

Hachmeister, Lutz: *Heideggers Testament. Der Philosoph, der Spiegel und die SS*. Berlin: Propyläen Verlag 2014. ISBN: 978-3-549-07447-3; 368 S.

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Lutz Hachmeister's historical reconstruction of *Der Spiegel's* interview with Martin Heidegger in 1966 came out during the same month as the unveiling of three volumes of Heidegger's „Schwarze Hefte“, black notebooks in which the philosopher kept notes of his thoughts from the early 1930s until 1970. Heidegger indicated that these notebooks should be published only after his death, the same stipulation he made for the *Der Spiegel* interview. In the black notebooks, Heidegger affirms the radical politics that he outlined at the height of his official involvement in the Nazi movement, despite evincing frustration with the bureaucratic intransience and political resistance his ambitious plans faced for restructuring the German university during his year as rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933–34.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Heidegger makes a number of highly negative comments about Jews, providing the most direct evidence to date of his antisemitism and its connection to his philosophical project of overturning metaphysics and specifically its contemporary instantiation as the essence of technology (or what he called „Machenschaft“ in the hidden writings of the 1930s).<sup>2</sup> Heidegger views Jews as promoters of the equalizing, abstract, and mechanical worldviews of the scientific revolution, technology, logic, and mathematics, precisely ways of interpreting the world that he believed the Nazi revolution could overcome. In short, the image that emerges of Heidegger from the *Schwarze Hefte* is of a philosopher deeply entangled in the politics of Nazism.

The image Heidegger presented of himself in *Der Spiegel* could not have been more different. When asked explicitly about his Nazism in the interview, Heidegger portrayed himself as a politically naïve philosopher who stumbled into politics for the sake of protecting the academic integrity of the university only soon to realize his mistake

and retreat back to his *Hütte* where he resumed his life of isolated contemplation. This handy exculpatory myth of the apolitical, cloistered philosopher – a myth that Heidegger nourished already in 1945 and that would last into the early 1980s until it was challenged by scholars – functioned to conceal his deep and seemingly persistent attraction to the „inner truth and greatness“ of the Nazi movement.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger saw in Nazism the possibility of transitioning to a new and glorious beginning beyond the unceasing abandonment of Being by metaphysics since Plato. In the early 1930s, he expressed apocalyptic fears and hopes, fears that technological modernity might successfully declare itself as the end of history and hopes that Nazism might save the Western world under the magnanimous aegis of Germany from the rapacious grips of reification. Heidegger held out the possibility that a new form of thinking beyond the exhausted paradigms of the philosophical tradition could prepare the way for an alternative – a life beyond technology's impoverished reduction of humans and their relationships in the world to the characteristics of things. Nazism presented itself as an opportune moment to initiate, specifically, a radical reform of the German university that would enable an entirely new human society to come into existence centered on questioning, openness, finitude, and struggle.<sup>4</sup>

This apocalyptic and revolutionary vision of Nazism did not overtly come up in the *Der Spiegel* interview. Heidegger did not discuss

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*, GA 94, Frankfurt am Main 2014; *Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/39)*, GA 95, Frankfurt am Main 2014; *Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*, GA 96, Frankfurt am Main 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung*, Frankfurt am Main 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Quote from Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen 1998, p. 152. The initial source of Heidegger's postwar exculpatory myth is: *Das Rektorat 1933/34 – Tatsachen und Gedanken* (1945), in: Martin Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910–1976*, GA 16, Frankfurt am Main 2000, pp. 372–394.

<sup>4</sup> The key text here – which Heidegger continued to cite in his writings long after his official engagement with Nazism, including in the *Der Spiegel* interview – is: *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, in: Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse*, pp. 107–117.

it in any clear manner when asked directly about his Nazism and his interviewers from *Der Spiegel* – Rudolf Augstein, editor of the magazine and Georg Wolff, head of its humanities section – did not press him on it either, although they may not have recognized Heidegger's Nazism as such. Rather, Heidegger obfuscated his involvement in Nazism with relatively little resistance from his interlocutors, while at the same time reprising his concerns about the essence of technology. He used the interview to obscure and advance his politics at one and the same time.

How was this possible? How did Heidegger manage to hold nearly all the power in his encounter with *Der Spiegel* not only intellectually but also in the various details from being able to strike passages from the interview to stipulating the timing of its publication to even retaining its copyright (*Der Spiegel* had to pay 5,000 Deutsche Marks in 1997 to reprint the interview)? These are among the questions that Hachmeister's book seeks to answer. After briefly discussing Heidegger's critique of technology and the history of the establishment of *Der Spiegel* in the immediate postwar years, Hachmeister settles on three contexts for understanding the interview. The first context concerns the motives and expertise of Heidegger's interviewers. Augstein and Wolff both knew little about Heidegger's philosophy. Although they prepared for the interview, they simply did not have the philosophical training to probe deeply into his thinking and the depth of his attraction to Nazism. So why did they interview him in the first place? The answer seems straightforward: Augstein and Wolff wanted to secure a „trophy interview“ that would garner public attention (p. 13). Heidegger's academic fame, his controversial politics, his well-known disdain for mass media, his reputation as a powerful teacher even among his most critical former students – all of these characteristics made him an interesting and high profile person to interview. Heidegger no doubt knew what *Der Spiegel* was after and exploited it in his favor. Indeed, on March 22, 1966, Augstein personally reached out to him in letter that one would be hard pressed not to read as obsequious. This letter points to the second context in which Hachmeister's book

places the Heidegger interview: the mystique that enveloped Heidegger as a person after the war – „the cultish obsession with his persona,“ as Gregory Fried recently put it – seems to have captivated Augstein and Wolff.<sup>5</sup> This attraction was to Heidegger's enigmatic persona but also, more deeply, to what one might call the riddle of Heidegger, the riddle of attempting to connect into some semblance of understanding the many dimensions of his life: the author of *Being and Time*, the powerful teacher of some of the twentieth-century's most commanding thinkers, the Nazi rector, and the philosopher who showed not only no regret for his support of Nazism after 1945 but remained chillingly silent about Hitler's war of destruction against the Soviet Union and his genocide of the Jews. If Heidegger were not as complicated and multifaceted as he is, then his decision to support the Nazis and his postwar silence about the Holocaust would likely not prompt the kind of attention that it does to this day.

The third context that Hachmeister suggests is diffusely argued, if not somewhat unclear. In two chapters, he discusses the Nazi pasts of some of the leading employees of *Der Spiegel*, including most significantly Georg Wolff who held the rank of SS-Hauptsturmführer and served as an intelligence officer of the *Sicherheitsdienst* in occupied Norway. The implication seems to be that these links to the Nazi past in some way impacted the way in which *Der Spiegel* approached Heidegger's interview. Hachmeister's strongest case for such a claim lies with Wolff whom, he believes, Heidegger viewed as a „verständnisvoller Interpret“ (p. 222). While Hachmeister does not develop this point in any detail, it is worth exploring, for Wolff and Heidegger may have embraced similar concerns about technology. In his unpublished memoirs, Wolff recalled the deep impression that Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter* made on him and suggested that the danger he saw in modern technology after reading Jünger's work played a significant role in his attraction to Nazism. Heidegger also read Jünger as affirmation of his fear that techno-

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Fried, What Heidegger Was Hiding: Understanding the Philosopher's Anti-Semitism, in: *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2014.

logical modernity might be able to assert itself as the final interpretation of the Being of beings.

These last remarks prompt a final observation about Hachmeister's book. The book skillfully situates the Heidegger interview within the historical contexts of *Der Spiegel* and German efforts to come to terms with the Nazi past (or to avoid that responsibility all together in the case of Heidegger). In so doing, though, less space is left for delving deeply into the ideas of the interview itself. In the interview's first part, Heidegger reprises his exculpatory myth of the unworldly philosopher before then turning, in the second part, to a critique of technological modernity that one would be hard pressed not to interpret as political. As with many other Heideggerian texts, the interview conceals and discloses the political interventions of its author. If the political Heidegger may be more blunt and apparent in the *Schwarze Hefte*, it is hardly the only place in which to find his political rebellion against the Platonic-Christian-Marxist tradition.

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