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Approaching Heidegger's History of Being through the Black Notebooks

Abstract:

The aim of this essay is to explore the importance of the *Black Notebooks* (GA 94-99) beyond their contribution to Heidegger's political biography. While attention has up to now focused almost exclusively on other matters, the *Black Notebooks* offer new perspectives on Heidegger's writings from the 1930s and 1940s, and beyond. The essay argues, that any reading of Heidegger's later work that tries to ignore the question for the History of Being, that is, the essential development of his work, as it moves from a consideration of the *Meaning of Being* to the *History of Being*, is doomed to misunderstand the essentially historical reflection of Heidegger's thought. Therefore, if one wants to mobilise Heidegger's thinking as a response to the great questions of our age, which this essay identifies as those of *Global Warming*, *Globalisation*, *Nihilism* and the *Nightmare of the Manipulated Human Being*, the latter raised by Merleau-Ponty in *Eye and Mind*, then one needs to force the question of history in his work as the central problem underlying any future potentiality of its philosophical impact.

Key Words: *Heidegger*, *Black Notebooks*, *History of Being*, *Globalization*, *Global Warming*, *Nihilism*.

Following the publication of the *Contributions to Philosophy, Mindfulness* and the *History of Being*, the question of the significance of Heidegger's later work has been widely discussed. However, the manifold difficulties raised by this *Turning* from the *Question of the Meaning of Being* to the *Question of the History of Being*, has led many philosophers to condemn the obscurity of these later works, particularly in contrast to the clarity of *Being and Time*. And yet, insofar as

Heidegger's later philosophy attempts to make our contemporary world question-worthy in an essential sense, it belongs with the most significant thought philosophy currently has to offer.

The aim of this contribution is to explore the importance of the *Black Notebooks* (GA 94-99) beyond their contribution to Heidegger's political biography. While attention has up to now focused almost exclusively on other matters, the *Black Notebooks* offer new perspectives on Heidegger's writings from the 1930s and 1940s, and beyond. They do so from various angles, including reflections on metaphysics, on the essence of politics as much as on the political situation of the time, on the main authors that Heidegger worked on during these years, on aesthetics, on his personal position in Germany during and after the Second World war, as well as on the works he had already published. In other words, for anyone trying to understand, evaluate and transform Heidegger's later thinking, to see where and how he moves beyond the parameters of the historico-transcendental tradition of the 19th century, these volumes offer immeasurable wealth.

In the following, I will attempt to defend this rather high expectation, namely that our studies of the *Black Notebooks*, rather than in Trawny's judgement giving us "entirely plausible reasons to break off every interest in Heidegger's philosophy"¹, might instead throw some light on some of what I called above the most significant thought philosophy currently has to offer".

What would such thought have to offer? What are the most significant problems humanity currently faces?

- Global Warming – and therefore the destruction not only of the human world, but the mass-extinction of life in a planetary disaster.
- Globalization – the growing feeling that the human being is losing its 'home', its world, that the more the human subject has become a

¹ Trawny, "Thinking Time", p. 74.

globalized phenomenon, the more isolated it becomes in its pure particularity. Consequently, the contemporary rise of the far-right on the fertile soil of fear.

- Nietzsche's Nihilism – the destruction of the essentially political nature of the human being in the sense of breeding itself, in favour of a biological technologization of the human being as the 'finally fixed animal'; and, following on from here,
- Merleau-Ponty's Nightmare from which there is no awakening – the fear that once the human being is drawn into the net of its own machinations, it will truly become the pure *manipulandum* that it thinks itself to be².

The question is, does Heidegger's later philosophy address these questions in a meaningful way, and, particularly, what is the impact of the *Black Notebooks* on the way that we can raise these questions? If we look at them briefly again:

Global Warming

From the 1960s onwards, Heidegger's meditation on the essence of technology has been an important resource for environmental thinking. And yet, something has changed since the 1970s and 1980s. This regards not that much different developments of climate science, but the clear feeling that our time is even more limited than we might have feared. Philosophy has always had a long incubation time, it never lent itself to quick fixes. As Heidegger says in a maybe too dramatic tone: "Only those who have the courage and the knowledge to think across the next three

² Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", p. 122. As this is a rather central passage of this work, I am going to quote it here in full: « Si ce genre de pensée prend en charge l'homme et l'histoire, et si, feignant d'ignorer ce que nous en savons par contact et par position, elle entreprend de les construire à partir de quelques indices abstraits, ... , puisque l'homme devient vraiment le *manipulandum* qu'il pense être, on entre dans un régime de culture où il n'y a plus ni vrai ni faux touchant l'homme et l'histoire, dans un sommeil ou un cauchemar dont rien ne saurait le réveiller ».

hundred years, are able today to join into thinking and to engage with 'philosophy'""³ – but as we know today, we might not have another three hundred years and in this respect, completely independent of Heidegger's thinking, philosophy is under threat from Global Warming. Philosophy has never been a subject with immediate impact, but the *Overcoming of Metaphysics* might take more time than we have, while, as one says, we need to act today. So, can *Gelassenheit* be understood as Heidegger's attempt to accelerate the advent of *another thinking*?

But that might essentially be the problem: 'What is action?', 'What is agency?' and, 'what is subjectivity?' The problem for my generation was that many of us came into philosophy from out of a feeling of disappointment with the political development of our European cultures. Somehow there was the idea that one needed to step back, to meditate fundamentally about the 'truth of the world', in order then to return again to subjective action. But maybe the whole idea of thinking properly first, in order then to direct one's action lies at the heart of the problem. It is this Hegelian conviction of the force of subjectivity that Heidegger's *Being and Time* had begun to undermine and that is further deconstructed in Heidegger's later work, ending in the famous phrase that 'only a god can save us now'⁴. And yet, as we will see, there are many points of contact between Hegel's and Heidegger's meditations on historical philosophy and once that we move from the 'middle' of the *Black Notebooks* onwards, Hegel and Nietzsche become more and more the main interlocutors of his writings, often no longer in the explicit form of a *critical disengagement* (*Auseinandersetzung*), but as taking their reflections to be expressions of the truth of our world⁵. In the end, the reversal of the relation of technology to

³ Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen* XII-XV, p. 176f, my translation.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, „Spiegel-Gespräch mit Martin Heidegger“, in: *Reden und andere Zeugnisse*, pp. 652-683.

⁵ Precisely because it is quite evident that Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzungen* with Nietzsche, Hölderlin, Hegel, etc. have never been intended to be mere interpretations of philosophical

science, similarly to Hegel's thought, implies that we are acting before we are thinking, which means that thought does not suffice to change our actions. And here we also find one of Hegel's judgments at the root of Heidegger's thought, namely that 'language is more truthful than what we mean to say'. Here we can also find the fundamental difficulty of thinking in the face of the insight that history has become the sole content of philosophy. While I will come back to this topic towards the end of this paper, the problem arising here is whether the *Question for the History of Being*, especially as it is developed in the *Black Notebooks*, can inform our understanding of 'that which moves the world' in the destiny of our being.

Globalization

From early on, Heidegger rephrases the question of the Nietzschean horizon, necessary for any animal to live, as the question of historical space, while the problem of globalization is addressed by the notion of global enframing and its concurrent *Ent-Fernung* or 'de-distantification', that is, the progressive disappearance of distance in the process of the world becoming a homogenised and, therefore, unhistorical space. Once all the people of this earth come together in 'international mindedness' and internationalization: are we really going to enter a golden age of peace or are we at risk to lose ourselves?

This problem has maybe given rise to the most essential 'unhappiness' with Heidegger's philosophy, as it seems to go against the grain of the post-war consensus, namely that it is only globalization that can achieve universal peace and prosperity. It is even more fundamentally put into question

doctrine, but were always an attempt of allowing us to take a step back towards a proper *Wahrnehmung*, that is, perception of our experience, this shift is quite significant, especially in terms of understanding Heidegger's hermeneutics. In other words, the critique of Nietzsche of the late 1930s and early 1940s is always and essentially a critique of the present. In this respect, the *Auseinandersetzungen* with these authors is, at the same time, the *Auseinandersetzung* with metaphysics, as it is to be found in the *Contributions*, *Mindfulness*, *The History of Being*, etc.

today, where Eurocentrism in philosophy is problematized and the 'decolonialized curriculum' made obligatory, on account of the conviction that only a globalized thinking is able to bring about universal moral justice.

Originally, the confrontation with Heidegger was kept in relatively civil terms, that of a 'reactionary peasant philosophy' against an enlightened, 'progressive city-dweller philosophy' (which we may nowadays call the 'liberal-elite philosophy'). Heidegger's consistent identification of thinking as the handicraft of the farmer sounds abhorrent in the ears of the city-dwellers who conceive of thinking as the hard, conceptual labour of intellectuals, who master the abstract constructions of representational systems, finally demonstrating their mastery by taking a defined position, some -ism that they then throw against all other -isms. And, thus, the language became much harsher, when Heidegger's critique of globalization was identified with Nazi *Blut und Boden* ideology and finally with 'Being-Historical anti-Semitism'⁶. It seems to me that the immediate identification of Heidegger's thinking as reactionary and resentful as much as the condemnation of his political engagement all stem from an ignorance or denial of the essentially historial dimension of philosophical thinking, a denial which is aggravated by the ethically motivated problematization of 'Eurocentrism', which implies a certain idea of philosophical thinking, namely its logical, computational and abstract nature, independent of any given space and time, that is, a metaphysical thinking that is essentially ahistorical.

⁶ The initial reception of the *Black Notebooks* has been essentially informed by their editor, Peter Trawny, who coined the term 'Being-Historical anti-Semitism', or, slightly less awkward, 'Seinsgeschichtlicher Anti-Semitismus'. See: A. J. Mitchell and P. Trawny, eds., *Heidegger's Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism*. For the *Blut und Boden* ideology, see the most extreme, if unphilosophical response to Heidegger's work by Emmanuel Faye, for example: *Heidegger, L'introduction du nazisme dans la philosophie*. See also the rather violent critique of this interpretation of the *Black Notebooks* by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, in: Herrmann & Alfieri, *Martin Heidegger – Die Wahrheit über die Schwarzen Hefte*.

It is, again, quite true that Heidegger's thinking constantly goes back to an idea of thinking as *das Bauen des Bauers* – the *building of the farmer*⁷, but the question might be, is such thinking necessarily reactionary in opposition to the progressive thinking of the city dweller? Is this because the modern organisation of life in mega-cities has come later in historical time and that there is no future for the farmer? Is *Geschichte* to be interpreted from such a simple before and after, backwards and forwards? This is certainly the perspective of Heidegger's critique of globalization. In an essay called *The Field Path*, Heidegger says

The human being attempts in vain to bring order to the globe by means of its planning, as long as it does not remain integrated into the saying of the field path. The contemporary human being runs the risk of remaining deaf to its language. All that falls into their ears is the racket of machines, which they take for the voice of God.⁸

It is at least worth considering whether there is some point here about the claim, reminiscent of Nietzsche's critique of the *Last Men*, that the globalized world is a world without history and therefore a world without future, and therefore a thought that is essentially not *progressive*. I am aware that it is not sufficient to draw attention to Heidegger's claim that the present has to be thought from the future, but maybe, illuminating that what he calls 'the fear of thinking' comes back to a 'fear of the historical depth of thinking' and its consequent realization, that existence cannot be mastered by abstract rationality and that the philosopher is not the master of some 'meta-ethics' or even 'meta-philosophy'. This emptying out of any horizon seems to me to lie at the root of a lot of misunderstanding, for example, when Günther Figal claims that Heidegger's 'idea' of another thinking is 'trans-philosophical'⁹, that is, that the idea that *Another Thinking*

⁷ This might sound strange in English, while the German refers to the *Anbauen*, i.e., to grow, to cultivate and the *bestellen des Landes*, i.e., to crop, to cultivate.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, p 89, my translation.

⁹ Günther Figal, „Clearing and Space“, p. 285.

would be even more universal and even more globalized than even European Metaphysics.

True, to consider these questions is unpleasant – especially as these arose in rather ‘unpleasant’ times – but who did ever say that philosophy should be pleasant? As Heidegger quotes Hegel’s introduction to the *Phenomenology*: “philosophy has to be careful to avoid trying to be edifying”¹⁰. And to claim some point of decision in moral philosophy, which would rule out the philosophical value of thought by means of an ‘ethics test’ – as we nowadays have them at university and everywhere – is essentially unphilosophical. Neither can one just sort philosophical insights into those which are more or less ‘problematic’, as if one could avoid philosophical problems according to the ‘trolley problem’: that is, choosing at each crossroad which path is, as Günther Figal asks when correcting Heidegger’s ideas, ‘less problematic’¹¹, before one even starts to think along the path ‘chosen’. Another metaphor often used here to describe the task of the philosophical commentator is that of ‘weeding out the bad bits’. And yet, it is, in any case, the task of philosophy to think that which is, rather than just thinking about something that is not, just because it would make us feel better (cf. GA 97/156).

In any case, the problem of ‘Globalization’, which implies for Heidegger the question of nations and people, of such strange concepts like *Russentum* or *Deutschtum*, or even of the ‘Jewish people’, is thought through the question for the history of being, this question which most commentators of Heidegger seem to either misunderstand, expressly rebuke or even completely ignore. The task is to think from the position of history towards that bedrock of philosophical *Da-sein*, which individuates the latter. This individuation in the historical embodied life will indeed throw up many

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I-V*, p. 310: „Die Philosophie aber muß sich hüten, erbaulich seyn zu wollen“ (my translation).

¹¹ See Figal, *op cit.*, p. 285.

problems that we have tried to escape from, in, for example, the city-dwellers' Habermasianism. And, yes, maybe it is ironic if one tries to find in Heidegger some help against the contemporary rise of the far right, though he certainly provided a sustained critique of Nazi ideology in the notebooks from the 1930s to the 1940s, which often rings true even today. In the following, after a brief view at 'Nihilism' and 'Nightmare', I will, therefore, make a first attempt to defend Heidegger's question for the history of being.

Nihilism

As everyone nowadays knows, while Heidegger was always a 'Nietzschean', while *Being and Time* did not need to mention Nietzsche very often, as it was still happily walking alongside him, Heidegger's later thought particularly depended on his *Seinsgeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung* (not so well translated as *historico-critical dis-engagement*) with Nietzsche. This is reflected in the famous remark that 'Nietzsche has ruined me'¹². Where Nietzsche was calling for someone who would be able to 'make all my truths unbelievable'¹³, and where Heidegger was the first sincerely to respond to that call, he seems to have judged himself that he did not manage to make all, if any, of Nietzsche's truths unbelievable. And yet, if the *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche was to be successful, this is precisely what it would have needed. The *Black Notebooks*, therefore, engage with this attempt constantly, again and again reflecting on the relation between 'last men' and modernity, between the 'downfall' of the

¹² This remark, "Nietzsche hat mich kaputt gemacht", attributed to Heidegger in a story told by Hans-Georg Gadamer, might, therefore, only arise from hearsay, but has nonetheless a revelatory power with respect to Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche. See also: Ullrich Haase, "*Dike and iustitia, or: Between Heidegger and Nietzsche*".

¹³ Friedrich Nietzsche, Letter to Overbeck, 2nd of July 1885, in: "Briefe", KSB 610 7/63, 1885; "My life now consists of the desire that all things may be different from how I understand them; and that someone will make my 'truths' unbelievable", my translation.

'higher men' and the 'overcoming of metaphysics', therefore the question of the 'not yet fixed animal' and the *Overhuman*, on the one hand, and the 'insertion into *Da-Sein*' (*Einsprung in das Da-sein*) on the other. The question for the history of being is therefore, not very surprisingly, constantly developed on the background of Nietzsche's questioning of history and the achievements of other thinkers are throughout measured against Nietzsche's thought. And yet, as I mentioned above with respect to Hegel, in the *Black Notebooks*, especially from GA 97 onwards, he speaks of these no longer as 'words of Nietzsche', but as 'words of our world'. Of Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Heidegger thus says that it "hardly manages to reach the threshold of the Overhuman" (GA 97/367).

But this will introduce another problem, namely that of the 'body', which Nietzsche describes as the mediated truth of history, this "human body, in which the whole of the farthest and nearest past of all organic becoming reawakens and becomes body, through which and beyond which an enormous but inaudible stream seems to flow"¹⁴. This body will throw up all these problems again, from space and place to 'metaphysical anti-Semitism'. This body, of which Heidegger has constantly affirmed that it is too difficult to talk about, insofar as the question of the history of being ventures to understand the 'body', the *leibende Leben*, without recourse to any objectification through either 'life' or 'mathematical space'. What happens to the *leibende Leben*, the embodied life, once we have to understand place and time "in terms of their relation to history and to human beings as historical", as Heidegger asks in the lecture course *Hölderlin's Hymne 'Der Ister'*¹⁵? Or, again in other words, what happens to the thinking of the human body as soon as we are forced to leave the age-old attempt to understand the human being as an 'Animal + Something'?

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, KSA 11/565, my translation.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"*, p. 65.

As Nietzsche says, "our experience of space and time leads us into error"¹⁶ – and it seems to me that the reflection on the history of being aims exactly at that experience as the fundamental question of phenomenology.

The question of the history of being therefore demands the radical decoupling of *Da-sein* from the concept of an objectified 'animality', already because these cannot appear on the same plane of thinking. To understand this question of history in the context of the radicalized phenomenological stance of Heidegger demands the radical de-objectification of the world and the de-representation of thinking, in such a way that the word 'body' itself becomes problematic. In this sense, we have to be aware that the question of Nihilism, as it develops from Nietzsche to later Heidegger, is neither thought psychologically nor epistemologically, but historico-ontologically.

Nightmare

At the beginning of *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty outlines the danger that arises from the ontological truth of the hermeneutic circle¹⁷. Following on from Nietzsche's illumination of the *Eternal Return of the Same* as giving rise to the utmost importance of our thinking and our habits of thought for all that is to come¹⁸, Merleau-Ponty gives the most extreme account of the danger of technology: once we think about the human being as absolutely manipulatable, as a part of the *Global Gestell*, once we fail to make a

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, p. 22; KSA 2/40; „Our sensations of space and time are false, for tested consistently they lead to logical contradictions“. One needs to listen carefully here: Nietzsche speaks of our 'sensations', our '*Empfindungen*' of space and time, not about our ideas or conceptions of them.

¹⁷ See the quotation from *Eye and Mind* above, as it claims that the way in which we interpret our existence threatens to become the truth of our existence.

¹⁸ This is again a theme following from the idea of history in Nietzsche. See, especially, the 'illumination of the Eternal Recurrence', in KSA 9/494: "The new heavyweight: the Eternal Return of the Same. The infinite importance of our knowledge, our errors, of our habits and ways of life for all that comes." My translation.

difference between mining ore and mining the capacities of human beings in the form of their resource management, the human being will become the manipulandum that it thinks itself to be. In this respect, the human being, after about 2500 years of metaphysical thought, will have become the *finally-fixed-animal*, and as little as we would know how to turn 'animals' into thinking beings, could we consider the possibility of the human being waking itself or being awoken, even by a God, from this nightmare. Contemporary philosophy, which mostly agrees with common sense in thinking that thinking does not really change much at all, cannot understand this problem and is therefore happily running ahead towards the abyss, in a frantic attempt, might this be in meta-ethics or neurophilosophy, to produce the final calculations that will save us from the ruination of technology, thereby being powered by what Heidegger calls the *Not der Notlosigkeit*. All that is left here is a negative feeling, a fear of the nothing which is the fear of thought.

Heidegger rephrases this 'nightmare' in a more Nietzschean style in the *Contributions*, discussing the essence of technology: What is technology? "Is it the historial (*geschichtliche*) path to the *end*, to the *falling back of the last man* (*des letzten Menschen*) into the *technicised animal*, which thereby loses also the *originary animality of the inserted animal*, ...?" (GA65/275). In other words, the question of technology is identical to the decision implied by the *Eternal Return of the Same*, namely that for either the 'finally fixed animal' or the *Overhuman* as the historial reality of the future, where Nietzsche equally calls this 'finally fixed animal' *Untertierisch*, that is, lower than animal life as conceived by us. Where Heidegger said in a letter to Medard Boss that there is some core resistance in the essence of the human being¹⁹, the *Black*

¹⁹ See Martin Heidegger, *Brief an Medard Boss*, 29. Dezember 1967, in: *Zollikoner Seminare*, p. 352. And yet, we need to be careful to interpret this in the sense of an 'essential trait' of the human being, which would be strange in the context of Heidegger's reflections. Rather, as he says in: *Martin Heidegger, The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 18: "Yet precisely because man is challenged more originally than are the energies of nature, i.e., into the process of ordering, he never is transformed into a mere standing-reserve".

Notebooks seem to be more on the side of Merleau-Ponty's *Nightmare*, for example where they say that "maybe, though, in the middle of the suddenness of its turning, the event will keep to itself, so that everything petrifies into machination and that this petrified state pretends to be life"²⁰. Following this explication, Heidegger discusses the absolute organization of the organ which we call the brain in Neuroscience, understood as the technological working out of its own foundation. The question thus is, in how far Heidegger's critique of technology is intelligible only on account of the prior clarification of the question for the history of being.

Is the Question for the History of Being 'Plausible'?

That Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* can give us any help with the problems of *Global Warming, Globalization, Nihilism and Nightmare* is, according to many commentators, including Günther Figal, the former president of the Heidegger Society, not very plausible. Actually, the whole question for the history of being is, according to the latter, not very 'plausible'. I am referring to the text already quoted above: "Clearing and Space: Thinking with Heidegger and Beyond", a paper that can be used in a negatively heuristic way to try to make some general points about Heidegger's thought as it moves from the *Question of the Meaning of Being* to the *Question of the History of Being*. Like many other commentators, Figal here tries to 'weed out' the thought of history in order to make 'Heidegger' more palatable. And, equally like many other commentators, he seems to ignore the point that, as Heidegger claims, the blindness to *Geschichte* is an essential sign of our contemporary fear of thinking as much as of the "decline of history in the so-called beginning of world history in the sense of planetary operation"²¹. As one can easily see in the conclusion to Figal's essay, without the Question for the History of Being, Heidegger's thought becomes completely meaningless – and

²⁰ GA 97/308, my translation; "vielleicht auch hält das Ereignis mitten in der Jähe seiner Kehre an sich, so daß alles in die Machenschaft erstarrt und diese Starre sich als das Leben ausgibt".

²¹ *Anmerkungen* VI-IX, GA 98/42.

that includes the early 'phase' of *Being and Time*. One might say, we tend not so much to overlook the essential notion of *Geschichte*, we rather repress it. And that can be seen in many commentators on Heidegger, from (even) Gadamer, via Habermas to Figal and most in-between, often even where they make history an explicit topic of their interpretation. Considering this, we need to bear in mind, that, following Hegel, Heidegger is quite convinced that this is not due to a lack of consideration on account of these authors, as every author interprets from out of their experience and back towards it, in other words, that everyone always speaks the truth, but that we here gain an insight into that which is.

What are these points of major ignorance? (I am trying to get this out of the way very quickly – as purely negative markers of what I will try to argue, linking that back to the four questions set out at the beginning: *Global Warming, Globalization, Nihilism, Nightmare*).

1. The question of history: Figal seems to think of philosophy as a purely logical exercise of the mind, trying to make use of objective ideas in order to grasp objective fact: an idea of philosophy that really came to an end in 1807 and has been comprehensively buried by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Figal consequently remains completely ignorant of Heidegger's 'path of thinking' from *Being and Time* to his later philosophy. Every claim about the meaningfulness of *Being and Time* in opposition to the 'obfuscation' of the later works, just bears witness to the misunderstanding of 'fundamental ontology', which is, after all, itself an essentially historical path of thinking. In other words, it is not the case that Heidegger's path of thinking enters the question of history in his later work. Without it, rather, the thought of *Being and Time* itself is unintelligible – precisely where it becomes just all too intelligible.
2. The relation between 'philosophy' and the 'sciences': if all these are purely logical exercises of the mind, trying to grasp things, then we just have to see that there are different things to grasp for both of them, in order to conclude that "philosophy can walk alongside the sciences without competition" (p. 289). Though that would still require to have

an idea of the 'object domain' of philosophy, while again completely ignoring Heidegger's thought of the idea of science as a tool of technology, a technology, whose essence is nothing technological, but itself *geschickliche Geschichte*. And yet, the presumed 'ignorance of science' on the part of Heidegger is one of the major points irking many of his commentators.

3. Heidegger's method of thinking: for that reason, Figal can see in 'early Heidegger' and 'later Heidegger' only two different 'versions' of a theoretical viewpoint, which can simply be compared with each other in view of their 'plausibility'. Consequently, Figal's reading of Heidegger compares early, middle and late in terms of the 'plausibility' of the 'views' expressed in each phase. Although the preface that Heidegger wrote to Richardson's *From Phenomenology to Thought* has been available for a long while, not many commentators have taken the following remark seriously, where Heidegger says that:

The distinction you make between Heidegger I and Heidegger II is justified only on the condition that this is kept constantly in mind: only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what is to be-thought by Heidegger II. But Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II.²²

In other words, there is no Heidegger I and Heidegger II, lest one sees these as different moments of one method, of one path of thinking from the question of the meaning of being to that of the history of being.

Figal's next claim is, then, that in the middle of GA 97 – in a completely misunderstood phrase – Heidegger drops the idea of history and gives us the opportunity of thinking about space in the 'view' of a *Lichtung* (*clearing*) completely untouched by the topic of history. That would give us something 'plausible' to think – and something completely meaningless, reducing Heidegger's writing to the clearing away of some clutter on the philosopher's writing desk. Now one can say that

²² William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, p. XXII.

Heidegger's main contribution to philosophy was to think the clearing as the truth of space: and no longer does one have to worry about the question what all the trees are made of that surround that 'clearing'.

4. Therefore, the relation between 'thinker' and 'thought': one of the tasks of the 'interpreter', it seems, is to distinguish between 'proper philosophical thoughts', on the one hand, and resentment, prejudice and ideology, on the other. If one finds enough of the first, then Heidegger can be saved, by identifying his 'disgraceful convictions' and separating them from what is to be taken seriously. In this sense the interpreter's task consists of weeding out the personal and ideological convictions and views, to see what pure philosophy is left, while already this idea of 'pure philosophy' is quite unphilosophical. One does therefore not really distinguish between the plausibility of the different views expressed in early, middle or late Heidegger, as any temporal sequence of the production of such thought is completely inconsequential with respect to their meaning as it is judged by the representing mind, which, furthermore, must already reside on a 'meta-philosophical' level of truth, in order to separate clearly philosophical statements from 'personal convictions'.

To clarify these points a bit further:

1. What we call one of the great thinkers, for example, those reflected on most in the *Black Notebooks*, that is, Aristotle, Leibniz, Hegel and Nietzsche or even Heidegger himself, never 'change their minds'. Not because they are stubborn, but because for them thinking is not an abstract process of building a 'view' out of independently existing ideas. Instead these thinkers constantly have to defend the idea of thinking against this common sense 'view' of presenting 'views'. The mind cannot change itself. Or, as Bataille puts it, to live is already to have given implicit answers to all the questions of philosophy, which

the 'actual' philosopher can only 'work out' after the fact²³. If such a philosopher has an 'illumination', like Nietzsche's 'sudden' insight into the thought of Eternal Recurrence in 1881 (see KSA 9/494) we readers can lead that thought back even to his early juvenilia. It is only after the fact, therefore, that Heidegger himself can discern different moments of the development of his thinking, like the 'Destruction of Metaphysics' in his early work, followed by the 'historico-critical dis-engagement' in his later work.

2. Yet this is not to say that all philosophical thinking is 'subjectively' arising from an individual life. Rather, both Nietzsche and Heidegger describe the act of thinking as *pathos*, as a response to that which is. The famous *Turning* is thus not a change of Heidegger's mind, but a change in that which elicits the response of thinking. And the relation that the thinker entertains with the past is not built on the choice of studying the texts of specific philosophers according to one's liking, sorting 'good' from 'bad' things. As Nietzsche says "when I speak of Plato Pascal Spinoza and Goethe, I know that their blood flows through mine" (KSA 9/585). This is what it means to speak about "the human body, in which the whole of the farthest and nearest past of all organic becoming reawakens and becomes body, through which and beyond which an enormous but inaudible stream seems to flow." It is maybe a sign of the most essential misunderstanding of Heidegger's thought, if, like Daniela Valega-Neu, in *The Bodily Dimension of Thinking*, one decries the abstraction of Heidegger's so called 'grand historical schemes' and counters them by a stress on small events, cashing in on the idea of a closeness to life against the grey destiny of history²⁴. Here Valega-Neu denies any historical dimension to the question of the body, and goes on to identify in this dimension the shortcoming of Heidegger's whole philosophy. And yet what Heidegger has in mind is

²³ Cf. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 12.

²⁴ Daniela Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, p. 83f.

not really a *grand historical* scheme, but more equivalent to Nietzsche's dictum that the events that determine history come silently on doves' feet²⁵. The mistake here consists in presupposing that the notion of history opens up grand meta-narratives, rather than realizing that the question here concerns a concrete analysis of time, which, beyond idealist abstractions, has to be interpreted as historical.

3. Is Heidegger first writing *Being and Time*, then entertaining the thought of history, finally giving it up again? Could he even? Following Hegel and Nietzsche, history has become the sole content of philosophy. Any 'eternal truth' in philosophical thinking, as *Being and Time* has it, is merely a remnant of Christian theology²⁶. The philosopher is therefore no longer looking at the world, developing 'views', as thinking is itself conceived of as a real part of that world thought. From here follows the necessary 'erring' of the philosopher, as Nietzsche has called it, and the *Geschick der Geschichte*, the destiny of history, as it is to be found in Heidegger. The fear of thinking is therefore the direct result of its historical depth insofar as this de-subjectivises the thinker herself. In a radicalization of Hegel's statement that language is more truthful than our intentions that we try to express through it, Heidegger describes our mistake as thinking that we 'have' language, while in truth the word has us. And yet, to mention the obvious, a living language exists

²⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, KSA 4/189, "Gedanken, die mit Taubenfüssen kommen, lenken die Welt". And maybe it is for the same reason that we feel much more comfortable with, for example, Merleau-Ponty, even though he follows, as one can see in his defence of the *Phenomenology of Perception* as well as in *Eye and Mind* and the lecture courses on *Nature*, a similarly historical path, in that he positions the development of phenomenology within a historical framework, which, in the first text, answers to the historical fate of metaphysics and, in the second, more specifically, to the "nightmare from which there will be no awakening", a nightmare essentially linked to the reification of the body.

²⁶ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 272, "Both the contention that there are 'eternal truths' and the jumbling together of Dasein's phenomenally grounded 'ideality' with an idealized absolute subject, belong to those residues of Christian theology within philosophical problematics which have not as yet been radically extruded".

as a historical being. In and through it speaks the historical past of the living body.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to develop the horizon for an interpretation of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* in order to allow for these to be seen as addressing the most pressing questions that humanity is facing today. I tried to do this obliquely by means of addressing the various ways by means of which interpreters of Heidegger's work have tried to escape from its difficulty and unease. The claim I am making is that in such a way we would be ending up with a 'Heidegger' bereft of any significance as to the current problems of humankind. A 'Heidegger' reduced to some 'productive insights' from *Being and Time* would give philosophy professors a lot to talk about, but would leave the world completely untouched. Instead of analysing his work into bits, might these be early or late Heidegger, might these be the 'properly' philosophical ideas, separated from his own convictions, we need to grasp the whole movement of Heidegger's thinking as *one* way of thinking, without reducing this to the representation of particular claims or views, which he might have held at particular stages of his work and which he might have changed over time. In order to do so, we need to embark onto the path of thinking as outlined in the *Black Notebooks*. We have already quoted Heidegger's own reflection on the relation between his earlier and his later work, understood as one movement, but the problem might become clearer if we look at another passage from the fifth volume of the *Black Notebooks*, clarifying this development in yet another way.

Above we heard him describe this movement of his work in the following ways: 1) "Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II", referring to the point that the whole 'purpose' of Heidegger I is to enable us to hear Heidegger II. Only once that the metaphysical certainty of our experience has been shaken up by putting it into question, can we develop an ear for the *Question of the History of Being*. 2) This distinction is called that between the way

of destruction and the *Seynsgeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung*, that is, the historico-critical dis-engagement. 3) And these two parts of his methodology, Heidegger calls in his *Black Notebooks*, "the way of subversion and the way of meditation", as the two ways of reaching an understanding of *Geschichte*²⁷. To understand these in a more essential way, Heidegger clarifies the philosophical status of *Being and Time* as having gone the path of representational thought in a 'fundamental ontological' sense (GA98/43), while it is necessary to understand the "sum of my thought" as the "simple step away from representational thought to a thinking in motion (a *be-wegendes Denken*)" (GA98/57). This investigation into the way that experience gives itself in the 'metaphysics of presence' is therefore led back to its historical roots, thereby demonstrating that the truth of the world is not what it gives itself as. 'Our sensations of space and time are false' as Nietzsche said above, and it is this error which Heidegger grounds in what he calls 'the repetition of metaphysics with the aim of its destruction', aimed at by *Being and Time*. It thus tries to shake up the unhistorical way of experience, by leading it back unto its no longer experienced ground. The basic misunderstanding of *Being and Time* thus lies in thinking of it as 'positive' philosophy, as just saying what is, rather than seeing its 'destructive' impetus. What, in the end, is *Being and Time*, if not the attempt to abolish the 'apparent world', as Nietzsche called for it in "How the True World Finally Became a Myth"²⁸?

And yet, the *Schritt zurück*, the step backwards, is not to be reduced to the fundamental ontological attempt at a repetition of metaphysics with the aim of its destruction, that is, with a shift from a description of contemporary *Dasein* towards a reflection on the history that made it possible²⁹, in an interpretation

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938)*, (GA 94) Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main 2014, p. 442.

²⁸ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 51.

²⁹ This is often seen as the idea of the repetition of metaphysics with the aim of its destruction, as, for example, in the derivation of the idea of truth as *adequatio intellectus et rei* to the originary notion of truth as *aletheia* in *Being and Time*. While this is the step back into the originary experience of metaphysics, it does not accomplish the step back to the 'things themselves', already

that is supposed to shake up our experience, but rather concerns a 'step' into another way of thinking as such. And the claim was that only on account of such a change in thinking may we be able to address the problems of Global Warming, Globalization, Nihilism and the Nightmare, insofar as these did not follow from a mistake in the calculative processes of representational thought, but from the establishment of such thought in the age of Enframing (*Gestell*).

On the one hand, this critique of technology is well known and one might be wondering what the *Black Notebooks* can add to the understanding of the claim that "the essence of technology is itself nothing technological"³⁰. Undoubtedly, the reflections of *Being and Time* and the influence of the later text *The Question of Technology* have had a decisive influence on ecological thinking since the 1970s. The questions of world, of care and the concretizations of the understanding of the acting human being as *Dasein* have allowed us to challenge the predominance of calculative thinking as it lies at the root of the devastation of our world and the spectre of a climate emergency and, finally, its possible catastrophe. We have drawn many ideas from these works, but these have been limited by being placed within an unquestioned understanding of thinking as the deployment of sets of positive, affirmative judgments. We can see this problem in terms of the most common reflections on *Dasein*. This is seen as, for example, an improvement on the Kantian idea of transcendental subjectivity and consequently measured against this and, therefore, measured in terms of its universal applicability to the understanding of human experience. Thus, one asks, 'who is and who is no longer *Dasein*?', 'which are the necessary attributes that determine *Dasein*? Consciousness? A hand? Or, one wonders about the applicability of certain attributes to *Dasein*, like 'does *Dasein* have a body?' or 'can we apply the idea of

because, as Heidegger claims, the Greeks have not experienced truth in the fullness of *aletheia*. Equally, as has often been argued, there is not yet a full exposition of the phenomenon of 'world' in *Being and Time*, which really does not come into its own before the *Origin of the Work of Art*; see "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes", in: *Holzwege*, pp. 1-72; Engl. trans.: *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 4, "the essence of technology is by no means anything technological".

sexual difference to *Dasein*?' etc. etc. And yet, all such questioning ignores not only the radical individuation of *Dasein*, but also the difference between the fundamental ontological notion of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, on the one hand, and the question of a possible 'insertion into *Da-sein*' (*Einsprung in das Da-sein*) of a thinking in terms of the history of being, on the other hand. And, as Heidegger already said above, the sense of the former can be heard only from its inclusion in the latter. In other words, Heidegger's phenomenology is no longer to be understood as a method, applying certain techniques to thought, like the different layers of Husserl's *epoché*, but tries to unearth the historical depth of an experience that gives itself in its absolute presence. The thinking of world, of ecology, of earth and the belonging of the human being to its world will remain meaningless, as long as we refuse to think it in terms of the history of being. This refusal becomes the more entrenched as long as we convince ourselves that the history of being presents us with abstract 'grand historical schemes', while a description of everyday experiences would give us concrete insights into philosophical questions, especially if enriched by interesting scientific facts. One of the main aims of the *Black Notebooks* lies precisely in overcoming these common sense convictions.

Next to this blindness to history, it is the question of the will and of our mastery over nature that make us turn away from Heidegger's thought. While the ecological movement has certainly taken up the critique of human hubris as it expresses itself in the scientific worldview, we still 'will' to change the human approach to the exploitation of nature and, therefore, judge the power of thought by the immediacy of its impact, even where we sense the contradiction of such a stance. Technology, as Heidegger says, „whose essence is Being itself, is not to be overcome by the human being. Because that would presuppose that the human being was the master of Being”³¹.

The whole problem of thinking, therefore, consists in that thought has no longer anything absolute onto which to base itself, while not being able to grant

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 38.

itself an encompassing ground on its historical becoming. Where Hegel described the constant threat of common sense in the separation of thought from the alienated world, Heidegger thinks this phenomenon in terms of *Seinsverlassenheit*, which means, essentially withdrawn from the subjective volition of the human being. While, therefore, both present the reasons for which historical actors 'do not know what they are doing', for Heidegger this is a problem that our engagement with history cannot be directed to overcome. The problem is not only how to think history – difficult enough, once realized that history is not a huge storage dump of clear and distinct ideas –, not only because thought is never in possession of the thing thought, but also because this lack of possession is due already to the idea that thinking is not simultaneous with thought (cf. GA 98/121). In opposition to representational thought, Heidegger's thinking in terms of the history of being seems not to bear the promise of being able to counter the raging deployment of technology with an assured mastery of thought. Reading the *Contributions to Philosophy, Mindfulness* or *The History of Being*, the reader might experience the satisfaction of essential insights alongside the feeling that there is nothing we can do. Reading the *Black Notebooks* should help us overcome this feeling of 'enlightened impotence'.

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