

Emanuel Kapfinger. *Die Faschisierung des Subjekts: Über die Theorie des autoritären Charakters und Heideggers, Philosophie des Todes.* Mandelbaum Verlag 2021. 232 pp. \$38.89 USD (Paperback ISBN 978-3854769590).

Many of the victims of Nazi Germany—Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Karl Jaspers, Karl Löwith, Ernst Cassirer, etc.—have never received the fame of Heidegger, a Nazi party member (NSDAP no. 312589). Even today, his writings continue to be debated. This includes his recently published *Schwarze Hefte* or Black Notebooks (Vittorio Klostermann, 2014).

A recent German language book, Emmanuel Kapfinger's *Die Faschisierung des Subjekts*, discusses Heidegger's authoritarianism and his philosophy of death. The German term 'Faschisierung' is rather well-known in Germany, but its English equivalent, *fascisation*, is less well-known. *Fascisation* basically means the infiltration of fascist structures into, for example, society, politics, philosophy, or to make something—like philosophy—fascist.

The eminent Micha Brumlik argues in his preface that Heidegger has believed that people do not have much free choice but are rather determined by destiny (7). Destiny was one of the most used words in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. For Heidegger, this destiny is determined by the *Gemeinschaft des Volkes*—a terminology that mutated into *Volksgemeinschaft* under Nazi rule. Heidegger's *Volks*-community and the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft* always meant the exclusion of non-Aryans, Jews, communists, etc. *Volksgemeinschaft* always means Auschwitz.

Brumlik correctly argues that Heidegger believed even when Germans get together—Heidegger uses the antiquated German word: *zusammentun*—it remains impossible to change the destiny of the communal *Gemeinschaft* (8). Worse, Heidegger believes that only a battle can free one from the power of such a destiny (8). The idea of a battle fits neatly into Heidegger's philosophy of death, in which 'freedom to die' [*Freiheit zum Tode*] is celebrated (20). It is also seen as the only escape route out of a modern society.

Kapfinger argues that it is the fascist subject that sees death on the battlefield as the only escape that renders Heidegger's philosophy fascist. Kapfinger writes that Heidegger believed that the modern subject lives a life of constant fear. To end the modern condition of constant fear, death is the only way out. It eliminates the fear of living in a modern society. In other words, Heidegger demands—just as Adolf Hitler did—that the human subject has to be ready to sacrifice himself (*es opfert sich*) in order to rescue himself from the conditions of a modern society. For Heidegger, this means *Selbstaufgabe*—self-abandonment.

With references to Adorno and Georg Lukács, Kapfinger says that both have shown that Heidegger's *Being and Time* (*Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 1927) is indeed fascistic (21). Worse, Heidegger did not simply share Nazi ideology. Instead, he actively promoted it, invented justifications, and supported Nazi ideologies from his early letters (1916)—when he complained about the 'Jewification [*Verjudung* of our culture and universities]—from his infamous university lectures (1933), and to his Bremen lectures (1949–50). Heidegger's worldview never changed until his death in 1976.

Given what we know today about Heidegger—and this comes despite Heidegger's best efforts to hide the truth—Kapfinger is correct to say that 'Heidegger was "the" Nazi of theory' (22). Heidegger clearly assisted the Nazis in making 'right-wing extremists' thinking acceptable (22). This is, as Canadian educational expert Henry Giroux once called it, the mainstreaming of fascism. But this also means, as Kapfinger outlines, supporting the ultimate Nazi slogan (30): '*Du bist nichts*,



Dein Volk ist alles! [you are nothing, your Volk is everything].

Telling us the true character of Heidegger is the brief yet illuminating story of Heidegger's professorship in Freiburg. It started with Heidegger dedicating his *Being and Time* to his teacher, Edmund Husserl (34). At the same time, Heidegger wrote to Jaspers, 'if my work is directed against one person, it is directed against Husserl' (34). But when Husserl was set to retire, Heidegger wrote to him with an expectation of becoming a full professor at Freiburg University after Husserl's retirement, that he (Heidegger) is looking forward to many philosophical debates with Husserl. Naïve Husserl supported Heidegger's return to Freiburg. Once in the job, Heidegger noted 'the friendship is over' (34) while removing the Husserl dedication from the next print run of his book, *Being and Time*. Worse, at Husserl's funeral in 1938, everyone attended except one person that should have been there: Heidegger.

In the meantime, Heidegger became—albeit briefly—the president of Freiburg University, giving Nazi speeches and doing the Nazi salute. Hitler's *Völkischer Beobachter* noted that the meaning of the Hitler salute is to forget about daily routines [*Kleinkram des Alltages*] and to remind ourselves of the great tasks that Hitler has given us (36). The Hitler salute also means 'freedom and sacrifice' (58). And it means, as Heidegger said during his lecture in summer 1933, 'the German *Volk* comes to itself in its totality which means it found his *Führung*' (59).

In the year 1933, the German word *Führung* had only one meaning: the Führer, Adolf Hitler. Heidegger knew that. In those years, Heidegger had big plans for himself. He wanted to become the philosophical leader of the leader, or the *philosophical Führer of the Führer*. Sadly, his beloved Führer, Adolf Hitler never even granted Heidegger an audience. Heidegger and the Führer never met.

Heidegger continued with, 'the greatness of our *Volk* [and] our German destiny is threatened [*Bedrängnis*] by some barbarity coming from somewhere which will eradicate us' (60). Heidegger says this precisely at a time when his Führer hallucinates about the greatness of Germany and the Jewish World Plot that will destroy Germany.

To prevent the conspiratorial hallucination of a so-called imminent Jewish takeover, Heidegger suggests to follow the Führer. This carries connotations of what Adorno later calls the authoritarian character (75). The authoritarian character is set against the human subject. Kapfinger says that Heidegger called this the '*Subjekloses Subjekt*' (107) or subject-less subject. For Kapfinger, the idea of a subject-less subject takes out the four subjects that made the Holocaust possible (127): a) Adolf Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, etc.; b) the actual killers of the SS, etc.; c) the Nazi bureaucracy (Eichmann, etc.); and, d) all those Germans who passively supported the Holocaust.

Kapfinger argues that Heidegger has 'developed a comprehensive theory of the fascist subject in his book *Being and Time*' (141). In this, Heidegger argues that in a modern society, the subject is 'lost' (142), and that self-consciousness, empowerment, identity, individualism, and inter-subjective recognition are myths. For Heidegger, there is no way to escape from all this. Instead, the subject is trapped inside a 'daily *Verlorenheit*, confusion, and disorientation' (142). This renders life in modern society senseless. The only way to escape all this is through Heidegger's 'fascist philosophy' (149).

In his section 'what is fascist philosophy?', Kapfinger maintains that 'Heidegger always positioned himself rather positively towards Hitler's *Volksgemeinschaft*' (154). Kapfinger says that '*Being and Time* is national-socialist because Heidegger's philosophical theses are anti-individualistic, anti-liberal, and anti-universalistic. Heidegger advocates the complete destruction of Cartesian philosophy seeking to extinguish human individualism' (155), and to annihilate all morality. Instead of 'individualism and the free will, Heidegger favours the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*' (155).

As a consequence, Kapfinger agrees with Adorno who once said that 'Heidegger's

philosophy is fascist to the core' (157). This is also because the 'solution to the fear to one's existence in modern society is to negate one's own subjectivity' (161). In other words, the fascist subjectlessness means the negation of the subject (161). This is the only solution to an existence in modern society where life has gone amiss, where any grounding no longer exists, and where the individual can no longer hold on to anything (179). This is a world defined by people who wear masks and where the entire existence mirrors a puppet game in which everyone wears a mask [*Maskenspiel*].

For Heidegger, behind the mask there is nothing (182). The individual is lost inside a pretended self-determination that no longer exists. What has created trust breaks down so that the individual faces an existence in an *Un-zuhause* (183), where one can never return home. As a consequence, the subject is afraid to be in this world. Fear and total despair reigns. The only solution to all this is the 'fascist option' (187). Death is the only option to escape from all this: 'Death wins' (188). Heidegger calls the true being [*eigentliche Sein*] freedom to die [*Freiheit zum Tode*] (189). Only in 'death and in non-existence has the subject reached true fulfilment' (191). This is pure fascist philosophy.

It is an existence or a *Dasein* (Heidegger) for one's own death—'*Dasein frei für den eigenen Tod*' (192). For Heidegger, this also means 'total submission to the dictator' (195), the Führer, Adolf Hitler. This comes as a total rejection of human individuality. Only Heidegger's self-denial allows the individual to free itself from the illusion of individual subjectivity (195). All this also means that only self-negation can free the deformed individual. This can only be achieved by affirming one's own death [*den eigenen Tod bejahen*]. And for that, the 'fascist subject needs to live up to the unconditional discipline' (197) as demanded by the Führer.

Kapfinger closes by outlining that fascism always thrives from a crisis of capitalism (213) and in that Heidegger played – albeit a minor – role during the 1930s. Kapfinger is correct in saying that 'the strictly hierarchical model of Nazi society is unlikely to flourish today' (218). Indeed, capitalism is not in crisis. Fascism is not needed. As a consequence, right-wing populism remains – apart from Donald Trump, and perhaps Viktor Orban, and others – on the fringes of society. The solution to the pathologies of today's capitalism e.g. as global poverty, the rise of inequality, environmental vandalism, and global warming, etc. are not to be found in a return to a Heideggerian-style fascist philosophy. These have never been the solutions. Yet, they assisted fascism, Nazism, and Auschwitz in becoming possible.

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