

Interpretation

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Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*: The Significance of His Anti-Semitism

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Although the profundity of Martin Heidegger's thought, and the breadth of his influence, can hardly be doubted, his reputation has been forever stained by his association with Nazism, manifested most egregiously by his having accepted from the Hitler regime the rectorship of the University of Freiburg in 1933, in which capacity he delivered a notorious inaugural address extolling the "glory and greatness" of Germany's "New Awakening." Continuing to "stump" for Hitler later that year, he exhorted his audience not to let their "being" be governed by "rules and ideas," but rather to recognize "the Führer alone" as "the present and future German reality and its law."¹

Following the Second World War one of Heidegger's most serious students, Karl Löwith, published essays in the journal *Les Temps modernes* uncovering and denouncing his former mentor's link to Nazism. While Heidegger was prohibited by the Allies from teaching for some years after the war as part of the process of "denazification," and he avoided any openly political statements, in 1953 he published a revised edition of lectures he had presented in 1935 under the title *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which he

¹ Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 48.

had spoken of the “inner truth and greatness of National Socialism” (arising from its confrontation with the fundamental problem of “the encounter between global technology and modern man”). In the prefatory note to the 1953 volume, which still included that remark, Heidegger stated that he had remedied any “oversights” and “rectified imprecisions” in the original text. In other words, Heidegger had renounced none of his admiration for the principles (such as they were) of Nazism, however much he may have felt disappointed at the Nazis’ failure to apply them correctly.²

Despite Löwith’s critique, and despite Heidegger’s reiterating his admiration for the Nazi regime, his reputation was successfully whitewashed in the English-speaking world, for a time, by his one-time pupil (and lover), the German-born Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt. After having condemned her mentor’s philosophy both in a *Partisan Review* essay and in correspondence with another of Heidegger’s pupils, Karl Jaspers, during the years immediately following the war, Arendt abruptly changed her tune following a personal reunion in Germany in 1950. As Richard Wolin observes, she not only became the “reliable publicist and goodwill ambassador” that Heidegger desperately needed, owing to his Nazi associations; she also served as his “de facto American literary agent,” supervising the translation and publication of his works in this country. Most importantly, however, in her contribution to an eightieth birthday *Festschrift* for her teacher, she now portrayed his philosophy as entirely unrelated to his lamentable political activity, even claiming that he had practiced “spiritual resistance” to the Nazis in his lecture courses of the 1930s and denying that his rectoral address had been “an expression of Nazism.” Doubting that Heidegger even had “any clear notion of what Nazism was all about” at the time of his rectoral address, Arendt claimed that he ended his “political past” within some eight to ten months³ (having resigned from the rectorship shortly thereafter). In effect, Arendt portrayed her mentor as a naïf who had absentmindedly strayed into a political world he knew nothing about, only to withdraw as soon as he discovered his error. As Adam Kirsch put it in the *New Yorker*, Arendt then set the seal on Heidegger’s “absolution” in a birthday address on West German radio in which she dismissed Heidegger’s Nazism as an “escapade,” a mistake

² Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), “Prefatory Note” and 166. The significance of the prefatory note is pointed out by Leo Strauss, “Existentialism,” *Interpretation* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 306.

³ Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 49–51.

that occurred only because the thinker naively “succumbed to the temptation...to ‘intervene’ in the world of human affairs.”⁴

This image of Heidegger could not survive the publication of several books in the 1980s and 1990s, most notably biographical studies by Victor Farias and Hugo Ott, which showed that the German thinker’s association with the Nazi movement was both deeper and longer-lasting than Arendt had maintained.⁵ As Adam Kirsch summarized it in an essay on Arendt’s relationship to Heidegger in the *New York Times*, those studies demonstrated that Heidegger, far from a naive idealist, “was a committed National Socialist for many years, an admirer of Hitler who purged Jewish colleagues, presided over a book-burning and...continued to teach, publish and travel throughout the Nazi period.”⁶

Even more damning regarding the link between Heidegger’s thought and Nazism was the recent publication of several volumes of the philosopher’s Black Notebooks (so-called because of their black oilcloth covering), composed between 1931 and 1941. Some 1,800 pages of the notebooks have appeared so far, with (as the translator of the volume under review observes) “many more to come” (vii).⁷ (There are a total of thirty-four notebooks, covering the years from 1931 to about 1969.) The significance that Heidegger attached to the notebooks even late in his life is indicated by the fact that he apparently revised them with a view to posthumous publication, and in the mid-1970s “presented them to the German Literary Archive in Marbach as part of his estate.”⁸ The notebooks, in the words of Harvard scholar Peter Gordon, reveal a thinker whose “anti-Semitism turns out to have been far more pronounced than one might have imagined.” In addition, they demonstrate that Heidegger’s “disenchant[ment]” with the Nazi movement after 1934 reflected only his disappointment that Nazism “had succumbed to the

⁴ “The Jewish Question: Martin Heidegger,” *New York Times Book Review*, May 7, 2010. See also Alexander Duff, “Heidegger’s Ghosts,” *The American Interest*, February 25, 2016.

⁵ Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*, trans. Allan Blunden (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁶ Adam Kirsch, “Beware of Pity: Hannah Arendt and the Power of the Impersonal,” *The New Yorker*, January 12, 2009.

⁷ All parenthetical page citations in the text refer to the text under review. As of 2017 Indiana University Press had published three volumes of the notebooks, covering the period 1931–41, under the title *Ponderings*, and translated by Richard Rojcewicz.

⁸ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “‘The Supreme Will of the People’: What Do Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* Reveal?,” trans. Rodrigo Therezo, in *Heidegger’s “Black Notebooks”: Responses to Anti-Semitism*, ed. Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 131.

technological fate that afflicted the modern age overall”—not any revulsion at the Hitler regime’s unspeakably evil policies.⁹

Jean-Luc Nancy is an extensively published French “philosopher,” or philosophical thinker, whose work has been deeply influenced by, even preoccupied with, Heidegger’s thought—though other reported influences on him include such twentieth-century “deconstructionist” (Heideggerian) French thinkers as Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille, as well as classic philosophers such as Descartes, Hegel, Kant, and Nietzsche. In his short monograph *The Banality of Heidegger*, as the translator puts it, Nancy addresses the problem of the anti-Semitism expressed in the Black Notebooks with the aim of steering between the claims “that Heidegger’s thought is untouched by the the [moral and political] faults of its author” and that “Heidegger’s political, moral, and intellectual compromises render his work worthless.” As the translator remarks, Nancy bases his analysis on the fact that “the Black Notebooks reveal that Heidegger was anti-Semitic, philosophically” (not just personally), and he dismisses “attempts to diminish” that fact by observing, for instance, that the anti-Semitism emerges in “only a few statements” out of the bulk of the Notebooks thus far published (xii, emphasis in original).

But Nancy’s own assessment of the significance of that anti-Semitism is not easy to discern. The problem emerges in the opening sentences of *The Banality of Heidegger*, wherein he acknowledges having borrowed his title from the subtitle of Arendt’s highly controversial 1963 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Before beginning his treatment of Heidegger, Nancy expresses the wish that his title “not give rise” to the “surprising if not troubling” “misunderstandings” that Arendt’s subtitle “occasionally...provoked...as if it were a question of declaring that the evil represented by the Nazi camps was something banal and so did not deserve to be unreservedly opposed and denounced.” Far from using the term “banality” to denote “a relative indifference of evil,” Nancy maintains, Arendt meant thereby “to indicate the contrary: the extent to which it had been possible for the judgments and practices that converged in the extermination of five million people to be made into a banality” (1–2).¹⁰

It is true that Arendt, to the best of this reviewer’s knowledge, never denied the need or the justness of having resisted the evil represented by the death

⁹ Gordon, “Heidegger in Black,” *New York Review of Books*, October 9, 2014.

¹⁰ The more generally accepted estimate of the number of Jews exterminated by the Nazis, not counting their other civilian victims, is six million.

camps “unreservedly.” Nor did she deny the justness of Adolf Eichmann’s execution (though she questioned whether the Israeli tribunal that condemned him, as opposed to some international court representing “humanity,” was the appropriate body to impose that penalty). On the other hand, her choice of the term “banal” to refer to the evil perpetrated by Eichmann and his partners in crime certainly did have the effect, in many or most readers’ minds, of mitigating his personal responsibility for his misdeeds. So, too, did her claim that Eichmann, despite his major role in directing the “Final Solution,” was “neither perverted nor sadistic,” any more than “many” others, but rather “terribly and terrifyingly normal.”¹¹ Indeed, in her postscript, Arendt, having summed up her explanation of what “predisposed” Eichmann “to become one of the greatest criminals of [his] period” by the term “thoughtlessness,” suggested that it was “banal’ and even funny” that even “with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolic or demonic profundity” from him, although his actions were “far from...commonplace.”¹² Finally, Bettina Stangneth, in her study *Eichmann before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer* (first published in German four years before the original, French edition of Nancy’s book), demonstrates convincingly, especially in light of the notebooks that Eichmann compiled while in hiding in Argentina, the inadequacy of Arendt’s understanding of Eichmann’s psychology, his malevolence, and his ambitions.¹³

This is not the place to revisit the long debate over Arendt’s book. I have raised the foregoing issues only to highlight the oddity of Nancy’s choosing to title his book after hers, despite his acknowledgment of the controversiality of her claims, and of the fact that that choice has rendered Nancy himself liable to accusations “of wanting to minimize the importance of the anti-Semitic statements” contained in the Black Notebooks, when he assures readers that “the opposite is the case (as it was for Arendt)” (2). (The oddity is particularly pronounced in view of Arendt’s unsuccessful attempt, discussed above, to cleanse Heidegger of responsibility for his association with Nazism.)

Nancy maintains that “the banality, in Heidegger’s case, is that of the *doxa* [opinion, doctrine] of anti-Semitism as it was circulating in Europe in the years 1920–40 and as it has reemerged in our day, particularly in France

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged ed. (New York: Viking Books, 1965), 276.

¹² *Ibid.*, 287–88, emphasis added.

¹³ Stangneth, *Eichmann before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer*, trans. Ruth Martin (New York: Knopf, 2014).

and Germany, in Greece, and a little everywhere” (2–3). In other words, the banality lay in Heidegger’s “introduc[ing] into philosophy” a mere popular prejudice—the racist “anti-Semitic discourse that was very widespread in Europe since the beginning of the twentieth century”—against which one would have thought an individual who was “capable of critiquing [its] historical, anthropological, philosophical, and fantasmatic crudeness” to be immune. Such a critique might have arisen from “democratic or religious, Marxist or humanist convictions,” or simply from a “repulsion felt toward the inherent vulgarity inherent in racism,” such as “Nietzsche had very clearly detected,” especially since Heidegger himself elsewhere repudiates the “racial principle” on account of its “biological, naturalist, and therefore ‘metaphysical’” ground (which destroys man’s uniqueness by reducing him to one among many natural beings) (3–4).

The present review of Nancy’s book is not based on any study of the Notebooks themselves, which I have not had the opportunity to read (other than in brief excerpts). Moreover, as will become evident, Nancy’s mode of explaining the roots of Heidegger’s anti-Semitism will involve abstruse Heideggerian “metaphysical” arguments that I am sometimes at a loss to comprehend, much less explain. Nonetheless, I hope that this review will assist readers to better understand the issues raised by Heidegger’s anti-Semitic remarks in the Notebooks (as these have thus far become public), including their relation to the broader issue of how his anti-Semitism has been addressed by some of his more sympathetic followers. I emphasize that this review is in no sense intended as an overall interpretation of Heidegger’s philosophic teaching, let alone an attempt to dismiss its importance on political grounds.¹⁴

Nancy describes the problem represented by the Notebooks as one of understanding how Heidegger’s enterprise of uprooting, or “deconstructing,” the Western “metaphysical” tradition, with a view to generating a “second beginning” that would constitute “metaphysics—in an essentially new sense” (quoting the Notebooks from the period 1938–41)—could have “convoked” the “banal and unthinking” doctrine of anti-Semitism. Here he stresses Heidegger’s belief that the present “unfolding of the West, in its present state of ‘uprootedness,’ is rigorously improper...with respect to a new beginning, because this unfolding knows” only a barren “calculation and explanation.”

¹⁴ For an excellent recent treatment of the implications of Heidegger’s philosophy for politics that acknowledges their problematic character but emphasizes the need to take it seriously, see Alexander Duff, *Heidegger and Politics: The Ontology of Radical Discontent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Finding a new beginning presupposes the “complete disappearance of what characterizes the West in its ultimate condition: technical knowledge, the domination of the masses, calculation, and ‘machination’” (5–6).

At this point, late in 1941, Nancy then observes, a new “motif” comes to the fore in Heidegger’s thought, that of “Russianness.” Heidegger contrasts Russianness with the “technics and communism” that constitute “the European West” and prefigure its “self-annihilation.” “Russian authenticity” as Heidegger conceives it constitutes “a reverse side to communism” and its attendant “technics.” As of 1941 the Russian people represent “the only outline of a character capable of indicating a possibility for a new beginning,” albeit one “that perhaps still awaits a German people,” assuming that the latter could be “removed from...the ‘machinating’ condition” to which the Nazis led it (presumably referring to the regime’s reliance on advanced military technology), which had “betray[ed]” its capacity for initiating a beginning. Other peoples Heidegger names, “English, French, Italian, American, Japanese,” are dismissed as wallowing in “insufficiencies” or “miseries” (8).

The foregoing observations, Nancy explains, provide “the necessary conditions for situating” Heidegger’s anti-Semitism. Just as the West’s “first beginning was the doing” of a particular people, the Greeks, “the complete destruction of the Greek beginning also brings with it its appropriate people,” namely, the Jews (9–10). In other words, before the Russians, or perhaps the de-machinated Germans, can initiate the new beginning, the way must somehow first be cleared by the Jews. Their task is “the uprooting of all beings from being” (9–10).

Oddly, just after having quoted Heidegger’s account of that uprooting as the Jews’ “world-historical” task, Nancy warns against a supposed recent tendency to deny that terms like *anti-Semitism* may legitimately be used in the absence of moral condemnation. (Is such a warning really necessary or salutary?) “The obligation that we face today,” he explains, “belongs above all to analysis, not because we ought to forget moral judgment...but because up to now we have still not gone far enough in thinking the deep reasons for our condemnations.” That is, “Two-thirds of a century after the [Jews’] extermination we have not sufficiently confronted what has happened to us, to European humanity become fully global...in the movement of events that Heidegger designated as ‘the uprooting of every being,’” a phrase Nancy compares to others used “after, at the same time as, and before” to describe those events such as “decline of the West,” “alienation,” and “one-dimensional man” (10–11, Nancy’s emphases).

Rejecting the position of those who would strike Heidegger “from the ranks of the philosophers on the grounds of his Nazism,”¹⁵ Nancy warns against the errors both of reducing Heidegger to being “simply a Nazi” and of maintaining “that the event of Nazism, of all the fascisms, and more broadly of the totalitarianisms *and* of democracy (which pretends that none of this applies to it), would not pose any philosophical problems (except as a vague call to ‘values’)” (11–12, Nancy’s emphasis). Here we must agree with Nancy that given the widely shared sense of cultural crisis before and after Heidegger’s time, merely appealing to “values” would hardly overcome the civilizational problem that Heidegger, in his way, sought to address—any more than such contentless appeals do today. Yet we wonder at Nancy’s seeming inclusion of democracy alongside various “fascisms” as somehow complicit in the debacle of the Holocaust. Nor are we sufficiently reassured in this regard by Nancy’s citation of a passage from the Notebooks dismissing “racial knowledge” as the “‘scientific’ foundation of the populo-politico world view,” which he reads as an expression of contempt for Nazi racial “science,” to demonstrate “exactly the inverse” of the claim “that Heidegger was simply a Nazi,” as opposed to a believer in an “‘archi-fascism’” or “a kind of hyperbolic revelation of a destinal truth of being based on ‘a people.’” While Nancy maintains that it is this latter outlook, rather than the charge of “simple” Nazism, that “deserved to be scrutinized...dismantled, and repudiated” (13), we question whether this distinction amounts to more than verbal quibbling.

In the next section of his essay, Nancy pursues Heidegger’s account of the Jews as playing “a determining...role in the ‘uprooting of being,’” making them “the privileged actor in the decline of the West.” In Heidegger’s view (as Nancy summarizes it), “the Jewish people claims for itself a racial principle” stemming from a “‘domination of life by machination,’” which in turn leads towards “a complete ‘deracialization’ of a humanity reduced to the equality of all.” Here Nancy astutely points out two parallels between Heidegger’s position and Marx’s: first, the latter’s treatment of money (rather than the Jews) as a “‘general equivalent’ in which productive humanity is alienated and flattened down from its own proper existence”; second, Marx’s identification of the proletariat as “a class destined to overturn class relations,” as the Jews (according to Heidegger) are “destined to annul the distinction between

¹⁵ Nancy probably has in mind Emmanuel Faye’s contention that in view of the close connection of Heidegger’s teaching with Nazism, libraries should transfer his books from the philosophy section to “the historical archives of Nazism and Hitlerism” (Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935*, trans. Michael B. Smith [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009], 319).

racess,” both groups lacking any positive “identity” of their own (14–15). In both cases “a new type of humanity” must arise “through which is accomplished the downfall of a humanity not only ‘all too human’ but above all too estranged (alienated?) from its proper destination” (16).

The Jews, Nancy reminds us, must serve as the agent of the West’s inevitable end (18–19). The “anti-Semitic motif” on which Heidegger rests this identification is the Jews’ “aptitude for calculation, of traffic, and of shrewdness” or “scheming” (20, 83n2). In other words, as is indicated by a quotation inserted in the Notebooks from “On the Jewish Question” that Nancy will cite further on (56), Heidegger fully accepts Marx’s reduction of Judaism to sheer materialistic egoism. Indeed, as Nancy proceeds to observe, Heidegger draws his broader characterization of the Jews “from the most banal, vulgar, trivial, and nasty discourse that had long been scattered throughout Europe and that had been propped up for some thirty years by the miserable publication *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*” (a tsarist forgery depicting an ostensible Jewish plan for world domination) (23).

Since, as Nancy observes, the *Protocols* had been exposed as a fabrication as early as 1921, Heidegger’s tracking its claims, “without citing the text but also without demarcating himself from it, could not in 1940 be the result of chance.” He then offers the following justification for Heidegger’s act:

Heidegger knows very well what he is doing. He is collecting banal rubbish for the sake of higher ends. Which means that he also recognizes a higher truth in anti-Semitism. A truth so much higher that it cannot even be published without being associated with the critiques of Nazism and of Christianity...that fill the text of [the Notebooks]. These latter therefore remain private and are held back from publication until far into the future [as Heidegger directed to be done]... [Heidegger’s] scheme merits the support of the most widespread, heinous, and narrow-minded vulgarity because this vulgarity says in its way the truth of Jewish-being...the perfectly identifiable entity and identity of the precipitation of the world into vulgarity. (24)

Here, the reviewer’s mind (and, he hopes, that of his reader) reels. The shocking character of this defense (if that is what it is) of Heidegger’s enterprise is hardly mitigated by the sequel, in which Nancy alludes to the “conjunction” during the first quarter of the twentieth century “between the themes of decline, of the masses, of democracy and the many forms of a will to be startled or shaken up, to regenerate and to eliminate the morbid factors of the West.” Heidegger chooses the Jews to be the instruments of the West’s self-destruction because of their supposed lack of “positive history,” and their

“lack of everything that allows for the opening to *beyng*¹⁶ (soil, destiny, decision, people)” (25). In other words, as the popular prejudice goes, they are rootless cosmopolitans.

In his next section, Nancy asks why Heidegger failed to “investigat[e]... the reasons and the provenance of anti-Semitism,” rather than accepting “as a given of the Western destiny” the “banality” embodied in the “hateful” and “grotesque...*Protocols*.” However, Nancy adds that there are “grounds for asking...how it happens that the very broad modern consensus—Americano-Bolshevik, techno-democratic, and in particular Anglo-French-European—includes within itself” as “a leading agent, this Jewish element on which all the others have been so eager for so long to cast their opprobrium” (27–28).¹⁷ Whatever that might mean, Nancy seems to cloud his condemnation by associating the hatred of Jews with the alleged phenomenon—popularized in a 1930 book by the German-Jewish writer Theodor Lessing—of “Jewish self-hatred,” which he suggests Heidegger should have seen as connected with “hatred of the Jews” (by others) (28). (Subsequently Nancy will suggest that Heidegger’s anti-Semitism reflected “the self-detestation that has never ceased to characterize the West” itself since Roman times [39].) Is Nancy intimating that the Jews themselves somehow share responsibility for the hatred that others bear towards them?¹⁸ In any event, he concludes the chapter—apparently speaking on Heidegger’s behalf—by describing the Jew as “the oldest figure of a self-destruction of the West” (30).

Without explaining that claim, Nancy proceeds to observe that Heidegger “gives no attention to the long provenance of anti-Semitism” because

¹⁶ *Beyng* is a translation of the German word *Seyn*, the older spelling of the word *Sein* (Being), which Heidegger uses to distinguish the “originary sense” of Being that he is concerned with from the meta-physical sense of Being as “beingness” (*Seiendheit*). See Bret W. Davis, review of *Engaging Heidegger*, by Richard Capobianco, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, September 9, 2010.

¹⁷ Note the curious phrase “Americano-Bolshevik,” reflecting Nancy’s apparent acceptance of the abstract, ostensibly suprapolitical perspective from which Heidegger viewed the world—exemplified by the latter’s notorious 1949 remark in a Bremen lecture equating Hitler’s death camps with modern (American) mechanized agriculture (Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 287; for a fuller treatment of the circumstances of the remark—deleted from an initial published version of the lecture but then restored to the final, official edition of Heidegger’s writings—and the moral obtuseness it exemplified, see the exchange between Bruce Heinly and Peter E. Gordon, “Heidegger and the Gas Chambers,” *New York Review of Books*, December 4, 2014). Similarly, at 40–41 Nancy will attribute Heidegger’s silence on the Jews’ extermination to his belief in their connection to the supposedly deeper problem of “technics” and “machination.” (See the following note.)

¹⁸ That Heidegger himself explicitly engaged in such a process of “blaming the victims” in the Notebooks is pointed out by Gordon in “Heidegger and the Gas Chambers.”

he “never burdens himself with the questions of a historian,” instead viewing history as “a single and continuous process in which what comes about are only the successive aggravations of the metaphysics of beings” (that is, as distinguished from “being” as such).¹⁹ Only “the properly modern regime of science and technics” seems to represent “a truly important change” for Heidegger, even though it too was guided by the “erosion of the meaning of *beyng*” that “began with Plato” and was then intensified by the Jewish unleashing of “Platonism” (32–33). (Heidegger presumably had in mind Nietzsche’s representation of Christianity as “Platonism for the people.”)²⁰ Inscrutably, Nancy then suggests that the “philosophical weight” of Heidegger’s concept of “beginning” “ultimately prevents consideration of any development, any history” as “a succession of events” or of the notion that Heidegger would have “designate[d] in a philosophical manner the decidedly untenable character of the progressive models that had governed the thought of history from Kant to Marx” (those models may well have proved untenable, but how can that justify ignoring the facts regarding the origins of anti-Semitism?). He concludes that we must therefore “welcome the rupture that Heidegger introduced in relation to history” (33).

Observing that anti-Semitism “appears early in the history of Christianity,” Nancy asserts that that religion imposes on the Jew whatever it experiences as “disquiet” whenever it “reworks...its own identity,” as “in the Crusades, in scholasticism, in the Reform,” adding that “Heidegger is not in the least bit interested” in the “Zionism” (Nancy’s quotation marks) that ultimately arises in reaction to the use of the *Protocols* (35). And when “Heidegger critiques the ‘ambiguity’...of a Christianity” that alternates between world-affirmation and “the hope of the beyond,” he seems unaware that “Judaism does not lend itself to this ambiguity.” Nor does he discern how the “‘non-apologetic’ Christianity” exemplified by Augustine and Kierkegaard “can be indebted to Judaism for something that cannot be simply reduced to the Western scheming of reason and calculation” (35–36).

¹⁹ Heidegger’s lack of interest in the empirical study of history (as opposed to the history of *beyng*) contrasts with Leo Strauss’s frequent references in his classes, as well as some of his published works, to the writings of leading political/diplomatic historians such as Macaulay and Churchill, along with the admiration he expressed for the accomplishments of the great statesmen that they portrayed. This difference reflects the belief of Strauss, in contrast with Heidegger, that the political standpoint, rather than one outside it, is the proper beginning point for philosophy. See Richard Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 70–79, 156–63.

²⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), Preface, 3.

Nancy elaborates the connection between anti-Semitism and Western self-hatred as rooted in our (supposed) dislike for “technics,” “money,” “commerce,” and “rationality” (all commonly associated with the Jews), despite (he implies) our dependence on them. The Heidegger of the Notebooks led our need to remake our “selves” astray, however, “into a kind of Self that is the enemy of every other” (39–40). Nancy adds, puzzlingly, that Heidegger must have chosen to conceal his anti-Semitism in his “public texts,” as distinguished from the Notebooks, “for fear of the Nazis whose anti-Semitism he was at the same time challenging and confirming even while coupling it with anti-Nazism”—citing no evidence of this supposed challenge. Tellingly, however, he explains Heidegger’s postwar silence “on the extermination of the Jews,” in response to the “friendly but pressing questions of [Karl] Jaspers,” by remarking that “to the end” he must have “considered the extermination camps as inscribed in [humanity’s] ‘destination,’” in that “the horror of the camps is the extreme destinal point of technics,” and “there is no need even to mention *who* the victims of the camps are,” since “technics, machination, and the Jews are intimately linked” (Nancy’s emphasis). Here, Nancy does seem to condemn Heidegger for “exploit[ing] the banality of anti-Semitism,” a “heinous stupidity” reflecting the popular need to make the Jews a “scapegoat,” although he adds that the German thinker thereby left an important “place...for a decisive element in the metaphysics of beings: the presupposition of the initial, of the foundation and the origin, of the authentic and the proper” (40–41).

The present reviewer confesses himself incapable of “deconstructing” these conclusions. I limit myself to citing the penultimate paragraph of this section of Nancy’s book, wherein he disclaims any “intention here of refuting Heidegger,” as opposed to simply “designating clearly the way in which he let himself be carried away and stupefied in the worst of heinous banalities,” his knowledge of the “trap” contained within “the rage for the initial” being “occlud[ed]” by “the old rancor of the West against itself,” to which, Nancy seems to hold, he himself ultimately succumbed (43).

Nancy suggests that “the entire West was from its origins infected with rancor against itself precisely to the extent that it promised itself...a completion and fulfillment—of nature, of man, of the polity, of justice, of knowledge.” (Does he mean that the rancor resulted from our exaggerated hopes for such fulfillment? Did all or most of the West’s inhabitants, let alone the most thoughtful among them, harbor such hopes for earthly existence, or live lives of “rancor” because they weren’t fulfilled?) He then compares Heidegger’s description of Western civilization as now “endowed with an

unheard-of violence that places it in a position to destroy itself” to concerns previously expressed by Freud, but adds that “Heidegger simultaneously dreads and wishes for this destruction,” since it is the precondition of a “new beginning” of history, albeit one that could not be expected to arise until “2300 at the earliest” (44–45).

Here we may be stimulated to think of Machiavelli’s estimate of the lifespan of a religion as ranging from 1,666 to 3,000 years, suggesting the possibility of a new worldview that might replace the Christian one as soon as a century and a half after he wrote.²¹ Heidegger’s view that Western metaphysics “find[s] its completion in the predatory animal and the wild beast” similarly brings to mind Hobbes’s account of “natural” man, although for Hobbes the purpose of government is precisely to tame such wildness. Is Heidegger’s project of renewal really a response to a peculiarly modern line of philosophic development—including the promised but never-achieved “fulfillment” of complete justice encouraged by the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers who radicalized those philosophers’ revolutionary project²²—rather than to “Western metaphysics” as such? Similarly, is Heidegger’s identification of the origin of “technics” in Judaism and Platonism at all historically accurate? (Recall Nancy’s account of his lack of interest in “the questions of a historian.”) And may not Heidegger’s project constitute a radicalization rather than correction of the “progressive” hopes that he found to be philosophically “untenable”?²³

While in later writings Heidegger would reflect on what he regarded as “the essential ‘withdrawal’ of being” from the world, in 1937–41 (Nancy observes) he is preoccupied with “relentlessly affirming the necessity of once again ‘founding the truth of being on the basis of being itself’” (quoting from the Notebooks). That “affirmation” entails “the inevitable destruction of all History...by the weight of metaphysics,” to which Nancy inscrutably explains “the metaphysical...constitution of world Jewry contributes.” “The beginning

²¹ *Discourses on Livy*, II.5. Cf. the discussion of the problem of introducing “new modes and orders” in *The Prince*, chap. 6, as well as the proposed conquest of “Fortune” in chap. 25; also *Discourses* III.1 regarding the need, if one wishes to preserve a “sect” or “republic,” to “draw it back often toward its beginning” (trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], 209).

²² Cf. Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

²³ On Heidegger’s clinging to “the German metaphysical approach to history as a meaningful process,” in contrast to Strauss’s rejection of that approach, see Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 156.

of the Other” (as distinguished from the past?) will generate a “distress,” Heidegger forecasts, in which (according to Nancy) “we cannot fail to recognize ourselves,” “seventy-five years and so many catastrophes later” (45–46).

But what connection does that distress have to the Jews? “Starting before 1940,” Nancy observes, Heidegger provided an “impetus...that would eventually open up paths other than those of the progressive humanisms,” paths pursued by such French thinkers as Sartre, Levinas, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Lyotard, none of whom shared his anti-Semitism. Indeed, “it was by way of Heidegger, although despite him,” as well as thanks to a number of his Jewish contemporaries such as “Cohen, Buber, Benjamin, and Rosenzweig,” that Heidegger’s bringing to light of “a motif of alterity...in the tradition that had thought itself to be Greek...took on importance.” Even though Heidegger’s “obsession with the beginning...led him into the worst and most atrocious of the vulgarities of a hatred of self—of the other-in-the-self” (the Jews?), he also possessed “some sense of a completely different way, less a way of ‘thinking’ than of bearing or of conduct,” one that “turns away from founding-destroying rage and from rancor.” Nancy finds evidence of that sense in Heidegger’s reference to “grace or fatality” as man’s “highest possibility,” in a context where he “evokes grace in relation to the Greek *charis*,” being aware that *charis* translates a Hebrew noun, as used in Genesis 6:8, where Noah is said to have found grace in God’s eyes (47–48).

As Nancy recounts Heidegger’s view (in a way, I note, that recalls the outlook of Martin Luther), the receipt of grace is not something that one could seek or foresee. But while Heidegger “held himself until the end in an interrogative suspense,” Nancy adds obscurely, he was “in truth always very certain of what he had named ‘being.’” This self-assurance “opened up” not only “an ineluctable resource of thought,” but also “the miserable precipitation into the most sordid sacrificial violence.” In this context Nancy quotes from Heidegger’s “Anaximander Fragment,” to the effect that “in order to assure the success of one being among beings it is necessary that sacrifices like those in a war be accomplished.” Lapsing once more into obscurity, Nancy explains that what Heidegger proclaims “being” to demand “is a sacrifice incommensurate with any blood sacrifice—which means not that it excludes this but that it includes it and carries it to an incommensurable height” (49–50).

Nancy then links this call for “the sacrifice of a people” explicitly to Heidegger’s wish to destroy “the groundlessness that is proper to *Jewry*,” which he may have envisioned as the outcome of Judaism’s “simultaneous combat” against Nazism “and against itself,” in the form of the struggle between

“Bolshevik” and “capitalist Jewry” (50, Nancy’s emphasis). (As if either the Soviet Union or the Western allies were led by Jews!)²⁴ Only because the Jews’ destruction would engender “the self-destruction of the West,” and thus “the victory of History over the historyless,” Nancy explains, can one understand Heidegger’s “stubborn silence” on the death camps, extending the silence he had observed since Kristallnacht. But then, according to excerpts that have been “divulged” from the later Notebooks, “Heidegger wanted to consider all of Germany as a ‘concentration camp,’ because it had handed its fate over” to the Nazis’ “sorry ‘world view,’” based on “racism and technical calculating machination” (51).

On all this, Nancy avows himself “speechless” (51). He rightly questions (citing Derrida) whether Heidegger’s “displacement of ‘biological’ racism into a metaphysics of the races [based on culture rather than biology]...displace[s] much at all” (52). In other words, he wonders whether it elevates Heidegger’s anti-Semitism philosophically over the eugenic doctrine of the Nazis that he scorned for its specious scientism. Yet Nancy immediately insists, for reasons that seem recondite, that the former “is more serious, without any doubt,”

²⁴ Of course there had been several persons of Jewish descent among the original Bolsheviks, most notably Leon Trotsky—just as there were numerous prominent Jewish “capitalists” in America. But by the mid-1930s it should have become clear that the thoroughly anti-Semitic Stalin, not the Jews, was in control of the Soviet Union; the dictator was soon to liquidate his potential Jewish “rivals.” (On Stalin’s lifelong “malice toward the Jews,” inherited from his father, despite his willingness to make use of them when they suited his needs, see Edvard Radzinsky, *Stalin*, trans. H. T. Willetts [New York: Doubleday, 1996], 25–27, 55, 531–32, 551, 557, 559–61; Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* [New York: Vintage Books, 2005], 547.) Meantime, Franklin Roosevelt, despite his reliance on Jewish advisers like Felix Frankfurter, was far more their director than their instrument, while Congress, as exhibited by its refusal beginning later in the 1930s to raise immigration quotas to accommodate Jewish refugees, was far from being dominated by philo-Semites: see David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 55–57, on the failure even of congressional liberals to press for assistance to persecuted Jews, while the combined southern Democrat / conservative Republican congressional majority blocked the President’s 1942 request for authority to suspend obstructive immigration laws, despite public revelation of the Nazis’ ongoing project of Jewish annihilation. Meanwhile, the State Department went to great lengths to “shut the doors” to Jewish refugees during the war, fearing (along with the British Foreign Office) as late as mid-1944 “that Hitler might confront the Allies with an exodus of Jews” (Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews*, 126–27, 331). And Roosevelt himself, as late as the 1943 Casablanca conference, sought to limit the number of “Jewish professionals” allowed into North Africa, so as to avoid generating the sort of “understandable complaints” that the German people had expressed prior to the war regarding the Jews’ supposedly disproportionate share of professional positions in their country (*Abandonment of the Jews*, 313).

Heidegger’s view of power relations in America would indeed have found a ready audience among individuals like the capitalist/political crank Henry Ford, who attributed his loss in the 1918 Michigan senatorial election to an influential “gang of Jews” whom he accused of funding his opponent as part of their “general conspiracy to gain control of the Senate and the country” (Paula Baker, *Curbing Campaign Cash: Henry Ford, Truman Newberry, and the Politics of Progressive Reform* [Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012], 114).

citing as his only evidence a remark in which Heidegger asserts that those “who now speak ‘on’ race and on belonging to the soil” (the Nazi theorists) thereby show “that fundamentally they are neither of a race nor of a soil” (50). Nancy concludes this chapter by observing that in Heidegger’s view, “the West has passed through a series of episodes across which the veiling of what was initially unveiled [‘the truth of *beyng*’] has only intensified,” and that the process of veiling required as an “agent” a “metaphysical” race (presumably the Jews) whose identity is suddenly “revealed” in a way that “signal[s] the urgency and imminence of clarity” (51–52). The notion that the revelation of truth required as its prerequisite the destruction of the people that prepared for its discovery seems comprehensible (if at all), I observe, only on the basis of a Hegelian understanding of history, according to which the truth becomes accessible only upon the completion of the historical process. But wasn’t Heidegger supposed to have unmasked and rejected all such “progressive” metaphysical doctrines? (See note 23 above.)

In the concluding section of his original text, Nancy repeats the theme of Heidegger’s quest for a “new beginning that would be simultaneously in the image and in the place of the other beginning that Christianity wanted to constitute.” “At the same time,” he adds, “the rejection or exclusion of the Jews by Christians aims to reject and exclude something that could complicate or even disturb the strict Christian initiality.” In European history, Nancy maintains, anti-Semitism has answered “the need for justifications...of modern, capitalist, technical, entrepreneurial, and controlled society.” Therein, he asserts, lies its “banality.” In this context he notes how Heidegger’s view of Judaism corresponds to the conclusion of Marx’s “On the Jewish Question,” according to which Christianity, having originated in Judaism, “has now been dissolved back into Judaism,” that is, “self-interest, practical need, egoism” (56–57). In sum, Heidegger, despite his renunciation of “Bolshevism,” shares with Marx the claim that the Jews, through their single-minded pursuit of material gain, are ultimately responsible for the decay of Western civilization—but thereby prepare the way, through its destruction (which for Heidegger will include the physical destruction of the Jews themselves), for the future redemption of humanity.

At this point Nancy identifies the essence of “the banality of evil” by citing a passage from the “Author’s Note” to Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* concerning “the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions” that apparently inspired Arendt’s use of the term (57, 90n). Heidegger himself in

the Notebooks “stigmatizes ‘machinations’ that are only ‘apparently revolutionary,’” according to Nancy, because they failed to “rise to the level of the other beginning” (57)—that is, one that transcended institutional changes or military victories?²⁵

It is unclear which beginning Nancy is referring to here. However, when he adds that the banality in question “corresponds to a ‘mass’ society equipped with ever greater means of communicating and diffusing messages capable of provoking indignation and condemnation, along with the expectation of a prompt advent of forgotten authenticity,” and observes that Heidegger simply transcribed the substance of anti-Semitic street banners into his notes, he is obviously holding the philosopher at fault. Nonetheless, while asking how “a thinking that felt so intensely the heaviness of a morbid civilization could...find nothing but to add to [its] anguish the imprecations formed by an age-old [anti-Semitic?] conscience,” Nancy diffuses the blame by saying that the question is addressed not only to Heidegger, but “to all of us.”²⁶ It is not enough, Nancy explains, “to condemn the ignominy of anti-Semitism”; we must “interven[e] at the very heart of our culture” to uncover the roots of “the extreme violence with which we immolate peoples, as well as social categories, classes, [and] strata.” We must not only “look with stupefaction upon a history that appears to us to race toward its own ruin,” but “break with the model that this history has given itself...of progress in a conquest of the world by man, and of man by his own exponential finalities.” Indeed, Nancy concludes, “we must learn to exist without being and without destination, to claim to begin or rebegin nothing—and also not to conclude” (58–59).

²⁵ I note that the Conrad citation hardly seems to fit Eichmann in that the “banality” that (by Conrad’s account) troubled him in “sympathetically” depicting his tormented revolutionary character Razumov is precisely the “futility” of the “Utopian revolutionism” expressed in Nancy’s quotation, exemplifying the way that “the ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality” and “basing itself on complete moral anarchism” in late-tsarist Russia necessarily provoked the “no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand” (*Under Western Eyes*, Malay edition [New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928], ix–x). How could any such rationale possibly apply to Eichmann’s unspeakably evil deeds, justify “sympathy” for their perpetrator, or reduce them to the level of mere banality? (As regards the passage’s possible applicability to Heidegger’s late thought, see below regarding his *Der Spiegel* interview.)

²⁶ Heidegger pioneered the strategy of diverting blame from the Nazis not only by equating Hitler’s death camps with mechanized agriculture but by contending, in the wake of the Nuremberg trial of Nazi war criminals, that the “thoughtlessness” displayed there by the Western allies “exceed[ed] by many thousand degrees the irresponsible, dreadful trade with which Hitler raged around Europe” (quoted by Charles Bambach, review of *Heidegger’s “Black Notebooks,”* ed. Mitchell and Peter Trawny, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, February 19, 2018).

I must leave it to Nancy's readers to puzzle out this apparent recipe for pure passivity—reminiscent of Heidegger's remark in his celebrated late (1966) *Der Spiegel* interview (posthumously published in 1976), that we could be "saved" from the "planet-wide movement of modern technicity" only by "some god," for whose possible appearance we could possibly do no more than "prepare" ourselves in our "thinking and poetizing."²⁷ However, in more practical terms, the bearing of Nancy's (non-?) conclusion on the question of Heidegger's guilt for succumbing to crude anti-Semitic prejudice seems to parallel Machiavelli's and Montaigne's implied critique of the church's doctrine of original sin: if all of "us" are guilty, then how can anyone, or any particular deeds, be truly blameworthy as "evil"?²⁸ If all of us are equally sinners, then nobody is really a sinner, and the most terrible tyrants, criminals, and terrorists go unpunished and uncondemned.

Heidegger would doubtless agree that the greatest evils with which the contemporary world is threatened are the ultimate outcome of the modern project of conquering nature, rather than regaining a harmony with being. But one may question (as Leo Strauss did) whether that project is something that grows directly or inevitably out of classical Greek philosophy, rather than deriving from a modern rebellion rooted in "antitheological ire," provoked both by the political problem engendered by Christianity and by the obscuring of the proper meaning of philosophy that Christian theology had engendered.²⁹

In a Coda Nancy condemns the various attempts that others have made to separate Heidegger from "the infamy attached to anti-Semitism," all of which "rely on interpretative ruses...and a refusal to read." But he reiterates that both the "Nazi enterprise" and Heidegger's endeavor to "exceed" it were "born from an exigency felt throughout the culture of the West." He adds, mysteriously, that "we are henceforth in charge not only of the destructive and self-destructive horror, but of everything that indulges in beginnings and

²⁷ "Only a God Can Save Us," trans. W. Richardson, in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. T. Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent, 1981), 45–67.

²⁸ See particularly Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), II.2.244–45 and III.2; also Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, III.1.211–12 on how the monastics' teaching "that it is evil to say evil of evil" helped to preserve and even promote the church's corruption.

²⁹ On "antitheological ire," see Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?," in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1959), 44. On Strauss's interpretation of early modern philosophy as an attempt to secure philosophy's independence from the *nomos* of revealed religion, only to subject it to the *nomos* of "the practical, progressive, humanitarian project of Enlightenment," see Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy*, 159.

ends.” The modern crisis arose because “the thought of arrival...did not manage to pull itself away from the desire for foundation, for inauguration, and for schematic programming.” “The most constant modern thought...Heideggerian or otherwise” preserved the goal of “auto-foundation,” a concept that underlies both anti-Semitism and the “anti-Christianism” that Nancy finds to pervade the *Black Notebooks*, even as it draws from Christian doctrine “the pretention to a proper foundation that rejects its Jewish provenance—its provenance in errancy and wandering” (61–62). The present reviewer finds this account of Judaism mystifying.

The last part of Nancy’s book is a Supplement addressing an excerpt from the *Notebooks* from 1942–48 that had appeared after the rest of the book was completed. The three-paragraph excerpt addresses the question of why Christianity failed to exercise its capacity of “resisting the decline of the West.” Heidegger’s explanation, directed at Jaspers, criticizes those who “cit[e] passages from Paul’s letters and thus leav[e] out everything that could demand the univocality of what is Christian.” Christianity lost its vigor or power of “originaryity” according to Heidegger through its “intensification both in the religion of salvation and in a collusion with metaphysics and the culture of the West” (64–65). In consequence, “the confrontation between metaphysical, racial, dominating, and calculating wills—namely, the Nazis and the Jews, but also Jewish Americans or democrats, or Jewish Bolsheviks—engulfs the opening of being,” in a manner that others might deem “‘world peace’ ” (66). Jaspers’s error in Heidegger’s eyes lay in his “degrading” Christianity into “‘moralism’ ” (68).

Nancy then locates the “banality” of Heidegger’s anti-Semitism in its incorporation of “hateful, racist denunciation” inherited from the historic Christian denunciation of the Jew as mere “calculation, machination, the will to domination” (owing to his failure to accept Christianity’s “new origin”) “at a time when the Christian and post-Christian world has begun to tear itself apart.” Anti-Semitism, Nancy judges, offered Heidegger “suitable material for explaining the Western catastrophe”—leading him to “reduc[e] metaphysics to the biologizing racism of those same Nazis” whose “thoughtlessness” he elsewhere reproaches (71).

While Heidegger “made no effort,” Nancy observes, “to reconsider” his anti-Semitism, he displays an “embarrassment” with regard to Christianity in the *Notebooks*, explaining that he cannot be a Christian since he cannot possess “grace” “as long as thought remains a demand for my path.” While Heidegger may have “confusedly shared” the impulse of thinkers like

Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Bonhoeffer to the “self-deconstruction” of Christianity, Nancy concludes, he remained mired in a “sordid anti-Semitism” as well as “anti-Christianism” (72–73).

What, then, in the end, makes Heidegger’s anti-Semitism “banal” for Nancy? Apparently, the key is its vulgarity or crudity: its reliance on unexamined popular prejudices such as those to which the *Protocols* appealed, in place (I observe) of any serious consideration of, or confrontation with, authentic Jewish texts, beginning with the Hebrew Bible and continuing through the centuries of rabbinic commentary and legal interpretation. Had Heidegger shown a modicum of interest in what Nancy terms “the questions of a historian,” that is, questions of empirical fact, as opposed to a purely “metaphysical” history, he could easily have discovered that the association of the Jews with commerce, banking, and “calculation,” despite its trumpeting by the ideologue Marx, was not something inherent in their religion, but instead the result of their being excluded, in most lands of the Diaspora, from noncommercial occupations (landowning, law, the military, government service, etc.), combined with the fact that lending money at interest was officially forbidden to Christians and Muslims. The ability that the Jews developed to prosper in commerce and banking of course made them vulnerable targets for sovereigns in need of immediate sources of funds (through confiscation),³⁰ as well as (for instance, under the tsars) means of diverting popular resentment at governmental oppression or other sources of suffering by blaming the Jews for their miseries—a practice that has recently undergone an alarming revival in Europe, following its earlier resumption in the Middle East. (With the establishment of the state of Israel, the Jews showed themselves quite capable of deep attachment to, and determination to maintain and defend, a particular homeland that Heidegger represented as the essential attribute of a “historical” people. But then, we recall Nancy’s attestation of Heidegger’s lack of interest in Zionism.)

Heidegger’s disregard of both Jewish texts and Jewish history, we might judge, was a purely intellectual fault—albeit inexcusable in a philosopher who chose to hurl condemnations at a people he knew nothing about. Perhaps his repetition of crude popular prejudices derived from his provincial and originally Christian background fall into the same category. But can the

³⁰ See Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 22.20; and, on the contrast between Montesquieu’s praise of the commercial regime exemplified by Tyre (20.5) and the Hebrew prophets’ condemnation of it for the sinfulness that accompanies commerce, Thomas L. Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu’s “Spirit of the Laws”* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 113.

same be said of his postwar dismissal of the significance of the death camps, and his unrepentant repetition of praise for Nazism's "inner truth and greatness"? Is the evil character of these remarks, along with Heidegger's decision to have the (revised) Black Notebooks published after his death, sufficiently indicated by terming them "banal"—any more than Eichmann's deeds can be so explained? I think not.

All this is not, of course, to deny the vast gap between Heidegger's achievement as a philosopher—the *destruktion* of an encrusted or "sedimented" philosophic tradition that Leo Strauss attested paved the way for his own resuscitation of classical philosophy in its original form³¹—and the utterly contemptible deeds of Eichmann. Nor is it to deny the magnitude of the problem of the potential obliteration of our distinctively human life by the reign of "technics"—a danger that concerned Strauss (and Heidegger's onetime pupil Hans Jonas) no less than it did Heidegger.³² But to soften our moral condemnation of Heidegger's crude anti-Semitism and his unrepentant apologetics for Nazism by claiming, as Nancy does, that the blame belongs to "all of us" is simply inexcusable.

As Alexander Duff (among others) has documented, we are still reaping the whirlwind of Heidegger's (indirect but powerful) political influence today, through its appeal to "virtually every variety of particularist opponent of Western universalism," from the intellectual progenitors of the Iranian revolution to Vladimir Putin's guru Aleksandr Dugin to the proponents of so-called liberation theology in Latin America. In the face of this challenge, Duff rightly recommends that liberalism's defenders "acknowledge the genuine, practical limits to universalism by drawing from the rich tradition" of

³¹ Leo Strauss and Jacob Klein, "A Giving of Accounts," *The College* (St. John's College) 22, no. 1 (April 1970): 1–5. In this exchange between old friends, Klein describes Heidegger as "the very great thinker of our time, although his moral qualities do not match his intellectual ones," while Strauss more straightforwardly describes Heidegger's moral teaching, founded on the virtue of "resolution," as intolerable, and remarks that there is "a straight line which leads from Heidegger's resoluteness to his siding with the so-called Nazis in 1933."

³² See Strauss's warning of the threat to humanity posed by the "universal and homogeneous state" espoused by the Hegelian-Marxist thinker Alexandre Kojève, in "Restatement on Xenophon's *Hiero*," in *On Tyranny*, rev. ed., ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth (New York: Free Press, 1991), 177–212, esp. 207–12; also Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

On the "promise" of creating "designer swine" to "serve as spare-parts factories for our ailing, aging bodies," generating the possibility of creating "mixed chimera"—all out of the most benign, humanitarian intentions, along with modern scientists' inveterate, Baconian quest for the sort of knowledge that empowers us to conquer nature—see Tom Clynes, "Sacrificial Ham: Thanks to Genetically Engineered Pigs, the Shortage of Organs for Transplantation Could Soon Be a Thing of the Past," *New York Times Magazine*, November 18, 2018, 53–55.

their doctrine's most profound, and therefore moderate, proponents, such as Montesquieu and Tocqueville, as well as "from the deep wells of classical political rationalism that long predate liberalism," while still insisting on "the dignity that derives from our common human nature."³³ It also entails, I would add, appreciating that the liberal tradition exemplified by the American constitutional regime is not reducible, as Nancy (following Heidegger) would have it, to a supposed "Americano-Bolshevik" materialistic/ technological "consensus"—rather than embodying elements drawn from the biblical, classical, and English common-law traditions, as well as the noble aspiration to self-government.³⁴ By contrast, Nancy's attribution of the dangers facing us to the supposed "rancor of the West against itself," deriving from its never-ending pursuit "of the polity, of justice, of knowledge," indicates a failure to grasp the nature of our present crisis, such as might be found only among "advanced" theoreticians who populate the contemporary academy. Banality, indeed!

³³ Duff, "Heidegger's Ghosts."

³⁴ The nobility of that aspiration is most obviously expressed in the opening paragraphs of *Federalist*, Nos. 1 and 39; in Washington's letter to the Jewish congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, regarding the national commitment to religious freedom; and in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address—all of which must infinitely surpass in their magnanimity any speeches or writings by the "Führer" to whom Heidegger originally pledged his fealty, even though it is unlikely he would have considered any of them worthy of his "philosophic" attention. This is by no means to deny that the moral and intellectual foundations of the American liberal regime are threatened today by the influence of such developments as officially sanctioned moral libertarianism, the decline of serious religious belief, decaying civic education, ideological "political correctness" stifling freedom of inquiry in the academy, and growing welfare dependency—to say nothing of the threat to our country's survival from antiliberal foreign governments and terrorist movements, some of them inspired at least nominally by the teachings of Heidegger and/or Marx. Nor is it at all to deny, therefore, the need to take seriously at the level of higher education the Heideggerian critique of liberalism, as works like Duff's *Heidegger and Politics* do.