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Emmanuel Faye. *Heidegger: L'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2005. 567 pp. EUR 29.00 (paper), ISBN 978-2-226-14252-8.

James Phillips. *Heidegger's Volk: Between National Socialism and Poetry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. 278 pp. EUR 23.50 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5071-4.

Richard Wolin. *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. 375 pp. EUR 27.90 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-11464-4.

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## Heidegger and National Socialism: New Contributions to an Old Debate

Some topics seem to be complex enough to engender not only one but several big controversies. The relation between Heidegger, his philosophy and National Socialism is such a topic.[1] For a while now we have been witnessing the fourth Heidegger debate since 1945, with contributions mainly in French and German newspapers and magazines. It was kicked off by Emmanuel Faye's voluminous study *Heidegger. L'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie*, published in France last year. By now, dozens of written interventions have appeared, some of them applauding Faye's sustained attack on Heidegger's philosophy, others launching a counter-attack in defense of a philosopher widely regarded as one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century.

What is it about Faye's book that has caused so much excitement? First of all, it is the radicality of its central claim: not only was Heidegger a Nazi, his whole philosophy is permeated by National Socialism. Therefore, Heidegger cannot be regarded as a great thinker; in fact, he should not be regarded as a thinker at all (p. 516). Hence the intellectual turmoil, and hence the dramatization Faye initiates beginning with the preface: he sees himself as engaged in a struggle against the propagation of Nazism and Hitlerism in the realm of thought, a

struggle that is still ongoing and on which the future of the human species depends (p. 7). Despite this somewhat agitated tone and the at times polemical character of Faye's argument, it should be stressed at the outset that—contrary to some accusations—the book is not a pamphlet but the outcome of several years of extensive and serious research.

Faye tries to justify his thesis that Heidegger subjected philosophy to the political aim of legitimizing National Socialism by citing a huge amount of published and unpublished writings, most of them already known—mainly speeches, seminars and courses that until now have only been available in German (especially in volumes 16, 36/37 and 38 of the so-called *Gesamtausgabe*).[2] In addition, Faye analyzes two unpublished seminars: “Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat” (Wintersemester 1933-34) and: “Hegel, über den Staat” (which Heidegger taught together with Erik Wolf in Wintersemester 1934-35). Faye intends to go beyond the much discussed works of Victor Farias and Hugo Ott by tightly linking philosophical critique and historical investigation (p. 9).[3] According to Faye, “l'affaire Heidegger” does not consist in the political engagement of a man who was temporarily deluded and whose work was

left intact, it is not reducible to the “grosse Dummheit” of which Heidegger himself spoke, but it amounts to the deliberate introduction of the foundations of Nazism and Hitlerism into philosophical thought and teaching (p. 9). What is more, the entire work of Heidegger is taken to continue to promulgate Nazism up until today.

In the introduction, Faye claims that the dissolution of the individual in a community rooted in “blood and soil” (*Blut und Boden*) is the hidden ideological agenda of Heidegger’s philosophy. Heidegger indeed adopts some of the racist conceptions of the Nazis; he short-circuits his own philosophical vocabulary (featuring such key concepts as *Kampf*, *Volksgemeinschaft*, *völkisch* and *Führerschaft*) with the “lingua tertii imperii” so aptly described by Victor Klemperer. But even though this merger is not an isolated phenomenon pertaining only to some official speeches, Faye’s claim that it infects the totality of his work and thereby disqualifies it seems to go a little too far. Like Farías, Faye suggests that Heidegger’s philosophy can only be understood as based on his political engagement. Faye is more careful in providing a material basis for his accusations, but some of his claims seem rather unwarranted, as, for example, when he insinuates that Heidegger might have been involved in writing some of Hitler’s speeches.

In the first chapter, “Avant 1933: le radicalisme de Heidegger, la destruction de la tradition philosophique et l’appel du nazisme,” Faye sets out to scan Heidegger’s philosophical writings from the 1920s for signs of a development that leads up to his engagement with National Socialism. He stresses the anti-modern, nationalist, Catholicist, existentialist and decisionist character of Heidegger’s writings of the time, a list that already points to some difficulties in assuming a linear development. When turning to Heidegger’s opus magnum *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Faye almost exclusively focuses on the infamous paragraph 74 where the *Volk* is introduced as a central category in a somewhat surprising move from the individualized authentic *Dasein* to the totalitarian unity of the collective. The only thing that seems to interest Faye in this extremely complex and rich book is how the critique of Cartesianism—which Faye apparently considers to be politically suspicious in itself (p. 33)—leads to the destruction of the individual and its dissolution in the community of the people. *Sein und Zeit* thereby turns from a purely philosophical project into a purely political one that not only manifests a romanticist affinity to *Heimat* but also mirrors the National Socialist doctrine of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (p. 33).[4]

Chapter 2 documents how Heidegger, as rector of Freiburg University, actively participated in the implementation of the university’s new antisemitic regulations, via the introduction of the *Führerprinzip* and in *Gleichschaltung*. During his rectorship, Heidegger’s aim was not to save some of the university’s autonomy from political influence, but on the contrary to advance the *Selbstbehauptung* of the newly politicized university by participating in the National Socialist revolution.[5] As chapter 3 shows, Heidegger’s resignation from his post as rector of Freiburg University did not mark the end of his engagement with National Socialism. He continued to invoke and promulgate the new *Kampf- und Erziehungsgemeinschaft*, the *Arbeitslager* and *Volksgesundheit*. [6] In chapter 4, Faye analyzes Heidegger’s course on logic (Sommersemester 1934, published in vol. 38 of the *Gesamtausgabe*), which is a prime example of the way Heidegger engaged in the indoctrination of his students. Chapter 5 focuses on the unpublished course “Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat,” the publication of which is apparently not planned in the *Gesamtausgabe*. The way in which Heidegger himself identifies the relationship between *Sein* and *Seiendes* with the relationship between state and people leads Faye to the general conclusion that the true meaning of Heidegger’s central philosophical concepts can only be understood in relation to National Socialism—that there is no Heideggerian philosophy that exists independently from its implication in Nazism (p. 242). In chapter 6, Heidegger’s relation to Carl Schmitt and Alfred Bäumler is portrayed, especially with regard to their critique of the liberal conception of politics and their own conception of the distinction between friend and enemy.[7] In this context, Faye confronts the reader with one of the most repulsive quotes from Heidegger, in which he calls for the total destruction (*Vernichtung*) of the enemy.[8] Chapter 7 introduces the legal scholar Erik Wolf as a close ally of Heidegger’s pro-Nazi politics at Freiburg and chapter 8 turns to the unpublished seminar the two of them taught on “Hegel, über den Staat.” The last chapter focuses on the later Heidegger’s philosophy, which Faye interprets as a “négationnisme ontologique” (p. 491), an attempt to exculpate himself and the whole Nazi project by means of a grandiose theory of the planetary reign of technology and contemporary nihilism. (National Socialism, for the later Heidegger, was merely another manifestation of this nihilism to which it initially seemed a radical alternative.)

Faye’s purpose in the book is to confront the reader with a moral and intellectual choice: either one fights

against the continuation of Nazism and Hitlerism in the realm of thought or one accepts it (p. 497). It is certainly true that a sustained intellectual and political effort has to be directed against revisionist writers who attempt to excuse and downplay or (even worse) provide a justification for Heidegger's engagement with National Socialism. However, Faye's simple alternative and his call for the reshelving of Heidegger's works from philosophy to history libraries seem to miss the complexity of the case.[9] A specialist on Descartes and Renaissance humanism, and himself a staunch rationalist, Faye sees Heidegger's philosophical critique of Cartesianism and modern rationalism merely as an ideological mask for a perverted politics. Those who adopt elements of Heidegger's critique are dubbed politically naïve or, worse, suspect—a judgment Faye passes on Derrida and even Habermas without further ado. One wonders what Faye would have said to some of the most prominent of Heidegger's students, like Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Herbert Marcuse and Hans Jonas, who continued to be influenced by his work even after 1945.[10]

Faye has succeeded indisputably in collecting and laying out for the reader the documents of Heidegger's deep involvement with National Socialism. Especially for the French context, his work will be of some importance, since it presents a large amount of material not available in translation before. Of course, this outcome is somewhat less remarkable for those who read German, but the analysis of the two unpublished seminars maps new ground (here it turns out to be of great advantage that all citations are also given in German in the footnotes). However, the reader is left with the ambivalent feeling that Faye's argument is historically strong but philosophically quite weak, since it never really takes the time necessary to understand the philosophical point and always rushes on to the alleged political subtext. Taking the Heidegger of 1933 as the one, only and true Heidegger leads Faye to view *Sein und Zeit* as National Socialism in disguise.[11] But to read Heidegger's National Socialist propaganda back into his philosophy proves to be of little philosophical value. And even if Heidegger himself argued that *Dasein* is in itself *völkisch* or German, why should we follow him in this unwarranted claim? [12] At this point it becomes especially evident that Faye tends to save himself the trouble of engaging in the necessary philosophical critique of Heidegger.[13]

More deplorable than these shortcomings, however, are the reactions of some Heideggerians who, once again, have refused to acknowledge the most basic historical facts or who have argued for a naïve distinction between

the man and his work. This tendency reaches a depressingly low level with François Fédier's characterization of Heidegger's behavior as "irreproachable" and some other contributions to a French website that was launched to counter Faye's "defamations." [14] But even more moderate voices, like Catherine Malabou's, speak of an ideological anti-Heideggerianism and add more fuel to the fire with not very helpful dramatizations like "guerre contre l'intelligence." [15]

The defenders of rationalism, however, clearly have had their own share in lowering the intellectual level of the debate. With *The Seduction of Unreason*, Richard Wolin, the arch-modernist of U.S. East Coast liberalism, provides an exemplary case. As the subtitle indicates, after having written extensively on Heidegger, Wolin now intends to uncover the "Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism." He does so in a series of essays on such diverse thinkers as Nietzsche, C. G. Jung, Gadamer, Bataille, Blanchot and Derrida, complemented by two chapters on the German New Right and the French New Right. But the reader will be inclined to ask what their uniting feature is. Wolin's answer is straightforward: they are all instantiations of the anti-democratic and anti-rationalist tradition of the Counter-Enlightenment. Unfortunately, Wolin uses the labels "Counter-Enlightenment" and "postmodernism" as *Kampfbegriffe* that he never clearly defines save by naming the usual suspects listed above (plus, naturally, Heidegger). Their philosophical works are reduced to a critique of reason and truth that Wolin deems intellectually untenable and politically disastrous and portrays as an expression of Western self-hatred and cynicism. Replacing the attempt to understand with the pursuit of his own political agenda—a critique of what he calls the postmodern academic left—Wolin's essays are filled with overhasty moral judgments and denunciations that cannot but seem rather peculiar to those readers not engaged in the simplifying logic of the U.S. culture wars.[16]

Pleading for "Reason's Return," Wolin speaks in the name of universalism, human rights, democracy and all the other good things no one could possibly oppose. There is, however, almost no philosophical argument that takes the positions he attacks seriously, as potential partners in a dialogue; rather, they are discredited from the start. This becomes especially apparent in his critique of Derrida's and Gadamer's philosophies. "Truth and Method," for example, is criticized for not treating human rights as one of its topics. Furthermore, not only does Wolin fail to provide an adequate defense of universalist conceptions of "truth" and "reason," he also

leaves open in what sense they are the necessary philosophical foundations for democracy.[17] His rhetorical strategy shares similarities with the method of “guilt-by-association” that he claims to avoid, nevertheless producing numerous statements admitting that a philosophical critique of the concepts of reason and truth does not make one a Nazi even as they imply the opposite through their choice of language. However, these criticisms should not obscure the fact that as pieces of intellectual history, some of the chapters (for example the ones on Bataille and Gadamer) provide interesting insights. As political interventions, however, they seem rather lame and as philosophical arguments they lack substance.

If Faye’s thesis—Heidegger’s National Socialism is the key to his philosophy—can be situated on one extreme, those who claim that Heidegger’s position was not National Socialist, that it even stood in contradiction to National Socialism or at least constituted a “private” version of it, seem to be located on the other extreme.[18] Interestingly, this view has recently been defended mostly by philosophers.[19] The most recent example is provided by James Phillips from the University of Tasmania, who sees Heidegger’s engagement with National Socialism as a genuinely philosophical engagement, the basis of which, as Heidegger himself claimed at the time, is provided by his concept of historicity. Since liberalism and democracy rest on the idea of the subject, Heidegger lined up with National Socialism in the task of demolishing the subject in favor of historicity and the *Volk*. Heidegger’s subsequent elaborations on the *Volk* can then be seen as providing an “immanent critique” of this central concept of National Socialism. According to Phillips, Heidegger came to see that liberalism (the ideas of 1789) and National Socialism (the ideas of 1933) both abstract from historicity and share the same ontological basis. Neither of them was able to think the *Volk* as authentic *Dasein*—the former dissolved it in an individualist manner, while the latter reified it as something given and certain. Needless to say, this argument is accompanied by numerous assurances that the author does not intend to downplay Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis. The whole line of thought, however, seems to be as historically uninformed as it is philosophically dubious. The problem with the Nazis, from either perspective, is surely not that they were not radical enough or that they were too liberal, too humanist, too wedded to the metaphysics of the subject. Furthermore, Heidegger’s critique of “real existierender Nationalsozialismus” was made in the name of what he thought of as the true and authentic

National Socialism. Consequently, one does not have to be a liberal in order to have some doubts about how *Heidegger’s Volk* could provide a solution for the problems of contemporary political philosophy.

The contributions to this new round of the Heidegger debate by Faye, Wolin and Phillips do not settle the case in either direction. Neither the prosecution nor the defense provide the decisive piece of evidence, and in fact it is quite unclear what this would look like. Rather, they can be seen as symptoms of an unresolvable puzzle that will continue to engender necessary debates and polemics like the one we are witnessing at the moment: that one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century has been so deeply implicated in the most terrible political enterprise. Heidegger’s *Fall*—in the double sense of fall and case—is not going to come to a close.

#### Notes

[1]. The earlier controversies are partially documented in Jürg Altwegg, ed., *Die Heidegger Kontroverse* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988); Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[2]. The scholarly status of the *Gesamtausgabe* is highly contested, since its editorial policies are extremely obscure. In fact, the way in which access to Heidegger’s estate (at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach) is restricted is quite scandalous. This makes it literally impossible to assess the philological accuracy of the available editions. Until 2026 access will be granted on opaque grounds to some researchers and not to others by Hermann Heidegger, who has propounded a rather questionable interpretation of Heidegger’s behavior between 1933 and 1945 (see the interview with him at <http://www.information-philosophie.de/philosophie/heideggergespraech.html>).

[3]. Faye situates his work in a line of studies that approach Heidegger’s work from different angles but in similarly critical ways: Victor Fariás, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1989); Pierre Bourdieu, *L’ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger* (Paris: Minuit, 1988); and Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). The most differentiated analysis can be found in: Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger. Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1992).

[4]. The thesis that *Sein und Zeit* makes a direct case

for National Socialism and the *Volksgemeinschaft* is at the center of Johannes Fritsche's work, *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). See also Hans Ebeling, *Martin Heidegger. Philosophie und Ideologie* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991), chapter 6.

[5]. See Reinhard Brandt, "Martin Heidegger: 'Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität,'" in his *Universität zwischen Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung* (Berlin: Akademie, 2003).

[6]. Most of the relevant documents can be found in Martin Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000). See also Bernd Martin, ed., *Martin Heidegger und das "Dritte Reich"* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989).

[7]. On another intellectual relationship of some importance to Heidegger, see the forthcoming study by Daniel Morat, *Konservatives Denken nach der Tat. Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger und Friedrich Georg Jünger 1920-1960* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006). An overview on the political behavior of professors of philosophy is provided by George Leaman, *Heidegger im Kontext. Gesamtüberblick zum NS-Engagement der Universitätsphilosophen* (Hamburg: Argument, 1993) and Gereon Wolters, "Der 'Führer' und seine Denker. Zur Philosophie des 'Dritten Reichs'," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47 (1999), pp. 223-251.

[8]. See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Wahrheit*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 36/37 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002), pp. 90-91, 94-95.

[9]. See Nicolas Tertulian, "Coup de tonnerre dans le ciel heideggerien," *L'Humanité* 18879 (April 28, 2005), pp. 22-23.

[10]. See Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); on Heidegger especially chapter 7 of this work, entitled "Arbeit Macht Frei: Heidegger as a Philosopher of the German 'Way.'" Wolin claims, a little too hastily, it seems, that Heidegger's students were in fact deluded by their old master.

[11]. See Emmanuel Faye, "Wie die Nazi-Ideologie in die Philosophie einzog," *Die Zeit* 34 (August 18, 2005), n.p. (accessed via internet archive, without page numbers).

[12]. See Henning Ritter, "Aus dem eigenen Da-

sein sprach schon das Deutsche," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 252 (October 29, 2005), p. 45.

[13]. See Dieter Thomä, "Alle zwanzig Jahre wieder," in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (July 30, 2005), n.p. (accessed via internet archive, without page numbers).

[14]. See <http://parolesdesjours.free.fr/scandale.htm>. It is somewhat disquieting that Gallimard is apparently about to publish a volume with the title *Heidegger à plus forte raison* with contributions of some of the more dubious participants in the debate. In the German context, revisionist studies on Heidegger's relation to National Socialism include Ernst Nolte, *Martin Heidegger. Politik und Geschichte im Leben und Denken* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1992); and Silvio Vietta, *Heideggers Kritik am Nationalsozialismus und an der Technik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989).

[15]. Catherine Malabou, "L'anti-Heideggerianisme idéologique: une nouvelle guerre contre l'intelligence," at [www2.ac-lyon.fr/enseigne/philosophie/c.malabou2005.rtf](http://www2.ac-lyon.fr/enseigne/philosophie/c.malabou2005.rtf). See also the statements presented in Jean Birnbaum, "Pour la jeune garde heideggérienne, l'oeuvre est indemne de toute imprégnation nazie," *Le Monde des Livres* (March 25, 2005), n.p.

[16]. John Gray, "Beyond Reasonable Doubt," in *New Statesman* (May 31, 2004), n.p. (accessed via internet archive, without page numbers).

[17]. Richard Rorty, "Philosophical Convictions," in *The Nation* (June 14, 2005), n.p. (accessed via internet archive, without page numbers).

[18]. A helpful systematic distinction between possible positions is developed by Dieter Thomä, "Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus. In der Dunkelkammer der Seinsgeschichte," in *Heidegger Handbuch*, ed. Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 141-162; see also Dieter Thomä, *Die Zeit des Selbst und die Zeit danach. Zur Kritik der Textgeschichte Martin Heideggers 1910-1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), chapters E.1 and E.4.

[19]. In his *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Julian Young, also formerly of the Philosophy Department at the University of Tasmania, argues that Heidegger's engagement with Nazism was inconsistent with his philosophical commitments at the very time and that after 1935 he provided a courageous critique of National Socialism that was in fact consistent with liberal democracy. As Hugo Ott has shown, these claims are historically false.

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