

Heidegger, “World Judaism,” and Modernity

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I

In March 2014, Heidegger’s *Überlegungen* II–XV, a series of what he called his *Black Notebooks*, were published. These texts differ from Heidegger’s previously known writings in that they seem to speak more clearly and directly to the philosophical motivations and intentions in Heidegger’s thinking of the 1930s, and they demonstrate that Heidegger’s being-historical thinking during the Second World War was open to anti-Semitic ideas. The discussions, which have until now been behind the scenes in Heidegger research, have so far brought no agreement. The often unnecessary struggle for the prerogative of interpretation has finally highlighted a question again. Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* force us, like no other manuscript from this philosopher, to ask: How do we read Heidegger?

This question especially crystallizes the issue of how we are to understand the problematic statements about Judaism. Is Heidegger’s thought anti-Semitic? If so, is it something in his entire thought or just a phase? If not, how are we to understand these statements? There is no doubt that these issues are crucial for the future of Heidegger’s thought. The severity of the discussion is to be understood accordingly.

There are answers that I do not want to ignore because they belong in a specific way to the problem. Thus there have been voices raised particularly against my thesis that there is in Heidegger a “being-historical anti-Semitism” (a thesis I will explain in more detail later), voices which do not abstain even from personal attacks.

One of these voices belongs to Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, who has represented his view of the problem in several articles. To begin my remarks, I would like to present this viewpoint in its most essential strokes. This will demonstrate to what extent such responses to Heidegger's texts themselves belong to the problem of textuality in Heidegger's thinking. Heidegger's writing produces a specific bearing that makes the meaning of that thinking fruitless, even castrates it.

I will come directly to the argument. Von Hermann writes: "With respect to the thirty-four notebooks, the very few passages relating to Judaism, taking part in no greater context, are completely irrelevant and thus superfluous for Heidegger's thinking. Above all, they form no conceptually systematic component [*Baustein*] of being-historical thinking. This is attested at the same time by all of the composed lectures, essays and treatises, which contain nothing anti-Semitic."¹

The entire statement carries the title: "No Systematic Component of Heidegger's Thought - Philosophically Irrelevant." Here we find a two-part argument. First, that the quality of the statements is too insignificant to attach any meaning to them. Actually, they are "superfluous," i.e. the publisher could also have just deleted them. "Above all," that is, beyond the quantity argument, they would not be "conceptually systematic components" of Heidegger's thought. Therefore, they would be not only "superfluous" but also "irrelevant."

I would like to comment only briefly on the first and seemingly more marginal part of the argument. Contrary to the view that what is rarely said is insignificant, is the view that what is rarely said is in fact the most significant. Plato's remarks concerning a fixed unwritten doctrine can be counted on one hand. Is this reference to an esoteric dimension in Platonic philosophy therefore meaningless? On the contrary. It could be that Heidegger is very taciturn with respect to the most important motives of his thought.

The second part of the argument constructs an alternative: either the anti-Semitic utterances of Heidegger belong to the "systematic" core of his thinking, or they are unimportant. I do not want to accept this alternative. Heidegger's thinking does not insist that a "system" be

separated from “irrelevant” ideas. There is no difference of *ergon* and *parergon* in Heidegger’s philosophy. “Ways, not works” is the motto of the *Gesamtausgabe*, and where there are no “works,” there are likewise no accessory parts of a “work.”

Nevertheless it is striking that the anti-Semitic passages in the *Black Notebooks* allow for such a wide range of interpretations. There is on the one side the radical critique of Emmanuel Faye and his friends, in which Heidegger’s thinking appears as a kind of prototype of National Socialism; on the other side, there are interpreters like von Herrmann and the French supervising translator of the *Notebooks*, François Fédier, who see in Heidegger’s engagement with National Socialism only a temporary error. Finally there is a position in the middle of these extremes, which tries to understand the meaning and importance of Heidegger’s anti-Semitic remarks in the context of his thinking as a whole. Because of these well-nigh incommensurable interpretations we have to ask: how do we read Heidegger?

The first impression of this question is ambiguous. The question seems to be necessary since Heidegger’s texts are often abstruse not simply because they operate with many neologisms, but because they have their own writing style. But at the same time it’s obvious that all philosophers speak in their own way, in their own style, with their own concepts. In this sense we could direct the question “How to read X?” to any philosopher.

But Heidegger and his texts are a special case. Heidegger is a thinker who tried to influence the organization of his texts. With this organization originates, whether consciously or unconsciously, an authority over the text’s reception. For that reason I see at least some evidence that Heidegger distinguishes between an exoteric and an esoteric sphere of philosophy.

The distinguishing of an exoteric sphere from an esoteric one in Heidegger’s thought corresponds to the differentiation of addressees. On the one hand there are the lectures and published texts such as *Being and Time*, which do not turn to any specific addressee. In any case, Heidegger problematizes neither the addressing of texts, nor of thinking.

This changes in writings such as *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. This text speaks directly to specific addressees. Heidegger calls them the “future ones” or the “few.”

These readers are now brought in a decisive manner to a position against the exoteric sphere of philosophy generally. Authentic philosophy in the “public sphere” (Heidegger is thinking of the university and the media) has become impossible. It is a matter then of practicing this “essential thinking” beyond the “public sphere.” The thought is certainly arguable. Today we know of good public-relations philosophers, who not only function as life-coaches but also must therefore represent banalities. It is more inevitable than ever to pose the question within the university. But what arose with Heidegger’s rejection of “the public sphere” and the direct address of the addressee, is a group of readers who turned away distrustfully from any open discussion. At issue is the emergence of the “Heideggerian.”

The esoteric texts in Heidegger’s collected works are his *Black Notebooks*. They are not focused directly on “the few” as addressees. In Heidegger’s thought they speak purely and primarily to themselves, although this verdict must be refined because there is evidence which contradicts it. Through this self-addressing, thinking folds back on itself. The abandonment of the “public sphere” is carried out with no regard for others whatsoever. The thinking in the *Black Notebooks* speaks in a being-historical intimacy to itself. In this way the texts are never personal.

(The question has been asked, how do the *Black Notebooks* stand in relation to Heidegger’s other texts? Some scholars already want to hear a reservation and hesitancy in titles like *Considerations* [*Überlegungen*], *Remarks* [*Anmerkungen*], etc., as if questions of understatement in the title of the *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* do not go far enough. I hold that the *Black Notebooks* are so relevant that they will change our understanding of Heidegger.)

The esoteric initiative in Heidegger’s thinking and writing in the *Black Notebooks* would not be adequately understood if we overlooked how the direct address of the addressee occurs in the text. Heidegger

is not the thinker to maintain an argumentative discourse – this is the language of the “public sphere.” Admittedly, it would be wrong to label a work like *Being and Time* as argumentative. But the esoteric address follows another, if not seductive, then perhaps erotic, style.

The conversation that Heidegger’s thinking calls out for is not a critically distanced discussion. It has much more to do with hearing, hearkening to silence, and obedience, as Heidegger often stresses. The critical distance of an argument is opposed to the nearness of an intimate agreement. With this the esoteric initiative first receives its authentic character.

Here now is the reason why the “Heideggerian” assumes that Heidegger’s self-interpretation must be the beginning of every engagement with this thinker. We must follow the “master’s” “instructions.” The self-identification is inevitable. Now it becomes impossible, for the “Heideggerian,” that their lover or friend could be anti-Semitic – even if during the 1930s and 1940s not only the majority of Germans, but even the majority of Europeans, were anti-Semites. It simply cannot be the case for them that this philosopher, who seduces the reader with such an intimate rapport, could keep to anti-Semitic stereotypes.

Heidegger’s thought engenders lovers. They are often, without a doubt, the best Heidegger scholars. They follow this thinking through the subtlest variation, they know it exactly and in detail. They dedicate themselves to him. Is love not the prerequisite for any hermeneutics? An interpretation born from hatred is bad mostly because the one who hates has no patience to engage with the longwindedness of the philosopher. This is also the same for Heidegger research.

But then the question of how we should read Heidegger seems aporetic. Either we become “Heideggerians” who penetrate the vast corpus of Heidegger’s thought, or we become mediocre researchers and/or critics who only look at this philosophy superficially. For us to know Heidegger, it seems necessary to self-identify with him. But there is a third possibility.

Along with the loving-scholastic reading and the superficial-critical reading, there is also the philosophical reading. A philosophical reading

loves the philosopher. It knows *eros*, the erotic dimension of its respective philosophy. But beyond that it knows the erotic dimension of philosophy par excellence, the freedom of thought which inscribes itself in every philosophy. The freedom of philosophy counts for more than obedience to a beloved thinker. The “Heideggerians” are not familiar with this experience. That is their weakness – they are not philosophers and never can be.

Heidegger’s texts require, perhaps more than others, a philosophical interpretation. It could be that Heidegger knew a genuine reader is one who enjoys his seductions, gives himself over to them – but does *not* succumb to them. From this standpoint I reject the view that Heidegger’s self-interpretations must be the beginning of every interpretation, just as much as I reject the temptation of bathing in Heidegger’s thinking as in the endless melody of Wagnerian music-drama.

II

I turn now to the question of whether we can speak of a being-historical anti-Semitism in Heidegger. For this, it must become clear what that could mean in the context of Heidegger’s thinking in general. In other words, we must try to understand the being-historical character of these claims about Judaism. For this two things must be accomplished: 1) we must get to know the essential characteristics of Heidegger’s thinking of the history of being in the 1930s and 1940s, and 2) we must question whether the remarks about “world Judaism” are related to being-historical thinking and, what is more, we must find out whether these remarks first become comprehensible from the vantage point of being-historical thinking.

However, to make these two questions possible, we must take note of the most important aspects of Heidegger’s remarks about “Judaism” and “world Judaism.” Accordingly, I will begin my deliberations with this. I want to cite three of Heidegger’s remarks, isolating the core statements in each.

“World Judaism” and Modernity

- A The reason for Judaism’s temporary increase in power, however, is that the metaphysics of the West, particularly in its modern development, provided the starting point for the spread of a rather empty rationality and calculative ability, which, in these ways, procured accommodation for itself in “spirit,” without ever being able to grasp the concealed regions of decision on their own terms. (GA 96: 46)
- B Even the thought of an agreement with England, in the sense of a distribution of the “franchise” of imperialism, does not get at the essence of the historical process which England is now playing out to the end within Americanism and Bolshevism, and this means at the same time also within world Judaism. The question concerning the role of *world Judaism* is not a racial one, but rather the metaphysical question concerning the kind of humanity which, *utterly unattached*, can take over the uprooting of all beings from being as its world-historical “task.” (GA 96: 243)
- C World Judaism, spurred on by the emigrants let out of Germany, is everywhere elusive. In all the unfurling of its power, it need nowhere engage in military actions, whereas it remains for us to sacrifice the best blood of the best of our own people. (GA 96: 262)

CONCERNING A

The remark can be reduced to three basic propositions: 1) Judaism comes into view in the course of a “temporary increase in power”; 2) this is related to contemporary metaphysics; 3) contemporary metaphysics is characterized by an “empty rationality and calculative reckoning,” which is why the “increasing power” of Judaism, with its “calculative capacity,” is related to this.

Regarding 1), it is one of Heidegger’s essential propositions about modern history that in its course it has increasingly taken shape as a history of the “will to power.” The modern subject, the (Cartesian) *ego cogito me cogitare*, ultimately projects itself as complete only in view of its possible perspectives for willing and expanding its power. To do so, it subjugates itself in its inventions to a technology that in the 1930s Heidegger, drawing upon Ernst Jünger’s concept of “total mobilization,” characterizes as “machination.”² “Machination,” in which all beings appear in the perspective of making or, we could say, of production, is once described by Heidegger in the *Black Notebooks* as follows: “The power of machination – the extermination even of god-lessness, the humanization of man into the animal, the exploitative utilization of the earth, the apportionment of the world – has entered a state of finality; differences of peoples, states, cultures exist only as facades. Machination cannot be inhibited and disabled by any measures” (GA 96: 52–53).

God – humanity – earth – world – a pre-figuration of the “fourfold” – are wholly occupied by the “power of machination.” All is integrated into it, nothing can prevent it. In the last notes of the *Überlegungen* (1941), but not only there, the thought appears that a connection exists between the eruption of the World War and the “power of manipulation.” It is not accidental that a history ends in the gigantic confrontation of totalitarian-technical systems of National Socialism/Bolshevism/Americanism.

The unfolding of the “power of machination” to its “finality,” however, leads to 2), the historical time-space of modern metaphysics. This begins in Descartes’ thinking and ends, concludes, in Nietzsche’s thinking. This thought belongs to the narrative of “being-historical thinking.” Being unconceals itself in modernity as the will of the subject,

consequently I-ness, ramping itself up beyond the will to will of Hegel into the will to power of Nietzsche.

The movement of history is a “sending” (*Geschick*), that is to say, it is not due to humanity’s influence but to an internal developmental dynamic of being in modernity and its understandings. The Zürich seminar of 1951 provides an example of this thinking. There Heidegger says that the atomic bomb “exploded long ago,” namely, “in the moment when man stepped into an uprising against being and positioned being in and of himself and made it the object of his representation.” And he adds: “this is since Descartes” (GA 15: 433).

And finally regarding 3), “Empty rationality and calculative capacity” is typical of modern thought. With this Heidegger means the occurrence that in modern science mathematics is technically instrumentalized for “the exploitative utilization of the earth, the apportionment of the world,” as was said earlier. And Descartes actually characterizes humanity, the modern subject, as “*maître et possesseur de la nature*.”⁵ Much could be said about the differentiation of science and its history, and also about the problematic relationship that, since Hegel, philosophy has to this history.

But it is more important to see that Heidegger inscribes Judaism in this history of modern technology and science or, as he terms it, of “machination.” He ascribes to Judaism a “calculative capacity.” At this point we must be accurate, because Heidegger was. In the *Contributions to Philosophy*, this very important text from the middle of the 1930s, we find the following thoughts. It says: “Sheer idiocy to say that experimental research is Nordic-Germanic and that rational research, on the contrary, is of foreign extraction! We would then have to resolve to number Newton and Leibniz among the ‘Jews’” (GA 65: 163/127).

Heidegger was therefore not persuaded by the differentiation between a “German” or “Aryan” physics and a “Jewish physics.” He rejected it because he was aware that such a distinction is impossible in the project of modern science. But that does not mean that this thought from the *Contributions* contradicts Heidegger’s imputation that the Jews are defined by a “calculative capacity.” There is a

difference, here, between the propositions: all calculative thinking is Jewish and all Jewish thinking is calculative. The first proposition is false because modern science was not established by the Jews. The second proposition Heidegger apparently considered accurate: all Jewish thinking is calculative.

The consequence of all of these considerations is that the ascription of “calculative thinking” to Judaism enabled Heidegger to depict Judaism as a moment of the “will to machination.” Judaism is a representative of modern technology next to other such representatives including, incidentally, the National Socialists. If I can characterize this whole construct of a historical classification of Judaism as being-historical, on the one hand, and likewise consider the attribution of a gift for calculation to Jews as an anti-Semitic stereotype, on the other, then we are here dealing with a “being-historical anti-Semitism.”

CONCERNING B

The second remark is divided into two propositions that are fundamentally difficult to connect: 1) there is a “historical process” in which England has played a role that cannot be changed by an “agreement”; 2) the role of “world Judaism” – in which “England” has a role to play, and in addition to which (this is important) “Americanism” and “Bolshevism” likewise play their parts – this “world Judaism” is not “racially grounded” but stems from the “metaphysical question concerning the kind of humanity which, *utterly unattached*, can take over the uprooting of all beings from being as its world-historical “task.”

The first part of this thought need not, it seems, detain us long. Heidegger – much like Nietzsche – despised not only English philosophy, but above all the “English spirit,” which for him is a merely economically oriented imperialist pragmatism. It would perhaps be possible to correlate Heidegger’s thinking at the end of the 1930s with Hitler’s speeches. If we think of Hitler’s speech on the 8th of November 1939, we find again this peculiar mix of contempt for England and anti-Semitic allusions. In general, it appears to me that the person of Hitler

represents the key to understanding the Heideggerian loyalty to the Third Reich.

The second part of the thought is more important. Heidegger maintains, first of all, that an understanding of “world Judaism” does not necessarily have to be “racially” motivated. I will leave this without comment for the moment. The question concerning racism in Heidegger must, in my opinion, be posed anew. I have done this in my book, so I will leave this issue to one side. There is a kind of “metaphysics” of “world Judaism.” “World Judaism” represents a “humanity” that, being “unattached” itself, furthers the “uprooting of all beings from being.”

However, “world Judaism” plays an important role in the cited passage. I cite it in part here once again:

Even the thought of an agreement with England, in the sense of a distribution of the “franchise” of imperialism [that is to say, the right or law of the established authority], does not get at the essence of the historical process [namely] which England is now playing out to the end within Americanism and Bolshevism, and this means at the same time also within world Judaism.
(GA 96: 243)

The question concerns the sequence “England” – “Americanism” – “Bolshevism” – “this is to say at the same time. . . also within world Judaism.” What does “this is to say” mean here? Are England, Americanism, Bolshevism not only equal to but the same as “world Judaism”? Perhaps “world Judaism” is even the ground or the origin of Bolshevism, Americanism, and England?

A note from the *Anmerkungen* of 1942 reads: “In the time-space of the Christian West, and this means in the time-space of metaphysics, Jewry [*die Judenschaft*] is the principle of disintegration. That which is disintegrative in the reversal of the completion of metaphysics - i.e., the reversal of Hegel’s metaphysics by Marx. Spirit and culture become the superstructure of ‘life’ - i.e., of the economy, i.e. of organization - i.e., of

the biological – i.e. of the ‘people’” (GA 97: 20). I refer only to the second half of the citation. Marx, the Jew, turns Hegel’s metaphysics around. With that inversion, “spirit” is the epiphenomenon of “economy” and “organization.” Apart from the fact that Heidegger takes it as a disintegration, it can now become clear to what extent “Jewry” and “world Judaism” are the source of Bolshevism, Americanism and England, even of the “biological” of National Socialism that Heidegger mentions.

How different Heidegger’s reference to Marx in the “Letter on ‘Humanism’” sounds, a reference that came perhaps only a year later: “Because Marx by experiencing alienation attains an essential dimension of history, the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts” (GA 9: 340/259, tm). The difference is deceptive, for there is no difference between this statement and that in the *Black Notebooks*. Simply put, the “alienation” Marx experiences is not the “alienation” of the modern world of labor, but that of the homeless Jew.

Judaism is the “principle of disintegration.” In what way? The “detachment” of the Jewish is connected to the furthering of the “uprooting of beings from being.” The “detachment” of “world Judaism” is, as it was called elsewhere, a kind of “worldlessness” (GA 95: 97) or, in my interpretation, “homelessness.” This concerns the Jewish Diaspora, in Hebrew *galut* (גלות), a disintegration that the Jewish people had to bear since the Babylonian conquest of the kingdom of Judea in 597 BC. In this sense the Diaspora is the condition of Zionism, and it is noteworthy that the Dreyfus affair in France at the end of the 19th century had both the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as well as Theodor Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* in its wake. But this is only an aside.

The “unattachedness” of “world Judaism” apparently allowed it to further advance the “uprooting of all beings from being.” To give a being-historical exegesis of this idea, in my opinion, requires first briefly considering Heidegger’s being-historical understanding of homeland (*Heimat*) and homelessness (*Heimatlosigkeit*).

In a comment from the beginning of the 1940s, we read the following remark about the homeland : “The homeland is the appropriation of earth to become a site for the preparation of residence, which safeguards

the arrival of being from whose truth [*Wahr-heit*] gods and humans first conceive the region of their response” (GA 73.1: 755). Allow me to add to this a further definition from the same text: “Homeland is the historical site of the truth of being, called and received by the earth, rooted in it and in it held safe.” This understanding of “homeland” is no longer related to a concrete nationally bounded community, to a people in the everyday sense. Homeland is at this point thought from *Ereignis* as “the event of appropriation,” as the historical provenance of the truth of being.

“Earth” belongs necessarily to this “homeland.” It “calls” and “receives” the “historical site of the truth of being.” The “site” is “rooted and held safely” in it. It concerns, in other words, what Heidegger elsewhere called the “intimacy of the strife between world and earth” (GA 94: 274). The homeland as world is “rooted” in and “held safe” by the earth, the world occasions the earth’s opening and uncovering. Homeland/world and earth open a respective history, however, when they happen as strife.

Returning to “unattached” “world Judaism,” this means that with the “uprooting of beings from being,” world Judaism promotes homelessness in a being-historical sense. World Judaism in its earthless Diaspora works towards making a sense of home impossible. How could it not, since it is excluded from the historical happening of the strife between world and earth?

However, in order to further the “uprooting of all beings from being,” that is to say, the separation of beings from being, a certain capability is required. We are already acquainted with this. It is the “calculative capacity” that grasps technology and mathematics as a universal instrument to grind down every historically developed difference between cultures or peoples. And yet this is apparently not the only way that “world Judaism” brings about “disintegration.”

Immediately after his depiction of the role that Marx plays in the history of metaphysics, Heidegger continues with the following thoughts:

Only when what is essentially “Jewish” in the metaphysical sense fights against the Jewish, only then is the pinnacle of self-destruction attained in history; assuming that the “Jewish” has everywhere completely seized control such that even combat against the “Jewish,” and this first and foremost, will be brought under its sway. (GA 97: 20)

Heidegger completes a movement of thought he had already discovered earlier. It is not easy to grasp. National Socialism is an epiphenomenon of “machination,” and that now means of the “Jewish.” The “Jewish” (that means National Socialism, or rather, machination), however, he now sees in a struggle with the “Jewish.” But what here is the “Jewish”? Do we have to think of “world Judaism” and/or of the persecuted, deported, and exterminated European Jews? However, the “self-destruction” of “machination” is a self-destruction of the “Jewish.” To fight against this, against what is “Jewish,” would be to be “brought under its sway” and thus to become yet another form of the “Jewish.”

I would like to pose here again the question of a being-historical anti-Semitism and respond to questions concerning its legitimacy. For Heidegger, the peculiar “worldlessness” of the Jews goes together with their “calculative capacity.” To the extent that this “worldlessness” is driving “the uprooting of all beings from being” it collides with the being-historical “home” as the “appropriation of earth to become a site for the preparation of residence.”

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A digression: Emmanuel Levinas attempts in his 1961 essay “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us” to bring out this most important difference between Judaism and Heidegger and the Heideggerians, whom he names explicitly. In essence, it concerns Heidegger’s emphatically topographic world-order and the destruction of this order by technology, as approved by Judaism.

“One’s implementation in a landscape, one’s attachment to *Place*,” this would be the “splitting of humanity into natives and strangers.” In this perspective, “technology is less dangerous than any spirit of a place.” According to Levinas, technology attacks “the privileges of this enrootedness and the related sense of exile.” He suggests that technology “wrenches us out of the Heideggerian world and the superstitions surrounding *place*.”⁴

Against this, Gagarin has shown us how we can leave the site. The text reads: “For one hour, man existed beyond any horizon – everything around him was sky, or, more exactly, everything was geometrical space. A man existed in the absolute of homogeneous space.”⁵ In 1961 Yuri Gagarin had orbited the earth for 106 minutes in the space capsule *Vostok I*.

Decisive, however, is that Levinas relates the idea of replacing “place” with “homogeneous space” to Judaism. Judaism “has not sublimated idols – on the contrary, it has demanded that they be destroyed.” “Like technology,” Judaism “has demystified the universe.” Through its “abstract universalism” it damages “imagination and passions.” Indeed, it has “discovered man in the nudity of his face.”⁶

I think it is unavoidable to confront Heidegger’s being-historical anti-Semitism with the thoughts of Levinas. Does this show that Heidegger’s ideas have something of an instinctive reaction against actual characteristics of Judaism? Or would Levinas – assuming he had knowledge of these ideas – not have to revise his opposition between Heideggerian “*site*” and Judaic “universality”?

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CONCERNING C

The third of Heidegger’s comments reads: “World Judaism, spurred on by the emigrants let out of Germany, is everywhere elusive. In all the unfurling of its power, it need nowhere engage in military actions, whereas it remains for us to sacrifice the best blood of the best of our own people” (GA 96: 262).

The proposition works with three subjects: a) world Judaism, b) emigrants who were allowed to leave Germany, c) we ourselves, who “sacrifice the best blood of the best of our own people.” We have already heard how world Judaism plays a role in the “power of machination.” The World War is the decisive context for this remark. “Emigrants” spur on world Judaism. It is not said who Heidegger is thinking of. Jewish refugees? People such as Thomas Mann who broadcast his speeches with the help of the BBC in London? They – just like “we” – appear to be identifiable. It is stated of world Judaism that it is “everywhere elusive.”

The worldlessness of Judaism appears to mean that it is “everywhere” but in this everywhere it conceals itself and remains “elusive.” The semantic of grasping, however, already indicates the problematic of this point. The “everywhere elusive” world Judaism is powerful precisely because it is “everywhere elusive.” And it is even on account of this special power that world Judaism needs “to participate nowhere in acts of war.” But how is that possible?

At this point I want to remind us of the already mentioned *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In his book, *What is Anti-Semitism?*, Wolfgang Benz pointed out that the concept of “world Judaism” generally belongs in the context of a myth of a “Jewish world conspiracy.”⁷ In this sense the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* represent a “textual incunabula,” an “absolute point of reference.”⁸ It is the original document of modern anti-Semitism even if it is not the only source of this.

The malicious fiction of the *Protocols* describes a Judaism which strives for world domination and which recognizes even war as a possibility in this striving. Under the heading: “the taming of the resistances of the non-Jewish through war and a general world war,” it states that “as soon as a non-Jewish state dares to resist us, we must be in a position to incite its neighbors to war against it. But if the neighbors too want to make common cause with it and advance against us, we must unleash a world war.”⁹

There is no way of proving whether Heidegger had actually read the *Protocols*. There is a remark by Karl Jaspers according to which Heidegger was aware of them. According to this remark, in a

discussion concerning the “evil nonsense of the *Elders of Zion*,” Heidegger had once maintained: “But there is a dangerous international association of Jews.”¹⁰

Heidegger would not have needed to read the fiction of the *Protocols* in order to be taken in by them. They were an element of National Socialist propaganda. Hannah Arendt had noted this in connection with a book by Alexander Stein written in 1936 entitled *Adolf Hitler, Student of the “Elders of Zion.”*¹¹ In any case, we hear a reference to such anti-Semitism in Hitler’s speech on the 30th of January 1939, which states: “If international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the peoples once more into a world war, then the consequence will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and therewith the victory of Judaism but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”¹² One can consider this speech as the first announcement of the annihilative actions of “task forces of the state police and the SD [*Sicherheitsdienst*; Security Service]” which began with the invasion of Poland in September 1939.

Heidegger followed Hitler’s speeches and would have taken note of this remark about the “international Jewish financiers.” Their spirit or rather their specter speaks from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This elucidates the context in and out of which Heidegger’s remark about world Judaism being “everywhere elusive” is uttered. “World Judaism” has become an international agitating power that can make use of certain figures (England, the USA, the Soviet Union) without having to come into view itself. At the same time, Heidegger obviously regards it as an enemy of the German people. Otherwise we could not explained the contrast he proposes: “whereas for us it only remains to sacrifice the best blood of the best of our own people.”

III

Ernest Renan wrote in 1883: “The Judaism which, so far, has been good for the past, will be good for the future. It is the true root of liberalism, it answers to the modern spirit [*esprit moderne*]. Every Jew is a liberal [...]. He is so by his essence. The enemies of Judaism, however, if you

only look at them more closely, you will see that they are the enemies of the modern spirit in general.”¹⁵

Renan’s own position to Judaism is not unimportant here. It is vital that he ascribes to Judaism a representation of the “modern spirit.” In this way the anti-Semite is an anti-modernist.

If Heidegger uses the concept of “modernity” at all, he uses it in quotation marks. While Heidegger’s use of quotation marks is a topic all its own, with regards to “modernity” they are meant critically. Besides antiquity and the Middle Ages, is there a fourth epoch after modernity that we could positively define? Doubtful, according to Heidegger.

The determination of the concept “modern” remains problematic. It is ambiguous and, therefore, mostly misunderstood. Even today there is a dispute as to what extent the “Enlightenment” of the 18th century is at the center of this concept. Is modernity a child of Kant’s *Critique*, and if so, in what sense? Is enlightened rationality the leading authority in our media-based public sphere? However such questions might shift the meaning of the concept of “modernity,” its use in many contexts is still unavoidable.

Here – for my reading of Heidegger’s remarks on “world Judaism” – it is not necessary to present a complete account of “modernity.” It is enough to single out from these remarks, without attempting to be comprehensive, both negative and positive moments that cluster around the concept of modernity. These meanings include: 1) homelessness, i.e. the mobility of Judaism, 2) lack of origin [*Ursprungslosigkeit*] in relation to the “first beginning,” i.e. the complete inclusion of Judaism in the “calculative thinking” of modernity, 3) devastation, i.e. the complete inclusion of Judaism in “machination.” All three meanings form a coherent semantic field and also revolve around each other. Accordingly, Judaism would be the source of homelessness and lack of origin, as well as the devastation of an idealistic ordering of metaphysics.

This semantic field belongs to the epochal sense of modernity. The modern subject emancipates itself from national or ethnic determinations so as to be able to follow the advances of universal capital unhindered. In so doing, it assumes that ideological, political, religious,

aesthetic or moral determinations recede before the technical-pragmatic demands of a universal way of life.

If possible, has Heidegger here confused the modern subject with the Jew? Does the meaning of “being-historical anti-Semitism” perhaps lie in a hidden being-historical survey of the “modern spirit”? No. A shift from “being-historical anti-Semitism” to a “being-historical anti-modernism” is not permissible. In fact, the identification of Judaism with the “modern spirit” itself remains caught up in a stereotype, which today we would interpret as anti-Semitic, a stereotype, incidentally, that is countered by Zionism. In Zionism, there were attempts, ignored by Heidegger, to ground Judaism back upon its original source texts.

However, even if we do not permit the shift from “being-historical anti-Semitism” to a “being-historical anti-modernism,” there remains, nevertheless, a consistent interpretation that “being-historical anti-Semitism” has traits of “being-historical anti-modernism.” The impact of this connection is troubling. It seems to be a thorn in the side of Heidegger’s thinking. For if we assume that today freedom consists in a – perhaps impossible – minimum personal distance from the undeniably present universal reductions of modernity, then we would have to acknowledge that this freedom is not only no longer to be thought with Heidegger, but no longer to be thought against him as well.

NOTES

- 1 Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, “Kein systematischer Baustein des Denkens – philosophisch belanglos,” *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* 6: 2 (2014): 637–38.
- 2 See Ernst Jünger, “Total Mobilization,” trans. Joel Golb and Richard Wolin, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 119–39.
- 3 Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142–43.
- 4 Levinas, Emmanuel, “Heidegger, Gagarin and Us,” in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand, 231–34 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 232–33.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 233.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 234.
- 7 Wolfgang Benz, *Was ist Antisemitismus?* 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005), 174.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 192.
- 9 Jeffrey S. Sammons, ed., *Die Protokolle der Weisen von Zion. Die Grundlage des modernen Antisemitismus – eine Fälschung. Text und Kommentar* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), 53.
- 10 Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Autobiographie*, erweitere Neuauflage (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1977), 101.
- 11 Alexander Stein, *Adolf Hitler, Schüler der “Weisen von Zion”* (Karlsbad: Verlagsanstalt Graphia, 1936).
- 12 Max Domarus, *Hitler. Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, vol. 2: *Untergang*, Erster Halbband 1939–1940 (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1965), 1328.
- 13 Ernest Renan, “De l’identité originelle et de la séparation graduelle du judaïsme et du christianisme,” in *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, vol. 1, 907–24, ed. Henriette Psichari (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1947), 922.