Booknotes

Heidegger was certainly a Nazi. He joined the NSDAP on May 1st, 1933, having already committed himself to Hitler in 1932 or even 1931. While Rector of Freiburg University he was an enthusiastic enforcer of the Party line. In 1933 he declared to his students that 'the Führer himself and alone *is* present-day German reality and its law'. Even when he had fallen out with the Party leadership in 1934 or 1935, he continued to speak of 'the inner strength and greatness of the movement' and its 'historical uniqueness'. He never formally left the Party. In life, Heidegger's attachment to the cause clearly went beyond the comparatively mild careerism of a Karajan, despite postwar attempts to bowdlerise key documents and passages in his writings.

But, vile as all this is, does it compromise the philosophy? Was Heidegger's philosophy as essentially Nazi, as, say, Lukacs's was essentially Communist? A careful examination of the question is undertaken in Herman Philipse's *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being* (Princeton University Press, 1999). Philipse's own approach to philosophy is rigorously and robustly analytical, and he set himself the herculean task of expounding and evaluating the key themes in Heidegger's work. The task is not made easier by Heidegger's penchant for stratagems to prevent criticism or even understanding of his thought, as Philipse points out. Notable among these is the stratagem of the elect: the claim that Heidegger writes only for 'those rare ones' who possess 'the highest courage of solitariness' which is necessary to ponder 'the nobility of Being'. This move is not just a cunning piece of self-insulation. Heidegger's own philosophy is designed to show that ordinary and post-Platonic philosophical thinking are alike incapable of grasping Being. So a) agreeing with Heidegger and b) not troubling him with objections which presuppose the validity of ordinary thought become criteria for having understood him.

There are certainly parallels between Heidegger's thought and Hitler's. Both are anti-Enlightenment and authoritarian, both talk about heroes, struggle and the sacrifice of the individual, both reject democracy and look for a leader, both are anti-Christian, anti-liberal, anti-bourgeois and anti-humanist, and both take themselves to be privileged interpreters of Destiny. On the other hand, Heidegger's philosophy is not biologically or 'scientifically' racist, which it could hardly be, given Heidegger's antipathy to science.

Even so, in his exaltation of Greek and German thought, was Heidegger attempting to provide a kind of spiritual version of Nazism to set aside Hitler's Darwinian one? And how was it that the advocate of individual authenticity (in *Being and Time*) could in his later philosophy profess that authenticity could be achieved only through immersion in the *Volk*? (A clue is perhaps provided by Heidegger's remark of 1936 (later suppressed) to the effect that Hitler and Mussolini were 'two men who launched counter-movements in Europe' against the nihilism prophesied by

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Nietzsche, and that is through 'the political organisation of the nation' that they re-vitalised their peoples who had been subject to the disintegration of human life, of which Nietzsche wrote.) Or were Heidegger and Hitler both reflecting a more general post-Nietzschean, post-Spenglerian pessimism, which affected many at the time, and which could take any number of political forms?

To all of these and many other questions Philipse provides detailed and fascinating answers, even if at the end of the day Heidegger's texts preclude the possibility of definitive answers. Cultural pessimism is also, of course, present in Wittgenstein's later thought, which brings us neatly on to the extraordinary claim that Wittgenstein may have been responsible for Hitler's anti-semitism (something which is admittedly hard to explain), and hence indirectly for the Holocaust.

The story is that Wittgenstein and Hitler were at school together in Linz (true, though only for one year, and not in the same class), that in *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote about an objectionable Jewish pupil in Linz as one of the sources of his otherwise puzzling anti-Semitism (true), that Wittgenstein was an objectionable schoolboy (quite possibly), and that he was the pupil referred to by Hitler (no evidence for, or, say the proponents of the thesis, against), hence...

This claim, first made by Kimberley Cornish in 1997 in *The Jew of Linz* (Century/Random House), re-surfaces in Laurence Goldstein's *Clear and Queer Thinking: Wittgenstein's Development and His Relevance to Modern Thought* (Duckworth, 1999). Goldstein has interesting things to say about Wittgenstein's early and later thought, and in a final chapter, he attempts to relate Wittgenstein's fascinating life and troubling character to his philosophy. The thesis is that Wittgenstein's life was a journey from outrageous vanity to real modesty, and that this is reflected in the move from 'the folly of the grand Tractatus scheme' to the child-like wonder, the puzzlement and the repudiation of theory and position of the later work.

In his life, according to Goldstein, Wittgenstein continually struggled against guilt over his vanity and other failings. So, suppose he was the Jew of Linz, and knew that he was? 'It is overwhelmingly probable that Hitler and Wittgenstein did meet, with dire consequences for the world.' In which case 'after Hitler had established his programme of persecutions, one can easily imagine Wittgenstein being haunted by the thought of what difference it might have made had he taken the trouble to behave less obtrusively and obnoxiously as a schoolboy in Linz.'

It is all too easy to imagine all sorts of things in relation to the Third Reich. Industries are built on such imaginings. Better perhaps to stick to facts: party cards, Rectoral addresses, altered texts and the like.

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