governing principles, we would address the details.

Philosopher. Well, we all know where the principles and the details led to.

Martin. But in 1934 things looked quite different.

Philosopher. Any observer of the scene with the least wit could tell it was wrong.

Martin. But there was still time to persuade through philosophy.

Philosopher. I think you are joking.

Martin. I was invited to take the Berlin chair in 1930 which would have made me the officially acknowledged leader of German philosophy.

Philosopher. When you discussed these issues with Professor Jaspers in 1933 he tells us he said to you "How can such an uneducated man as Hitler govern Germany" and your reply was "Education is quite irrelevant-just look at his wonderful hands". Is that correct?

Martin. I don't recall.

Philosopher. I am not surprised, the inanity of it beggars belief. In your appeal to German students in November 1934 when Germany left the League of Nations you said "let not axioms or ideas be the rule of your being. The Fuhrer himself and he alone is the present and future German reality and its law."
This statement betrays a total submission and a total intellectual collapse.

Martin. By that I meant he had become the personification of our destiny. He would lead the breakout from Plato's cave.

Philosopher. Then you were in thrall to Hitler.

Martin. I admit in 1933-34 I admired his way out of the mess the Weimar parties had led us into. For the reasons I gave earlier.

Philosopher. So he was to be your new star in a godless world.

Martin. Then yes but.....

Philosopher. That explains much about your position during 1933-34....you became the Fuhrer-Rector!
How do you explain your attempts to discredit Professor Staudinger subsequently a Nobel laureate in chemistry. First you informed Eugene Fehle, the Baden government official responsible for university affairs, of his political unreliability. He began investigations, the Gestapo then sent you a file for comment. There you objected to his Swiss citizenship, that he was against military activities and so on. You asked for his dismissal but fortunately for him higher officials protected him and you backed down. We have all the correspondence.

Martin. I merely pointed out that his current enthusiasm for the revolution was opportunistic given his previous position.

Philosopher. Ah you see even the Reich could distinguish the value of a professional scientist against the visionary philosophy you were hoping to spread.

Martin. Quite possibly-but this is when I began to part company with the party. Its insistence on precisely this scientific materialism changed my view for it was always in opposition to my fundamental philosophical attitude.

Philosopher.If only we understood it!

Martin. I will explain....

Philosopher.Not now!...We are not here for a tutorial on that.

Martin. A pity!

Philosopher.why?

Martin. Because my philosophy explains the content of my thoughts and actions from 1934 onwards and shows the independence of my thinking as regards the party.

Philosopher.So far the evidence confirms the compromises you made to satisfy the party around 1933-34.Indeed it shows your enthusiasm for the party and Hitler.If this became less so as the years passed do we see any stand by you before the war against the increasing violence,bigotry and moral collapse.

Martin. Did you or your colleagues?

Philosopher.We all became private citizens rather than fulfil a public role.

Martin. But it would have been madness to publicly oppose the party.

Philosopher.Exactly, none of us had the courage to do that but you remained a supporter to the end.We might have expected from you a more heroic stand.

Martin. I became totally disillusioned by the end.

Philosopher.why did you remain a party member -even now?

Martin. I did not really think about a formal resignation I thought it was extinguished by the defeat.

Philosopher.At least you could have made the gesture before the end.

Martin. There was no point,that would be opportunism.I supported an idea and now I must pay the price.

Philosopher.Is that an admission of guilt?

Martin. (hastily) Oh no!

Philosopher.The facts of your cooperation and sympathy with the third reich are evident in so much of the correspondence.The 1933-34 Rector period could be considered an aberration before the worst was known.Yes you began a process of correction largely by avoiding politics and playing safe.Before the war a condemnation by you could have had influence and your pre-eminence would have protected you being thoroughly German and not a jew.For a jew it would mean death.Were you not aware of that?

Martin. My wife my sons were too attached to the homeland and would not leave.My duty was to stand by them.

Philosopher.we do not take that as a sufficient reason and do not believe you had any wish to leave.

Martin. It is true I wished to see it through to the end whatever the consequences.

There is a pause in darkness implying a recession before the verdict.

Philosopher.After deep consideration it is concluded by us all that the charges are proven.You will be suspended from all employment at the university of Freiburg for five years at which time your case will be reviewed.

Martin. I protest,I will appeal!

Philosopher.There is no appeal system.

Martin. It will destroy me.

Philosopher. Your attitude makes it clear that you still do not understand, in your heart, the magnitude of what has happened. The descent by Germany into barbarism and the failure of the press, the judiciary, the legislature and the people to oppose

this appalling moral collapse will perhaps never be forgiven and certainly not forgotten. Leading intellectuals like you could have made some sort of stand or, as most did, leave. A protest such as you make now could well have led to death under the reich. Think of that. We now have gained again that most precious value, our freedom to think what freedom is. Before freedom would be decided for you which, of course, is no freedom at all. That is all.

CURTAIN