

# INTRODUCTION

*David Michael Levin*

Proclaiming his empiricism, his pride of distance from a past informed by myth, Heraclitus (500 B.C.) wrote: “Those things of which there is sight, hearing, knowledge: these are what I honour most” (Fragment 55).<sup>1</sup> For him, though, “the eyes are more exact witnesses than the ears” (Fragment 101a). He also insisted on the fact that “the eyes and ears are bad witnesses for me if they have barbarian souls” (Fragment 107). Furthermore, he wanted us to realize that “men are deceived over the recognition of visible things” (Fragment 56).

Reading the pre-Socratics and studying the archaic history of their cultural world, we are easily tempted to construct new narratives, letting something be seen that was unseen before. And why shouldn't we? It is through such narratives that we articulate our changing forms of self-understanding and continually remake ourselves. We can now see that, even before Plato—in fact long before Plato, not only in the extant fragments attributed to Heraclitus, but in fragments attributed to Parmenides (475 B.C.)—philosophical thinking in the Western world was drawn to the tuition, the authority, of sight. But also, we can see that these philosophical teachings repeatedly insisted on calling to mind all the dangers in placing too much trust in vision and its objects.

The dangers of which the philosophers warn us are not only the tricks and deceptions, the hermeneutics, of everyday perception—the stick, for example, that appears to be bent when placed in water—but also the illusions and superstitions of visionary religion. For, when we turn away from the discourse of philosophers to look into the origins of this discourse in archaic history, in the cultural lifeworld of the earliest ancients, we find an abundance of myths recounting visionary journeys of the

spirit, and we see, through the fragments of the past, the telling ciphers of occult visionary religions, visionary rituals and practices, visionary “technologies of the self.” In the course of formulating his theory of recollection in *Meno*, Plato refers back, with appropriately encrypted words, to the archaic visionary Mysteries of Eleusis, where every spring for perhaps hundreds of years, hundreds of people gathered in the dark of a cave-like temple, awaiting initiation into the esoteric teachings of death, rebirth, and immortality bestowed by the goddess Demeter in luminous visions. Likewise, Plato’s myth of the cave in *The Republic* refers back to the experiences of a visionary religion practiced, and perhaps abandoned, at the very beginning of our civilization.

This volume is a collection of essays on vision: not only vision itself but the culture of vision, and the many different discourses of vision. All the essays were written especially for this collection, except for the study by Hans Blumenberg, which was published in 1954 in his native language, and which is presented here in its first English translation.

In the same year another important study on vision appeared: an essay titled “The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses,” in which Hans Jonas examined the historical privilege of sight, which from the very dawn of our culture has been thought to be the noblest of the senses.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on this essay some years later in *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt observed that “from the very outset, in formal philosophy, thinking has been thought of in terms of *seeing*. . . . The predominance of sight is so deeply embedded in Greek speech, and therefore in our conceptual language, that we seldom find any consideration bestowed on it, as though it belonged among things too obvious to be noticed.”<sup>3</sup> But, some pages later, she noted: “Since Bergson, the use of the sight metaphor in philosophy has kept dwindling, not unsurprisingly, as emphasis and interest have shifted entirely from contemplation to speech, from *nous* to *logos*.”<sup>4</sup>

For those of us who can see, vision is, of all the modes of perception, the one which is primary and predominant, at least in the conduct of our everyday lives. This does not seem open to much debate. More problematic, however, is the narrative that argues for the domination, the hegemony, of a visual paradigm in our cultural history. Can it be demonstrated that, beginning with the ancient Greeks, our Western culture has been dominated by an ocularcentric paradigm, a vision-generated, vision-centered interpretation of knowledge, truth, and reality? If so, many more questions follow. Can it be argued that, in the period we call “modernity” (the period beginning, say, with the “discovery” of perspectivism and the rationalization of sight in the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century), this ocularcentrism has assumed a distinctively mod-

ern historical form? How is the ocularcentrism of modernity different from that which prevailed in earlier ages? Has the *character* of the dominant vision changed in correlation with the evolution of modernity, its hegemony manifesting itself differently in each of the centuries since the Renascimento? What is left, today, of the rational vision of the Enlightenment? Has its institutionalization in the course of modernity given it historically distinctive forms of incorporation, power, and normativity? How has the paradigm of vision ruled, and with what effects?

There are difficult questions implicit here: questions regarding the historical connections between vision and knowledge, vision and ontology, vision and power, vision and ethics. How does vision figure in the methodology of the social sciences—in its hermeneutics of positions, perspectives, and horizons? Is visualism implicated in the problematics of relativism? Is it implicated in the narcissism of the will to power? Is it responsible in any sense for a dangerous politics?

In “The Turning,” Martin Heidegger asserted that both our capacity for seeing and our capacity for hearing “are perishing through radio and film under the rule of technology.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in *Dawn and Decline*, Max Horkheimer commented: “As their telescopes and microscopes, their tapes and radios become more sensitive, individuals become blinder, more hard of hearing, less responsive.”<sup>6</sup> If they are right, and we are indeed becoming blinder all the time, how can vision still be hegemonic today? We may thus wonder, returning to Arendt’s reflections on the discourse of the present, whether our contemporary culture is really still ocularcentric, whether it is in transition to a different, historically new paradigm, and whether she could be right about the future importance of the logos, of a paradigm based on speaking and listening. If we are becoming deafer, it may be doubted that our capacity for listening can be counted on to redeem the logic of our cultural history and its future. Is there a postmodern future beyond the governance of ocularcentrism? What would a postmodern vision be like?

There certainly is some evidence for a shift in our cultural paradigms: a shift, that is, from (the normativity of) seeing to (the normativity of) listening.<sup>7</sup> Thus Hans-Georg Gadamer appropriated the ocular concept of “horizon” and reinscribed it within a conversation-based hermeneutics of interpretation. And Jürgen Habermas, like John Dewey, has tried to replace the detached-spectator paradigm with a paradigm that recognizes the importance of democratic participation. Breaking away from a subject-centered rationality, Habermas has conceptualized a rationality that is grounded, instead, in the ethics of communicative processes. Moreover, he has attempted to displace the epistemological privileging of “the kind of objectification inevitable from the reflexively applied perspective

of the observer,” whereby “everything gets frozen into an object under the gaze of the third person,” the gaze, that is, of the subject as observer-spectator.<sup>8</sup> His philosophical work is intended to contribute to the release of the modern subject from a terrible double bind. For, in the objectivist paradigm generated by traditional ocularcentrism, the subject is invariably positioned either in the role of a dominating observer or in the role of an observable object, submissive before the gaze of power.

The critiques of Gadamer and Habermas are indebted to earlier critiques. Already, in the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche was formulating a powerful critique of the privileging of vision and of the foundational position of vision-generated, vision-centered concepts and methods in the history of modern philosophy. Although he never discussed ocularcentrism as such, Nietzsche was certainly critical, like Heraclitus, of the vision constitutive of the “herd mentality,” and he attacked our readiness to shut our eyes to the truth. But he was equally critical, if not more so, of the vision of the philosophers, which he thought too myopic, too abstract, too theoretical, too detached from practices, and even from their own senses and sensibility. Thus, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, he attacked the philosophers’ presupposition of an eye outside time and history, “an eye that no living being can imagine, an eye required to have no direction, to abrogate its active and interpretive powers.”<sup>9</sup> He immediately followed this attack by asserting that “all seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing. The more emotions we allow to speak on a given matter, the more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conceptualization of it, and the greater our ‘objectivity.’” And in *The Will to Power*, he reminds us that “there are many kinds of eyes. Even the sphinx has eyes.”<sup>10</sup>

In keeping with this project of multiplying perspectives, multiplying eyes, Nietzsche praises “fearless Oedipus eyes,”<sup>11</sup> but also expresses his admiration for “an eye like Goethe’s, full of love and good will,”<sup>12</sup> for the eyes of the child (“On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” section 5),<sup>13</sup> and for the “secure and calm” gaze of Epicurus, capable of moderation in its voluptuousness.<sup>14</sup> If such a commitment to perspectivism is sufficient to make one’s thinking ocularcentric, then perhaps, in this sense, Nietzsche’s philosophy is itself ocularcentric. But this sense of the term could not be more at odds with the sense in which the thinking of (say) Plato, Descartes, and Husserl may be described as ocularcentric. For, by *multiplying* perspectives, Nietzsche is effectively using an ocular metaphoric derived from the tradition to subvert the authority of ocular thinking: he turns the very logic of ocularcentrism against itself, altering forever the visionary ambitions of philosophy.

However, it would seem that, in spite of Nietzsche's efforts, our social life and culture are still being formed by the hegemony of vision. For, in the twentieth century, three major philosophers—Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida—have argued that the thought and culture of modernity have not only continued the historical privileging of sight but allowed its worst tendencies to dominate—and in fact allowed sight to dominate in a distinctively modern way, very different from the ocularcentrism of earlier times.

For Heidegger, visionary experience has always dominated both the origin (*arché*) and the end (*telos*) of the discourse of metaphysics. But he saw in modernity an historically distinctive phase in the evolution of this ocularcentrism. Whereas, at the beginning, this hegemony brought forth glorious visions as well as visions of violence, it has, in modernity, turned increasingly nihilistic. For a tendency of dangerous character, which in his "Letter on Humanism" he calls the "malice of rage," has become increasingly dominant in ocularcentrism.<sup>15</sup> This cultural tendency he defines as *das Gestell*: often translated as "enframing," it is the universal imposition of an interpretative paradigm or *episteme*.

In terms of our sight, this means that the formation of the figure-ground structure (*Gestaltung*) of our perception (*Wahrnehmung*), in which the alethic truth (unconcealment) of the ontological difference between being and beings must be sheltered and preserved (*bewahrt* and *gewährt*: words which, in German, let us hear their relation to truth), becomes increasingly reified, closed, restricted, narrowed, tightened, distorted, and destructively fixated in representations—of self, of others, of knowledge, truth, and reality—that interpret the visible world by imposing confrontations of opposition between subject and object. In the discourse of metaphysics, this tendency reflects, and is in turn reflected by, the technological transformation of life in the modern age.

In "The Age of the World Picture," Heidegger not only considers the hegemony of vision to have had its beginning in the culture and philosophies of ancient Greece but thinks it has continued into our own time. In fact, he thinks, the historical form that this hegemony has assumed in the latest phase of the modern period is particularly ominous, reducing everything to the ocularcentric ontology of subject-relative images or representations. Moreover, this historical development of our ontology as he sees it is so distinctive, so decisively different from the ontology of earlier historical periods that he argues for the recognition of a "new epoch," defined precisely in terms of this reduction of being to being-represented: "That what-is should become what-is in representation is what makes the epoch [*Zeitalter*] which gets to this point in a new epoch in relation to the preceding one."

In this “new epoch” the ocular subject finally becomes the ultimate source of all being—and the reference point for all measurements, all calculations of the *value* of being. The very being of the world is equated with our images and representations. As Derrida says in “Sending: On Representation”: “The fact that there should be representation or *Vorstellung* is not, according to Heidegger, a recent phenomenon, characteristic of the modern epoch of science, of technique and of subjectness (*subjectivité*) of a Cartesian-Hegelian type. But what would be characteristic of this epoch is rather the authority, the dominant generality of representation. It is the interpretation of the very essence of what is as an object of representation [that makes this epoch distinctive]. Everything which becomes present, everything which happens or presents itself, is apprehended [solely] within the [subjective] form of representation.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Heidegger, the Platonism of the Greeks set in motion an ocularcentric metaphysics, a way of thinking of which the logic would eventually turn all being into being-represented, or being-imagined. Platonism effected this without being in an historical position to understand itself, from the standpoint of the future, as already setting the stage for this later development. Thus Derrida notes that, although representation is not merely, for Heidegger, an image in and for the subject, “to the extent that it is, this presupposes that the world is previously constituted as visible. Now if for the Greeks, according to Heidegger, the world is not essentially a *Bild*, an available image, a spectacular form offered to the gaze or to the perception of the subject; if the world was first of all a presence (*Anwesen*) which seizes man or attaches itself to him rather than being seen [as such], intuited (*angeschaut*) by him; if it is rather man who is taken over and regarded by what-is, it was nevertheless necessary for the world as *Bild*, and then as representation, to declare itself among the Greeks, and this was nothing less than Platonism.”<sup>17</sup>

Although influenced by this analysis, Foucault was more disturbed by the social and political manifestations of this ontological reductionism. And, like Heidegger, he thought he could see striking correlations between this ontology and the modern hegemony of vision, modern technology, and modern forms of “governmentality.” For Foucault, the enlightenment project constitutive of our modernity has been increasingly double-crossed by the panopticism of its technologies. Whether these be the technologies of production, the technologies of sign systems, the technologies of power, or the technologies of the self, in each of these economies Foucault sees an increasingly dangerous tendency—dangerous, but nevertheless resistible—pointing us toward conditions of totalization, normalization, and domination. If modernity is, as it seems, dominated by vision, earlier times may indeed have been ocularcentric; but

the hegemony of vision at work in modernity is nevertheless historically distinctive, and functions in a very different way, for it is allied with all the forces of our advanced technologies. The power to see, the power to make visible, is the power to control. Panopticism is the political display of the “enframing,” the *Gestell* that Heidegger sees ruling our time: it is the universal imposition of technologies of control. Only in modernity does the ocularcentrism of our culture make its appearance in, and as, panopticism: the system of administrative institutions and disciplinary practices organized by the conjunction of a universalized rationality and advanced technologies for the securing of conditions of visibility.

Derrida, likewise influenced by Heidegger’s critique, sees a certain ocularcentrism concealing itself behind the history of the metaphysics of presence. Although, for him, this hegemony of vision is therefore very old and certainly traceable to Platonism, it appears to have adopted a different configuration in modernity. What is distinctive about ocularcentrism in the modern period? Derrida’s answer seems to be that it has extended its hegemony beyond the margins of philosophical textuality into the politics of culture. In the eighteenth century, its politics was that of the Enlightenment. It supported a reflective, critical rationality and the visions of a utopian imagination. But in our own time, we can see the tain of the mirror: the other side, a phallogentric, logocentric “heliopolitics” driven by “the violence of light” and threatening to impose the ontological order of presence wherever its mastery can reach.

Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida have all seen, traced, and attempted to understand the advent of a distinctively modern form of ocularcentrism. Each one, of course, in his own way and from his own perspective. But, for all their differences, each one has gone beyond critique, using the textuality, the *work* of critique to articulate and practice what might be called “countervisions”: not only critical and strategically subversive observations, but also historically new ways of seeing, ways that model visions very different in character from the one that has become hegemonic.

In *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx pointed out that “the forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.”<sup>18</sup> Our vision continues to change. But do we know—can we tell from this history—the full extent of our sensibilities? Do we know of what further development our senses may be capable? Inspired by the enlightened humanism in the young Marx’s vision, Herbert Marcuse asserted that “alternative cultural forms and practices, new ways of seeing and a new sensibility” are necessary today.<sup>19</sup>

The essays collected here represent many different points of view.

However different, they are all, I think, responsive to some of the needs and concerns of our time. They are, then, timely reflections on the present, opening up our moment in time to a past that was never fully present and a future always under way. The topic of ocularcentrism provides a unique opportunity for us to think about modernity from different points of view, yet also in a focused and coherent way.

Reading Heraclitus, Heidegger was led to the reflection that we are indebted to the light, and are “entrusted” with “preserving it and handing it down.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps this collection of essays, questioning the predominant character of our vision, examining the hegemony of vision in the life of our culture, and problematizing in different ways the ocular discourses, practices, and institutions that we have for so long simply taken for granted, will in its own way preserve and hand down this entrustment, this gift of light, making it possible for us—and for the generations following us—to cultivate a different sensibility and bring new visions into being.

The first chapter, by Hans Blumenberg, is on “Light As a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation.” Opposed to the “notion that the philosophical logos has ‘overcome’ pre-philosophical mythos,” and convinced that this reading of the history of philosophy “has narrowed our view,” Blumenberg sets out to formulate a “philosophical metaphorology,” documenting the “metaphorics of light in the history of metaphysics.” His intention, he says, is “to show the way in which transformations of the basic metaphor indicate changes in world-understanding and self-understanding.” Thus, in his carefully documented narrative, we see how the “history of man,” a history conceived in terms of stories of redemption and stories of freedom, becomes an intricate “history of light” reflecting those many changes.

Beginning his story with Parmenides, Blumenberg takes us through the history of metaphysics. He tells us about Plato’s myth of the cave, in which “the metaphorics of light already has a metaphysics of light implicit within it”; light in Hellenic skepticism and Stoicism; the vision of Neoplatonism; the precarious privilege that Jewish culture accorded to listening; Cicero’s identification of light with the virtue of a moral consciousness; the Gnostic dualism of light and darkness; Augustine and the early Christian reception of the metaphorics and metaphysics of light; the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, where the light appears not in a cave but in a monastic cell and in a small study; and of course the Enlightenment, with its own critical transformation of the natural light doctrines that figured in seventeenth-century thought.

In a footnote bringing his narrative into the present, Blumenberg opines that, “with regard to the modern age, it evidently still needs to be proven that the history of metaphors of light *continues* at all.” There is, then, for him, no hegemony of vision shaping our present world. However, in an analysis of today’s “technologies of light” that may remind one of Heidegger and that certainly anticipates Foucault, he calls attention to the existence of a “coerced vision”: “The connection between vision and freedom is being dissociated. Due to the dominance of the prefabricated and of technologically precast situations and aspects, the modern extension of sensory spheres has not become a source of freedom.” Thus, while Blumenberg questions the view that the philosophical discourse of modernity, and, more generally, our modern culture, can be called “ocularcentric,” what he sees today, when he looks around him, is a world in which vision is no longer a path to wisdom or redemption, no longer even a method for acquiring knowledge and achieving freedom, but rather a technology complicitous with domination—and forces that threaten a new “darkness.”

For Descartes, darkness is a nightmare. There is nothing to be learned from entering its domain. He is a philosopher obsessed with clarity and light. If a discourse in which light, vision, and its metaphors are constitutive of its very logic may be called ocularcentric, then it would be difficult to deny that Descartes’s philosophy exemplifies ocularcentrism. In chapter 2, on “Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes,” Dalia Judovitz recognizes this logic, but argues that Descartes not only limits but ultimately displaces both the priority of the eye and the centrality of its vision, in order to proclaim and affirm the sovereign power of a reason the intuitive nature of which is modeled—paradoxically—on our experience with vision. Concurring with Merleau-Ponty, who noted in “Eye and Mind” that the course of Descartes’s thought is organized around two fundamental and related projects, namely (1) his “struggle against, and critique of, illusion,” a struggle for certitude in knowledge that led him in the end to reject the visible world as a whole, and (2) his rational reconstruction of the visible domain “according to a figurative model based on mental schematism,” Judovitz undertakes to demonstrate that, although Descartes acknowledged vision as the dominant sense and was sufficiently fascinated by the new science of optics, and by the new technologies that were suddenly augmenting the power and prestige of vision, to conduct optical experiments and write at length on his research, his much deeper commitment to rationalism disposed him to challenge, and ultimately repudiate, the power and nobility of vision. Ironically, at the same time that he criticized vision for its deceptiveness and attempted to separate mind from body, and reason from perception

and imagination, he transferred the properties of the visible to the mental domain, "whence they will illuminate metaphorically the powers of reason to attain certitude as clear and distinct ideas." Henceforth an intuitive, inborn light free of sensory experience, reason is finally empowered to rationalize the visible world for the sake of science and technology. Thus, vision itself becomes merely a "construct" of the rational mind, and its referent becomes the optical projection of a geometric system.

Judovitz concludes her study by adumbrating her conviction that there are dimensions to vision not reducible to thought and that there are conditions limiting thought which Descartes, and the schools of thought he inaugurated, have failed to see.

The next chapter proposes a very different reading of Descartes. In "Vision, Reflection, and Openness: The 'Hegemony of Vision' from a Hegelian Point of View," Stephen Houlgate argues for the position that there is nothing inherently problematic—and, in particular, nothing inherently despotic—about making vision our model for knowing and thinking. Challenging the critique of ocularcentrism that sees in philosophical thought and its culture a tragic commitment to the metaphysics of presence and that connects the historical domination of this metaphysics with the hegemony of vision as our cultural paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality, Houlgate says: "my intention in this essay is to examine, and indeed call into question, the conception of vision which constitutes the presupposition of that critique."

Houlgate opens his essay with some appreciative as well as critical reflections on Dewey, Rorty, and Heidegger. Dewey is of interest because he problematized the spectator theory of knowledge and argued for a participatory conception of knowledge based on the unity of theory and practice. Rorty is of interest because he has rejected the picture of the mind as a mirror of theoretical reflection, rejected ocular theories of truth that make it a matter of correspondence, and proposed a conception of truth and mind based, instead, on discourse. And Heidegger is of interest because he denied that our primary involvement with the world is theoretical, repudiated the reduction of knowledge to techniques of objectification aimed at mastery and control, and attempted to think a different way of experiencing our world. Noting that each of these philosophers was convinced of the hegemony of vision, that each argued against the continuation of this hegemony, and that each proposed an alternative paradigm, Houlgate examines the thought of Descartes, Berkeley, and Hegel in order to question these more contemporary critiques of vision and "visionary" thinking. Concluding his analysis of Descartes and Berkeley, he asserts that neither of these philosophers made vision by itself responsible for the reductive objectification and instrumentalization of our world.

Taking a position that differs from the one defined by Judovitz, he writes: "It may well be, as a study of Descartes suggests, that modern technological subjectivity rests not so much on the hegemony of vision, but rather on a certain narrow conception of thought. Furthermore, it may also be the case that vision is precisely what points the way to a richer, more open, less reductive conception of thought. One philosopher who to my mind is convinced of the intrinsic generosity of vision is G. W. F. Hegel." Pointing out that Hegelian vision is "a complex fusion of different levels of awareness," Houlgate maintains that, for Hegel, "objectifying, mastering subjectivity is not the product of the hegemony of vision . . . in human life, but rather the product of [a] conscious reflection" moved by "self-oriented desire." After drawing our attention to Hegel's articulation of "visual intuition"—a very different mode of vision, less reductive, more generous, and more in harmony with its objects, but no less oriented toward objective clarity—Houlgate concludes his study, inviting the cultivation of a philosophical vision that is genuinely open to its other and free of the need to dominate.

Following this reading of Hegel—the architect of a great philosophical system, one of the "grand narratives" that postmodern criticism would like to see us abjure—is a chapter on Nietzsche, the most passionate enemy of philosophical systems, who wrote of his "profound aversion to reposing once and for all in any one total view of the world," and of his "fascination for the opposing point of view: refusal to be deprived of the stimulus of the enigmatic."<sup>21</sup> Gary Shapiro's "In the Shadows of Philosophy: Nietzsche and the Question of Vision" skillfully moves through the labyrinths traced by Nietzsche's writings and enables us to put in historical perspective Nietzsche's many ways of seeing things, his discursive deployment of visual examples, his visual metaphors, his attitude toward dream and illusion, his critique of the visualism blinding philosophical discourse, and his relationship to modernity and its project of Enlightenment.

Shapiro holds that, contrary to what Heidegger contended, Nietzsche's philosophy does not continue the tradition's hegemonic conception of vision. Pointing out that Nietzsche's thinking delighted in the interplay of light and shadow, clarity and obscurity, the manifest and the hidden, presence and absence, he calls into question the interpretation according to which Nietzsche thought of vision as an instrument of the will inherently driven by a desire to make everything totally visible and totally clear. But if Nietzsche refused the nobility of a privileged vision captured by the metaphysics of presence, then neither, according to Shapiro, did he adopt an uncompromisingly antiocular position, substituting the auditory and the tactile for the visual. Shapiro shows that Nietzsche's break with the tradition of ocularcentrism in philosophy does

not consist in avoiding all recourse to visual vocabulary, but rather in the strategic deployment of a visual vocabulary excluded by the tradition, thereby deconstructing the ocular support claimed for its epistemology and metaphysics. Rethinking vision, thinking toward the possibility of a vision no longer enslaved by metaphysics, Nietzsche calls for an abyssal vision, a fearless gaze willing to look into the abysses and face a world without any absolute grounding. Shapiro elaborates this vision.

In the "Economy" chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau asks an important question: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?" In "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the Search for a New Ontology of Sight," Martin Jay defends vision and its philosophical discourse against the hostility of French philosophy in the twentieth century. Finally in revolt against the legacy of Cartesianism, many French philosophers of this century have sharply denounced what Jay calls a "spectatorial and intellectualist epistemology based on a subjective self reflecting on an objective world exterior to it," radically questioning the ocularcentrism of the dominant philosophical tradition, and finding support for their critique in the work of Husserl and Heidegger. According to Jay, these philosophers ultimately contributed, despite their own strongly ocularcentric vocabularies, to a decisive weakening of the ocular paradigm. Thus, for example, Husserl's concept of intentionality abolished the spectatorial distance separating subject and object and made it necessary to revise traditional theories of representation. Moreover, his late work on the prereflective lifeworld demonstrated that "phenomenology could mean something besides the search for pure essences."

As for Heidegger, Jay points out that, although Heidegger was always attempting to give thought to the advent of a new vision, he was extremely critical of Greek notions of *theoria*, theoretical vision and contemplation; that he lamented the reduction of *theoria* to observation in modern empiricism; that, like Dewey and Husserl, he contested the privileging of a spectatorial vision which endistances and estranges subject and object; that he repudiated ontologies which, "based on the synchronicity of a fixating gaze," made spatial existence prior to temporality; and that he regretted the degeneration of vision, its fall from the nobility and openness of wonderment in ancient Greece to the gaze driven by the will to power, the predatory possessiveness and calculating, self-interested curiosity that are distinctive, for him, of our contemporary world.

Analyzing all Sartre's major philosophical works, Jay carefully documents the evolution of Sartre's obsession with vision—his indictment of "the absolute look" and his critique of the hegemony of vision both in

our social relations and in our philosophical discourse. Noting that, for Sartre, life is a constant struggle for power, and that he thought our sight to be partly responsible for the reifications, alienations, and humiliations of social existence, Jay can find no recognition in Sartre's work of any redeeming virtues, any more benevolent tendency and potential, in our capacity for sight—nothing worth cultivating.

With Merleau-Ponty, the story is very different—and also, as Jay shows, much more complex, much more ambiguous. For if it can be argued that he was a critic of ocularcentrism in the history of philosophy, it can also be argued that his own work is deeply ocularcentric, and that he made, as Jay puts it, “a heroic attempt to reaffirm the nobility of vision on new and firmer grounds” than those provided by the “scopic regime” of Cartesianism. To be sure, on the one hand, he dethroned the sovereign spectator, “the observing subject, whether Cartesian, Sartrean, Husserlian, or Marxist,” brought the philosopher's “bird's-eye view” back down to earth, challenged philosophies of reflection, undermined the vision-generated dualism of subject and object, denied the possibility of Cartesian clarity and the rationalist assumption of transparency in meaning, and “raised invisibility to the same ontological status as visibility.” On the other hand, he argued with eloquence for the primacy of perception, fought for perspectivism, and rejected both empiricism, which he accused of reducing vision to observation, and intellectualism, which he accused of transcendental narcissism, and of turning vision into an act of intellectual judgment.

Moreover, he attempted, as Jay points out, to articulate a “new ontology of vision,” drawing on the resources of a hermeneutical phenomenology to bring to light a dialectical intersubjectivity of gazes, gazes constitutive of social relations oriented by mutual acknowledgment. And it may even be argued, as I have, that Merleau-Ponty's last writings, assembled in a volume titled *The Visible and the Invisible*, show how, in the process of “mirroring,” the reflexive reversibilities of vision “double-cross” the moment of narcissism and constitute a “corporeal schema” that schematizes and grounds—or, say, provides fertile soil for the cultivation of—the normative principles of mutual acknowledgment, reciprocity, and justice.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Jay wants to conclude that, “even in his case, it can be demonstrated that the suspicions and doubts plaguing other twentieth-century French critics of ocularcentrism ultimately surfaced.” For, while some philosophers have accused Merleau-Ponty of being too closely tied to the “exorbitant privilege of vision in our culture,” Jay finds himself compelled to confess that the new ontology of sight which Merleau-Ponty adumbrates in his last writings—the project of an ontology which radi-

cally decenters the percipient subject—delivers a “vision” that is not easily recognizable as still human—or even, for that matter, as still what can be called “vision.” Perhaps one of the most thought-provoking questions with which Jay leaves us, then, is, what sense can we make out of phenomenological “narratives” that radically deconstruct the subject-object structure which we moderns have come to identify with, or as, the essentially human: assertions, for example, that there is “an anonymous visibility,” a reversible “vision in general” inhabiting us, that “I am all that I see,” and that “through vision we [literally] touch the sun and the stars.”

My own contribution is “Decline and Fall: Ocularcentrism in Heidegger’s Reading of the History of Metaphysics.” As earlier chapters have pointed out, Heidegger formulated a powerful double critique: first of all, a critique of our everyday way of seeing, the inauthentic way of seeing typical of everyone-and-anyone (*das Man*), which he regarded as calculative, narrowly instrumental, reifying, aggressive, and ontologically degenerate (i.e., forgetful of being); and second, a critique of the hegemony of vision, not only in the discourse of philosophy from Plato through Husserl but also in Western culture as a whole, and in modernity most of all. In this chapter, I place Heidegger’s critique in the context of his reading of the history of metaphysics, and relate this critical reading to his interpretation of Western history. And I show that, although he was inclined to see our history through the optics of a conservative-Romantic narrative of decline and fall, he was also drawn to the consideration of a radically different way of seeing: as early as *Being and Time*, with its hope for a redeeming “moment of vision,” and as late as *Gelassenheit*, with its attempt to envision an ontologically appropriate, ontologically thoughtful seeing which is open to “the lighting,” the “unconcealment” of being, and capable of letting visible beings be what and as they are.

Proposing an interpretation that differs to some extent from Martin Jay’s, I suggest that Heidegger was neither (in contrast to Derrida) against the *hegemony* of vision as such, nor even (in contrast to Descartes and Sartre) critical of *vision* as such. On the contrary, his thinking, ever inspired by the ocularcentric Greeks, was deeply beholden to vision-generated, vision-centered language. However, he was strongly critical of the *character* of the vision that has prevailed in our ocularcentric culture and its philosophical discourse. What disturbed him was increasing domination by a vision the character of which he held partly responsible for the increasing “darkness” of the world, our increasing “closure” to the lighting of being. This “pathological” vision was, he thought, particularly powerful in our present epoch. Indeed, the modern age was, for him, the age of the world picture, the age when being itself is finally reduced to

the enframing of representation. And he turned to the Greeks, especially the pre-Socratics, not in order to repeat the past, not in order to retrieve intact their original vision, but rather to learn whatever he could from struggling to understand their thought, and to find, in the light of their accomplishments, a new beginning for vision, a way of seeing no longer bound to the will to power and the metaphysics of modernity.

Chapter 7, contributed by Herman Rapaport, is on "Time's Cinders." The focus of this chapter is Heidegger's lecture course "On the Essence of Human Freedom." In this course, which took place during the summer of 1930, Heidegger attempted to define the "essence" of freedom in relation to the truth (unconcealment) of being and to articulate this relation in terms of a hermeneutic phenomenology of lighting and vision. Thus, the question of freedom ultimately becomes, for Heidegger, a question of understanding how human beings can exist in the openness granted by the light of being. However, since he held that being must be interpreted "in the light of time," the logic of his analysis of human freedom led him into a continuation of his thinking, begun in earlier work, about the relation of time and being.

Paradoxically, this thinking continues to make use, as Rapaport shows, of a "visionary" discourse, in spite of the fact that, to some extent, Heidegger's critique of the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of being as a standing and persisting presence attributes the occlusion of temporality, and the consequent "substantializing" of being, to the ocular vocabulary of their metaphysics.

After exploring Heidegger's perplexing dependency on the metaphysics of light and vision in his interpretation of time and being—an interpretation intended, of course, to cast light on the "essence" of human freedom, Rapaport turns to consider Derrida's *Cinders*, a work that reminds us of the cinders that remained in the crematoria of the German death camps, and of the lights of the spirit suddenly extinguished by the fires of hate that raged in the Holocaust: events exemplifying the monstrousness of human freedom that is always a possibility in the openness of being; events that, in 1930, Heidegger's invocations of a lighting, fire, and flames of the spirit may be said, if only belatedly and after the fact, to have anticipated—or even, perhaps, in a most uncanny way, to have ignited.

Supplementing Derrida's critical reading of Heidegger—a deconstructive hermeneutics that brings to light some surprising textual traces of Heidegger's National Socialism—Rapaport indicates how Heidegger's thinking remains haunted by the flames and glowing cinders of the Shoah, in which the light of both truth and freedom was betrayed, and virtually extinguished—something about which Heidegger was loath to

think and loath to see, in spite of his avowed commitment to freedom and truth.

Writing with Derrida's *Cinders* in mind, Rapaport gives us a reading of Heidegger's text "On the Essence of Human Freedom" that discovers in this discourse the evidence of a monstrous "truth of being" which Heidegger did not see. This tracework leaves no doubt: something was shadowing his vision of human freedom, something was being concealed: a truth already present and yet *not* already present, or *not yet* present. Thus, Rapaport also shows how Heidegger's understanding of the "essence" of freedom is related, in ways Heidegger himself did not expect to see, to the "indifference" of being: the "indifference" of an openness which allows for the possibility that the lighting of being may be turned into the fires of hell, the monstrous evil of the Holocaust.

What is absent from Heidegger's illumination of being? In the aftermath of the Second World War, the traces of evil were still present: cinders that spoke of all the absent ones—all those who were murdered in the name of the Spirit (*Geist*). In Germany, this Spirit fanned the flames of nationalism and racism. Reading Heidegger's lectures in the afterglow of this eerie light, Rapaport calls our attention to Heidegger's discussion of monstrousness as a human possibility, and also to his reflections on the temporal interpretation of being as presence and as absence. For the truth of the cinders in the crematoria, about which Heidegger never spoke, lies precisely in their uncanny position in our traditional ocular-centric ontology. There is no place for these cinders in the discourse of metaphysics. How do the cinders that remain to tell of the dead bring being into time and time into being? For Rapaport, this is a relation that can profoundly unsettle our understanding of ourselves and challenge our capacity for vision.

Chapter 8, by John McCumber, is on "Derrida and the Closure of Vision." McCumber begins his essay with a question: what is the connection Derrida makes, within the field of textuality, between metaphysics and vision? And he notes that, according to Derrida, metaphors of light and vision are central to the texts of metaphysics, and that these texts have always desired clarity, objected to shadows, refused to recognize shading (shades of meaning, the shade in which writing is cast), and betrayed their anxiety over perspectivism.

McCumber shows that Derrida's fascination with vision is twofold: (1) "If vision itself is external to [the texts and textuality of] philosophy, then a metaphorized version of vision is constitutive of it." (2) But what if, conversely, "vision itself, 'properly' understood . . . , is in truth merely an artifact of the metaphorical vision instituted by (and instituting) philosophy"? What then? In McCumber's reading, Derrida documents "four