Heidegger and the Nazis

This letter will be read by two of your peers. Do not use ChatGPT or similar LLM to draft this letter. It should be your writing, but you will use another LLM-based product for part of this letter.

Martin Heidegger is considered one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. However, his biography includes active and enthusiastic support of Nazism. He became a member of the Nazi party just over a week after he was elected rector of the University of Freiburg, joining the party on May 1, 1933. He was not only a member, but an enthusiastic supporter of the Nazis. After World War II, Heidegger was named as a "Mitläufer," a low-level public incrimination of being a Nazi. This association with Nazism and Heidegger's anti-semitic writings are at the center of much controversy about how Heidegger's philosophy should be viewed. Heidegger never unequivocally renounced his support of the Nazis, though he did express a form of regret.

Your letter should explore how Heidegger's support of Adolf Hitler and the tenets of the Nazi regime change (or do not change) your view of Heidegger's work?
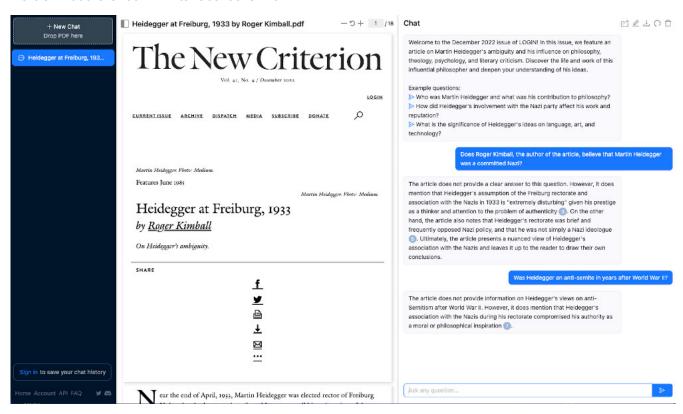
But there's more!

For this letter, use a LLM-based tool called ChatPDF (https://chatpdf.com/) and a PDF of an article by Richard Kimball. Take Kimball's article on "Heidegger at Freiburg, 1933" and use ChatPDF to explore it.

Your use of ChatPDF is partly to explore Kimball's article and (even more so) partly to explore the capabilities of ChatPDF and your relationship with it as you use it.

Note that when you pose a question to ChatPDF, the bot returns numbers in small blue circles. These refer to sections of the article that relate to the bot's response.

Here's what the ChatPDF interface looks like:

Carefully consider the ChatPDF responses, familiarize yourself with Kimball's article, and assess the quality of the ChatPDF responses.

In a brief paragraph in your letter, reflect on the experience of using ChatPDF to explore the article, considering the bot's accuracy as well as your confidence in its responses and the level of trust you had in using it.

When the machines take hold...

This letter will be read by one of your peers. This letter is assigned on October 9, but it is not due until OCTOBER 20. That gives you ample time to consider and, well, fiddle with ChatGPT. That is also after Fall Break.

You will use ChatGPT or another AI-assist for this Almost Weekly Letter, but you will do so following some rules.

Seminar participants will be divided into two groups: One group will use AI to *BEGIN* the writing process; the other group will use the AI *AFTER* having completed a draft of the letter and use the draft as part of the prompt.

Here are the groups, though be aware that you are doing your own work on your letter. These groups just tell you whether you *BEGIN* with ChatGPT (or whatever) or use it *AFTER* you have done a draft of the letter.

> **1. USE AI *TO BEGIN* – [student names]**

> **2. USE AI *AFTER BEGUN* – [student names]**

The tactics differ for the two groups. How do they differ and what do those differences imply about the processes of writing and its influence on the development of thought?

For this all other assignments using ChatGPT or other AI-assists, keep copies of your prompts and the subsequent responses from the AI.

Read the article by Simon Rich called "The New Poem-Making Machinery" (June 2022 *New Yorker* online; https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-new-poem-making-machinery). The last section of the article contains what Simon's calls "poetry" that was created by an AI developed by OpenAI. Think about questions that the article raises either explicitly or in your mind as you consider the story Rich tells and the verse that appears at the end of the article.

Of course, in the year since Rich's essay appeared, much has happened in the development of LLMs and AI. We think about them differently than we did when they first appeared as a significant cultural force. But the questions that Rich's essay remain. What did you think about Rich's essay? How has your thinking changed over the past year when it comes to ChatGPT, other LLMs and AI? Are human poets necessary for poetry? What are the hallmarks of evidence to back up claims of AI sentience? What do you think of the products of the "new poem-making machinery"? Is it art? Where "is" the art?

Is this cheating on this Almost Weekly Letter?

This letter will be read by a peer. This letter uses ChatGPT or a similar AI-assist.

Note that the assignment appears on October 9, but it is not due until OCTOBER 27. I wanted to give you plenty of time to consider and do the assignment.

For this letter, you have "co-writer" so you don't need to constrain yourself to the "about 750-word" length. You may find that double that word count works for you. This letter assignment is announced a week earlier than the usual letter assignment, so that you have more time to complete it. **The letter topic is announced on October 9, and it's due on October 27, well after Fall Break.**

An earlier letter asked you to consider the products of a "new poem-making machinery." This letter gives you the opportunity to take the machinery for a spin. Your letter this week uses ChatGPT or a similar AI-assist (like Bing, for example), which is a step up from the language model that used in Simon Rich's *New Yorker* article. (Ethan Mollick's Substack post, cited below, has a list of chat bots that were around in summer 2023, along with his frank assessment of them.)

What about using AI to write term papers? At the very least, students have thought about that, and it's fair to assume that most students have already done it. Teachers are coming around to thinking about it, too, though many are still cupping their hands around their ears and singing "La-La-La-La" to avoid hearing about LLMs like ChatGPT.

"As Grant Otsuki argues, there's no putting the AI genie back in the bottle and little sense banning its use outright. Instead of teachers 'pretending AI doesn't exist' or treating it merely as an antagonist, Otsuki encourages us to bring it into the classroom: 'it might be time to train people to write with AI.' What would that look like? While many writers are familiar with various assistive technologies, there are practically no examples for training writers with text-generating AI and language models like GPT-2" (Paul Fyfe, "How to cheat on your final paper: Assigning AI for student writing" 2022).

For the first part of this letter, devise a set of "prompts" that relate to your research paper topic. (You will have a better chance of identifying false information, which is likely to abound in the responses, if you use a topic that you know.) Play around with the chat bot you chose to use. Ethan Mollick has some useful pointers for how to devise effective prompts: "How to Use AI to Do Stuff: An Opinionated Guide" (https://www.oneusefulthing.org/p/how-to-use-ai-to-do-stuff-an-opinionated). Mollick's article was assigned earlier this semester.

For the **first part of your letter**, save the prompts you use and the outputs that the bot provides. Edit the outputs, and indicate deleted by ~~strikethroughs~~ and your additions by **bold face** type.

In a **second part of the letter**, using your own writerly voice (**no AI or LLM for this section!**), review your experience of using the bot to create the piece of writing for the first part of the letter. Some questions to get you going: How hard (or easy) was it to find prompts that worked well? What process did you improvize to get the chatbot to work as a "co-writer"? What did you discover? Where did you find the AI helpful and where was it a hindrance? How do you think AI might change the ways that people view writing, both in education and in employment? Does the use of AI constitute plagiarism? What might be the advantages of using AI tools like ChatGPT? The disadvantages?