**Shall we think with Heidegger against Heidegger?**

Gregory Fried encounters his rational open-minded antitype, one who remains favorable to his subject even where he disagrees. While Fried recognizes Heidegger as the illiberal obsessed by völkisch communal belonging and while he may not see him anymore as the great philosopher, he notes the broad impact Heidegger has had in emphasizing the totality of ‘Being’ against ‘metaphysics’ and the reduction of reality to what can be rationally analyzed. He points out “that the question of Being is as old as philosophy itself, and was never Heidegger’s private property”. But – in spite of Heidegger’s known deceptions and falsifications and the megalomania now found in the *Black Notebooks* –he does credit him with having attempted new answers to avert the “relentless quest for power upon power […] as we ramp up the apocalyptic lethality of our weaponry”, new answers serious enough to make us think “the question of Being against Heidegger” with Heidegger.

We read that in the *Notebooks* Heidegger acknowledges “how early” he came to believe in Hitler’s party as a political option. But this does not come as a surprise in view of recent research.[[1]](#footnote-1) The same holds for Heidegger’s anti-Semitism before 1933: “Whatever Heidegger’s anti-Semitism was then, he must have kept it quite private” Fried writes. This may be the common perception, but several well founded analyses have established that Heidegger’s anti-Semitism has, from early on, been more than mere cultural prejudice.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is true that *Being and Time* was preceded by Heidegger’s fame as an outstanding teacher. But assuming that his “electrifying impact” was due to his great philosophizing seems dubious. The *Notebooks* clearly confirm the cryptic way of expression he cultivated, in agreement with numerous statements scattered in the ‘Gesamtausgabe’. One example among many others: “In the future we have to dare the unintelligible; *any* concession in terms of comprehensibility is already a destruction”.[[3]](#footnote-3) In and of itself this *could* indicate the difficult search for a new *philosophical* language. But Heidegger’s work being a steadily expanding corpus, known texts need to be linked to the newly published. In 1931 Heidegger explains that “what is said indirectly” appears to be the best way to “impose” his message to his students.[[4]](#footnote-4) Does the veiled way of expression point to the depth of the thinking, or is it not the result of a manner of philosophizing that reduces free judgment works by working with allusions and, to cite a former Heidegger student, with “imposition”?[[5]](#footnote-5)

My own research makes me believe that Heidegger’s cryptic language is linked to a crucial yet generally disregarded notion of his thinking: the aptitude of every human being to use his reason towards understanding the world is given up for a belief in the “difference in essence” of *Menschentümer*,[[6]](#footnote-6) a disdainful term perhaps translatable by “mankinds”, in the face of an instable and dangerous life destined for heroes. For Heidegger reason, understood as a common human ability, is the expression of cowardice. He conceives of philosophy as struggle against cowards, as something beyond a dialogue based on rational arguments. Genuine thinking is “struggle of meditation”[[7]](#footnote-7) that aims at “domination and decision”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Such martial meditation is not about knowledge, it is about the conjuring cult true Being that opens itself only to the chosen few.

Fried explains that modernity, as seen by Heidegger, is the result of us being forgetful of Being. However, the modernity Heidegger rejects is less about *forgetting* Being than about *shirking* it because a whole range of people lack the courage, the strength and finally the “essence” to live up to Being. There is no general “we” for Heidegger. The *Notebooks* are clear about that: the propagated “meditation on essence”[[9]](#footnote-9) is the obverse of the “incapacity for meditation” of those who lack roots and therefore lack history– *Geschichte*.[[10]](#footnote-10) It should be noted here that Nazis are *never* qualified as lacking history in the *Notebooks*. It is thus disputable when Fried states that the Nazis appear “as yet another manifestation of metaphysics”. The only danger according to Heidegger is that Nazism could be weakened by Jewish machination and thereby loose its brutal radicalism.

The alleged Jewish trickery, their machinations, is the very reason Heidegger celebrates World War II: it epitomizes the necessary struggle against those who are not only “immune”[[11]](#footnote-11) to the call of Being, but are worse in seeking to deter the Germans and their state from their destiny: these are the “merchants”, the “money grubbers” who are “tricky”, who mislead, who “lurk” and who “allure”.[[12]](#footnote-12) The anti-Semitic semantics can easily be evoked without having to join the explicit and therefore trivial anti-Semitic choir. To what extent is the “invisible philosophy”[[13]](#footnote-13) that Heidegger advocates a conscious device of writing between the lines, one of the tactics devised for the “invisible war” against the Jews?[[14]](#footnote-14) I see this as a crucial, yet neglected, aspect of the debate.

Fried points out correctly that Heidegger had hoped National Socialism to “be the catalyst of a ‘crossing-over’ to a new history”. It is understandable that Fried remains elusive, as to what this new history is actually about. Heidegger never concretizes this ‘crossing over’ because his philosophy is about *awakening* the German people to what he seems to consider to be ability to flirt with abyss that has little to do with “who we are *going to be* as human beings in a newly global world” (G. Fried).

Recent work that clarifies Heidegger’s attitude versus Nazism ought to be taken into account:[[15]](#footnote-15) namely that Heidegger distinguishes between different “metaphysical essences”. On the one hand the Germanic and Russian metaphysical essence, representing “people of authentic historical force”, on the other hand the “metaphysical inanity”[[16]](#footnote-16) of the Jews, the Americans, the English, the French. Heidegger advocates an ultimate subjectivity which is the will to power and its tool: technology in its martial sense.[[17]](#footnote-17) In his *Letter on Humanism* (1947) Heidegger began to spell out a modernity starting with Descartes and leading to the Shoah. This crude representation may well be as post-war mystification. If so, we would be ill advised to see in Heidegger a philosopher who, despite his errors, might still help us to define a humanity beyond a “relentless quest for power upon power” and to understand “what it means to be human upon this earth” (G. Fried).

1. See the testimonials by Max Müller and Hans-Georg Gadamer cited in Faye, E. *Heidegger, the Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*. New Haven 2009: 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See i.e. Heidegger, M. /K. Bauch. *Briefwechsel 1932-1975*. A. Heidegger (ed.). Freiburg 2010: 18, 32. And also: Faye. *Heidegger, the Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy…* p. 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. GA 96, 222 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E. Blochmann/M. Heidegger, *Briefwechsel 1918–69*, Marbach a. N. 1989: 46. Letter from 30.12.1931: “In diesem Semester mache ich wieder die Erfahrung, die mich immer wieder beunruhigt, daß das indirekt Gesagte am sichersten einschlägt ….“ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Hersch, J. *Eclairer L’obscur. Jeanne Hersch. Entretiens Avec Gabrielle et Alfred Dufour*. Lausanne 1986: 29: “Les idées qu’il développait devant nous, il ne les soumettait pas à notre libre jugement, qui est l’attitude libérale d’un philosophe; il les imposait”. Also: Faye, E. *Heidegger, the Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy …* p. 221 sq. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See GA. 54 [lecture from winter 1941/42]: 142. And GA 69 [texts dating from 1938–40]: 205 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. GA 96, 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. GA 96, 22 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. GA 96, 86 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. GA 96, 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. GA 96, 41 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. GA 96, 114, 94, 89, 89, 117, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. GA 96, 87 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Kellerer. “À Quelle ‘guerre Invisible’ Heidegger Faisait-Il Référence? http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/actualites/20140510.OBS6734/a-quelle-guerre-invisible-heidegger-faisait-il-reference.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See i.e. Faye, E. (ed.) *Heidegger, le Sol, la Communaute, la Race*. Paris 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. GA 96, 56, 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Kellerer. “Rewording the Past.” *Modern Intellectual History* 11, no. 3 (2014): 575–602. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)