

ISGAP OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES no. 7/2025

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Similarities between Heideggerian Philosophy
and Identity Synthesis Ideology

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ISBN 978-1-940186-26-9

The Seeds of Campus Antisemitism: Similarities between Heideggerian Philosophy and Identity Synthesis Ideology

Sabrina Soffer*

Introduction

“History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.”

—Mark Twain

In April 2024, anti-Zionist mobs at Columbia University and Yale University formed human barriers to block Jewish students from entering into certain campus areas,¹ bearing a chilling resemblance to when Nazi students at the University of Vienna linked arms to prevent Jewish students from entering its library building.² In the wake of the brutal attack on Israel of October 7, 2023, by Hamas, a US-designated terror group, Jewish life centers, fraternities, and academic buildings at many universities across the country have suffered widespread vandalism and damage reminiscent of *Kristallnacht*, with prominently displayed swastikas and other symbols of hate. These incidents closely mirror the events of May 1933, during which the Student League at the University of Freiburg seized and vandalized the Jewish Fraternity house, “Neo-Friburgia,” which the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) subsequently branded with a swastika.³

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As Jewish students increasingly face antisemitic harassment on US college campuses, how and why anti-Jewish hostility emerges and how it proliferates is a critical and timely matter of inquiry.⁴ The recent scenes of anti-Israel demonstrations on American college campuses, which evoke disturbing parallels with the actions at world-renowned German universities during the Nazi era, demonstrate that the intellectualization, moralization, and institutionalization of ideology are at the root of the antisemitism issue, both past and present. This paper will illustrate that Heideggerian philosophy, which served as Hitler's intellectual backing and legitimized Nazi scholarship across the German academic realm, is tantamount to the modern-day "identity synthesis" ideology that is inherently anti-Zionist. Both Martin Heidegger's counter-enlightenment philosophy and postmodern identity synthesis ideology constitute rebellions against objectivism, logical reasoning, and modern systems that are utilized for revolutionary and destructive political ends. In both instances, the Jew is cast as a scapegoat for societal ills and the degeneration of modernity, necessary of elimination.

Historical Context

Heideggerian philosophy was not isolated to Heideggerian scholarship or bolstering Hitler's politics. The substantiation of Nazi philosophy enabled scholars such as Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt, Walter Grundmann, and Paul Ritterbusch, among about 500 other academics and university rectors, to promote Nazi ideology and antisemitism as a part of *Aktion Ritterbusch*.⁵ In 1940, Reich Minister of Education Bernhard Rust officially "supported the *Aktion* to mobilize the humanities" in support of Germany's expansionism "through a series of conferences and publication projects ... intended to legitimize German hegemony."⁶

Mobilization in the university included recomposing and creating academic departments that taught a Nazi-oriented curriculum. Even "Jewish studies" departments were established to give the appearance

of Jewish recognition; however, in reality, their programming vilified the Jewish race and religion and delegitimized Jews' connection to their ancestral land.⁷ The demonization of Jews went hand in hand with German expansionism, based on the belief that cleansing the Jewish people—an inferior, unrooted, unworthy vermin—from the earth would help grow and purify Greater Germany.

Neither the teaching of Nazi Germany's educators nor the spread of antisemitism in today's academia involve the direct instruction of antisemitic notions. Instead, both embrace underlying philosophies that facilitate the emergence of theories that help breed an antisemitic ideology, including eugenic racial theory, historicity, and rootedness. On today's campuses, academic disciplines such as the "Resistance Studies Initiative" at the University of Massachusetts Amherst,⁸ Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) hiring practices at The Ohio State University,⁹ and decolonial approaches to psychology¹⁰ or "knowledge"¹¹ at the University of Buffalo promote a political agenda that hands the reins to the so-called oppressed who seek to dismantle existing societal structures in the West.

Those seeking to delegitimize existing systems and the Western perspective often scapegoat Israel, Zionism, and America, painting them as the ultimate oppressors due to their "white settler-colonial imperialist" attributes. Thus, Zionists, comprising approximately 80 percent of diaspora Jews,¹² can be justifiably harmed, and Israeli civilians can be murdered in the name of justice, equality, and virtue.

In the contexts in which they were conceived, Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis ideology may come across as well-intentioned: German antisemitism of the 1930s, like anti-Zionism today, was regarded as the beacon of the progressive movement—a virtuous means to achieving "collective liberation." Furthermore, "German universities are widely considered to have been the very best in the world during the nineteenth and early twentieth century,"¹³ as American universities are today.

The parallels between Heideggerian philosophy and modern-day identity synthesis ideology, along with the antisemitic climates they engender, call for an exploration of the elements of these philosophies that render them susceptible to Jew-hatred and of how they align with each other. It is necessary to delve into both Heideggerian philosophy, which is arguably suffused with Nazism and substantiated Nazi scholarship, and the identity trap in order to determine whether contemporary intellectual culture contains sources of the kind of radicalism that imperils Jews around the world.

Philosophical Background

Martin Heidegger, a seminal 20th century philosopher, authored the landmark magnum opus *Being and Time*, an ambitious exploration of the ontology and essence of Being, or *Dasein*—Existence in its everydayness. The 1927 work was a sensation that elevated Heidegger's position in German academia and Germany itself, influencing a circle far beyond his own philosophy students and demarcating him as a luminary of the era.¹⁴ Unique to *Being and Time*, and arguably what drove its popularity, was not only its revolutionary ontological philosophy, but its reference to and critiques of various philosophers spanning from antiquity to modernity: Aristotle, Kant, and Nietzsche to name but a few. The convergence between German Romantic philosophy, like that of Johann Gottlieb Fichte,¹⁵ and Nazi politics, given the popularity of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* across German universities, enabled Heideggerian thought to support and fuel German idealism and supremacy in academia.

Aktion-like efforts had already started at Freiburg University seven years prior to the official launch of *Aktion Ritterbusch*. In 1933, Heidegger instituted the *Führer principle*, stating that rectors would be appointed by the Nazi Minister of Education rather than by the faculty, as had traditionally been the case. In the fall of that year, upon declining a position at the University of Munich, he asserted, "I ought to decide to work at the task that lets me best serve the work of Adolf Hitler."¹⁶ Over the course of forty years, Heidegger authored many

other works, including the infamous antisemitic *Black Notebooks*, which were published in 2014 after being concealed for decades.¹⁷ Heidegger's long philosophical journey led him to a "shift," turning away from Nazism—including for his own protection—but from 1933–1934, the time at which he served the *Führer Rektor* of the University of Freiberg, he was a champion of National Socialist philosophy and the Nazi party.

To Heidegger, philosophy transcended intellectual endeavor, focusing instead on attaining "authentic being"—a process whereby *Dasein* discloses its true nature to unearth the meaning of life. On a societal level, authenticity would be created through *Gleichschaltung*, a means of reconstructing a tormented Germany through the unification of the Volkisch spirit and *historicity*,¹⁸ a revival of Greco-German roots. As for education, Heidegger sought widespread reform on a program of unification between the university and the National Socialist state; philosophy would reign as the queen of the sciences because "all science remains bound to that beginning of philosophy."

Apart from the *Black Notebooks*, neither much of Heidegger's early writings, such as *Being and Time*, nor works written during his rectorship made any deliberate indication of his antisemitic ambitions. Many scholars have contested Heidegger's antisemitism because he claims to have resigned from his rectorship in protest against Nazi policies, having appointed Jewish deans and prohibiting the posting of "Jew notices" on doors. Nonetheless, it is clear that Heidegger "took up the position for political reasons" and "regularly invoked his own philosophical views as justifications for his political decisions," "occasionally resort[ing] to strategic uses of anti-semitism in the service of his academic political goals."¹⁹ In the context of this analysis, the purported intentions that Heidegger or his adherents may attribute to his actions are immaterial. Rather, the primary concerns of this examination are the bare ideals of his philosophy, whether those ideals underpin anti-Jewish hatred and a Nazi state, and whether these tenets are aligned with the ideals embedded in the identity synthesis and anti-Zionism of today.

The comparative aspect of this investigation begins in the second half of the 21st century amid the revival of social justice initiatives, marked by what the author of *The Identity Trap*, Yascha Mounk, first referred to as “identity synthesis.” identity synthesis is a manifestation of Critical Race Theory that places racial, sexual, and cultural origin identities at the forefront of one’s conception of being in the world.²⁰ Not unlike Heideggerian philosophy, which draws a binary line between the rooted and the unrooted, the authentic and the inauthentic, the historical and the ahistorical, identity synthesis divides the world between races and between oppressors and the oppressed to champion a radical political program. American Progressives in “schools and universities” are “encouraging students to believe that they should ... conceive of themselves as racial beings”²¹ and embrace the identity synthesis framework as a life-guiding principle. “Because of this focus on identity, as a way of interpreting social reality,” infiltrating all parts of education, parts of the left have constructed a moral ideology that “draw[s] distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ ... the in-group and the out-group,”²² not unlike how “traditional right-wing radicalization of German bourgeois youth made it possible for the Volkish ideology,” and later “the anti-Jewish revolution,” to strike “deep roots ... in ... educational institutions.”²³

Heidegger’s Antisemitism and Identity Synthesis–inspired Anti-Zionism

To effectively compare and contrast between the philosophical elements in Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis, as well as their potential to foster anti-Jewish sentiments, we must first assess the arguments in support of the claim that anti-Jewish sentiments—antisemitism and anti-Zionism—are inherent in each philosophy.

In *Heidegger in Ruins: Between Philosophy and Ideology*, Richard Wolin argues that Heideggerian philosophy is inherently suffused with Nazism. He contends that Heidegger’s notions of “historicity” and “temporality” were constantly underscored in order to discount

“universal history” as a metaphysical abstraction that was bequeathed by Enlightenment cosmopolitanism—a modernity he deemed stagnant, mired in a metaphysical intellectual culture. Heidegger’s philosophy of “being-toward-death” would effectively destroy the culprits of Germany’s degenerate era of metaphysics and forge a new beginning for the Christian West. “Because philosophy had reached its end,” it “must be replaced by the metapolitics of the historical Volk.” The historical Volk could not just be revived by “any Volk” but the “German Volk.” The German Volk represented the only people with “historicity,” and therefore contained the sole authentic *Daseins*, or individuals, that could fulfill the promise of “another beginning.”²⁴

Unlike the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Heidegger’s *Being and Time* did not mention Jews. So how is it that Heideggerian philosophy, as Richard Wolin argues, is inherently suffused with Nazism and laced with antisemitic tones?

Heidegger’s German exceptionalism, tantamount to Aryan supremacy, may not contain obvious antisemitic tones but evidently *contains* and *lends itself* to antisemitism: the Volkisch mission was pursued by and for the German people alone and deemed Jews the parasites of the earth. It was also dependent on a revival of Germany’s Christian and Greek primordial past, whose histories were ridden with anti-Jewish hate. In these contexts (and beyond), the Jewish people were the eternal scapegoat. For instance, in ancient Greece, Jews were labeled “barbarians,” with the term “barbaros” signifying “the other.” Early Christian allegations against Jews included the infamous blood libel, which accused them of killing Christ and using the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. The list goes on.²⁵ Post enlightenment, scientific thinkers meshed Judeophobia with dubious racial science “and became the chief vehicle for the diffusion of the Volkisch movement.”²⁶ A belief in German exceptionalism, while considering “world Jewry”²⁷ the culprit of the West’s degenerated modernity, renders the Heideggerian utopia *Judenrein*, or Jew-free. This ideology shares similarities with modern anti-Zionism on American university campuses, where anti-Zionist and

many far-left identity synthesis activists advocate for the cleansing of Zionists and view collective liberation as dependent on the eradication of the Jewish state and the dismantling of modern Western systems. Anti-Zionist activists have been lured into the Soviet pro-Arab propaganda machine of “Soviet Zionology”²⁸ that painted the West as an imperial, colonizing evil: America represented the beastly colonizer, and Israel was its patron. Today, anti-Zionist activists on college campuses and city streets regurgitate the rhetoric of anti-imperialism and decolonialization as they burn Israeli and American flags in the name of liberation from the oppressive West. Thus, one can conceptualize their belief in the importance of eradicating the West as a form of renewed “exceptionalism” within their movement.

Among Heidegger’s Nazi affiliations and lectures during his rectorship at the University of Freiburg, the *Black Notebooks* demonstrate that Heidegger was attempting to “arrive at ontological insights in the areas of science, religion, politics, and culture on the basis of signs or characteristics of daily life under National Socialism.”²⁹ Hence, while Nazism may have been inherent in his philosophy, antisemitism did not necessarily have to be. Antisemitism was instead deeply embedded in Heidegger’s broader global perspective. This is not dissimilar to the Identity Synthesizers who acquire ontological insights concerning the nature of reality based on political, economic, social, and racial conditions under US democracy. And, not unlike Nazi Germany, the modern US political landscape has disillusioned many, leading to the formation of ontologies that divide the world into binary categories such as classes of oppression or race. For Heidegger, such divisions included Carl Schmitt’s friend–enemy distinction, the authentic and the inauthentic, the historical and the ahistorical, and the rooted and the unrooted, in which Jews always represented the negative side of each token.

Identity synthesis has taken up a similar ideological formulation, leading to a process of “self-reinvention” whereby “you pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other

side”³⁰—not unlike Heidegger’s belief that it was necessary for Germans to fabricate an internal enemy and then pursue that enemy’s total annihilation. For Heidegger, the enemy was the Jews; for today’s Identity Synthesizers, the enemy is Zionists. This antagonistic mode of thought has pervaded the new brand of antisemitism—anti-Zionism—which has become an “omnipresent and indispensable component of central European, antimodernist *Kulturkritik*,”³¹ and pervades American Progressivism today.

As a Progressive for his time, Heidegger rejected metaphysics and Western Enlightenment ideals, resembling how Identity Synthesizers resent the West and aim to tear down its structure and systems. Indeed, antisemitism and its diverse adaptations emerge together with the rejection of liberalism, capitalism, communism, socialism and other political trends.³² As a basis, anti-Jewish hate employs what former Israeli politician Einat Wilf defines as the “placard strategy,” where the collective image of the Jew—whether it be “Israel,” “Zionism,” or the “Star of David”—is equated with the image of degeneracy and evil. In recent anti-Zionist campus demonstrations, imagery featuring a Star of David on a trash can accompanied by the caption “Keep the World Clean” represents a calling to do away with “global pollutants” in order to attain the epitome of justice, rights, equality, and freedom. Not dissimilar to Heidegger’s political project, the placard strategy points to the project’s aims for a world without the collective Jew—for “the collective Jew is what stands between the deteriorating modern world and utopia.”³³

While Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis, which lie on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum (right vs. left), may not contain explicit antisemitic rhetoric on the surface, their philosophies do contain the seeds for an antisemitic ideology. To probe deeper into these philosophies, we will next juxtapose their foundational components by aligning *Dasein* with identity, German Messianism with revolution, and Heideggerian educational reform with American Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

In the Spirit of Race: Identity and the Volk

Both Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis make “Being” the focal point of thought. But doesn’t the fact that all philosophers place the human being at the forefront of their projects disprove any claims regarding the uniqueness of Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis in this regard? However, the unique and binding portion of the two philosophies is the *dichotomy* between the superiority and inferiority of Being revolving around Schmitt’s friend–enemy distinction³⁴ and the *reductionist worldviews* surrounding identity.

One may argue that a reductionist and racialized worldview represents the antithesis of Heideggerian philosophy. Heidegger opposed the Nazi philosophy of eugenics, believing that race-oriented thinking constituted a reductive and superficial way of understanding Being. However, the Romantic idea of “race-soul” served as “a mystical source of German unity,” and the “very idea of the Jews as a separate race with particular, dangerous traits ... grew from a mystical notion of thinking far more than it did from eugenic[s].” In Heidegger’s “purported acts of such spiritual resistance there was no factual evidence” to support the notion of a master Aryan race. The notion of race and blood, combined with spirit, took the place of Nazi “biologism,” and Heidegger effectively “endow[ed] race with an enduring and profound spiritual orientation.” *Dasein*—the Heideggerian vision of “who” on a quest to uncover the nature of Being as an engaged existence in the world—can only attain its spirituality from “the voice of blood,” whereby “blood” is substituted for “race.”³⁵

Critical Race Theory has provided the foundation for the identity trap, especially as related to race. Like Heideggerian thought, identity synthesis aims to extend beyond race to other identity factors and contains a spiritual element to drive the ideology forward. Intersectionality represents the “Being” element of this extension, “emphasiz[ing] that different forms of oppression” that are based on race, sexual orientation, cultural origin, and other identity factors “reinforce

each other.” Thus, all oppressed groups should unite in a common struggle against their oppressors “by any means necessary.” They cannot work together with certain ideological counterparts due to “standpoint theory,” the belief that oppressed groups and groups that are comparatively privileged are “incapable of understanding each other.” “Progressive separatism” isolates members of intersectional groups from those that are comparatively privileged to “gain political consciousness and take on persistent injustices.”³⁶

Similarly, Heideggerian philosophy fosters a political consciousness based on the struggle of the supreme against the common people. The supreme represents the party that can bring about a “Messianic era” but is thwarted by some societal plague. In identity synthesis, the power dynamic is similar but its composition is the opposite. The oppressed masses, represented by society’s helpless victims, must rise up against the ultimate oppressor represented by the powerful and privileged few. Within the framework of Nazi antisemitism, the Volk, deemed supreme by Heidegger, stood opposed to the masses and the perennial scapegoat—the Jew. In the American version of anti-Zionism, it is the coalition of the so-called oppressed masses against the singular evil epitomized by the “Jewish supremacist state” of Israel. It is for this reason that the most prominent anti-Zionist movement, the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, attracts the support of diverse groups that promote intersectionality, including the Black Lives Matter movement, feminist groups, and even Queers for Palestine—no matter how ironic.

Both identity synthesis-inspired anti-Zionism and Heideggerian antisemitism thus share a racial and spiritual struggle against the so-called enemy. Packaged with race and spirit, *historicity* weaves a common thread between Heideggerian antisemitism and identity synthesis anti-Zionism. *Dasein*, the Heideggerian identity base, becomes central to demarcating the rank of one’s “historicity.” The *Dasein* of the Volk could only be a German, harboring Greek “rootedness.” As a result, classical studies departments, such as Assyriology,

Egyptology, and Indology, were instituted at universities, aiming to link these flourishing historical civilizations to German roots. Similarly, Identity Synthesis deems individuals with more intersectional identities as being *rooted* in an oppressive past (and thus in an oppressive present) and as occupying an elevated social stature due to their position of historical victimhood. Both identity synthesis and Heideggerian philosophy mask a desire for power with historical victimhood, while projecting supremacy onto other diverse groups of people, ultimately resulting in antisemitism.

It is no surprise that anti-Zionists delegitimize the Jewish connection to Israel, contending that Jews have no “rootedness” in Israel. They argue that Judaism is just a religion and that Israel is a Jewish supremacist “white-settler colonial ethnostate” that must be abolished in order to achieve “collective liberation.” Like Nazi racial theory and Heideggerian antisemitism, such anti-Zionist sentiments have no factual grounding: Israel is central to Jewish peoplehood and Judaism, over half its population is of Middle Eastern or Arab origin, and it is the only democracy in the Middle East.

Just as Heidegger contended that “validity” should be “rejected” because it gets “entangled” in “perplexity and confusion,” the dubious categorizations of race and roots, combined with a mystical revolutionary dimension, are easily washed away.³⁷ Hence, facts are easily substituted with pseudo-scientific notions and extreme ideologies, creating a baseless yet powerful movement that has the ability to mobilize the masses. Paraphrasing the words of Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, “common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions,” who have been exposed to and educated to accept only one viewpoint, are the ones who are “truly dangerous.”

A Messianic Era: Redemption and Revolution

Like identity synthesis and its anti-Zionist supporters, Heideggerian philosophy and the Nazi movement proved revolutionary. The post-

World War I climate in Germany and the political climate in America in the era of social media and Donald Trump have both drawn common people to radical philosophies. In a state of frustration, hopelessness, and disillusion, people tend to forgo common sense; in this context, they gravitate toward short-term destructive fixes to *feel good* instead of long-term constructive visions that can *do good*. As Lewis Lowenthal notes in *The Prophets of Deceit*, if the “prophet” is an “advocate of social change” and suggests “the elimination of people rather than a change in political structure,” he is therefore not an advocate but an agitator.³⁸ Much like anti-Zionists advocate for Israel’s complete elimination rather than improving the country for all its citizens, Heidegger contended that the German restoration required the annihilation of the Jewish race. The gravitation toward destruction is a product of disillusionment and a bait for the masses. And with scholarship substantiating the legitimacy of resistance, destruction, and extermination, agitators become God-like messiahs of deteriorating societies in which the public vests their salvation. “Heidegger’s doctrine of *Seinsgeschichte* [history of being] assimilated the political theology of ‘redemptive antisemitism,’”³⁹ just as identity synthesizers assimilate an intersectional and victim-based theology of redemptive anti-Zionism.

Heideggerian philosophy and identity synthesis share not only their common rejection of Jews and/or Israel but also their repudiation of Western civilization and its values. The Jews, representing less than one percent of Germany’s 1910 population and assimilated in society following their emancipation,⁴⁰ and modern Israel, a small yet mighty and prosperous democracy in the Middle East, both serve as objects of jealousy due to their relative success against the backdrop of a weakening West. Jealousy leads, in part, to scapegoating, but more perilous is a persistent discontent with Western ideals and values that leads to the subversion of civil values and normative codes.

In 20th century Germany, Heidegger and many Germans grew disenchanted with the French Enlightenment’s *droits de l’homme* or “rights of man.” In modern America, many citizens have grown frustrated

with the idea of democracy, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. These value-based systems and laws are designed to grant equal rights to all citizens and help enhance the legal status of minorities, including Jews. History did not establish legal equality for all groups—including Jews—and bigotry and racism continue to be very real issues, prompting individuals to seek to reverse the status quo using provocative means that are not always practical. Identity synthesis-inspired anti-Zionism and Heideggerian antisemitism dream of bringing about a Messianic era by completely destroying modernity's systems and eradicating the impediment to utopia, namely the collective "Jew," who is deemed responsible for modernity's ills and for revolutionizing the West.

Heidegger's "destruction of the history of philosophy" led him to forge a "path that led beyond the decline of the West" alongside the destruction of Jews. His German Messianism embraced a renewal of the "Greek Beginning" that would foster a new era in the history of being—one that was authentic and mired in historicity.⁴¹ Heidegger conceived of people as divided between the historical and ahistorical, and the historical had to be restored in order to catalyze redemption; eliminating world Jewry was a prerequisite. This philosophy parallels anti-Zionists' chants to destroy Israel and Zionism as a prerequisite for revolutionary liberation, decolonization, and justice. Through raging protest, anti-Zionists have made it abundantly clear that their ultimate goal is to tear down the United States and Western values and overhaul American democratic systems, rejecting equality in favor of equity, with little thought to a plausible substitute.

Revolution is often a product of successful agitation. Like German students in Nazi uniforms, radical students on today's US campuses are draped in keffiyehs, chant violent slogans, and harass their Jewish peers both in school and on city streets. In German universities as in American ones, professors are heavily involved in protests and/or ideological indoctrination—directly or indirectly, obviously or subtly. Professors at Northwestern, Harvard, Columbia, and universities across the

Washington, DC area have signed letters and petitions supporting the anti-Israel student encampments and protests. External academic anti-Zionist groups also intervene in university departments, like the BDS-affiliated Middle East Studies Association, which has links to numerous campus Middle East programs where professors lure students into the identity trap and use these frameworks to promote anti-Zionism. Other faculty promote or risk promoting identity synthesis in their classrooms by virtue of syllabus requirements, including DEI training, which is suffused with ideas inspired by identity synthesis.

“Few humanities scholars in Germany remained uninvolved” in weaponizing their professorship in support of Germany’s war aims.⁴² Rectors often cleansed German universities of Jewish professors and Nazi dissenters, ensuring the same kind of demographic homogeneity that can be seen at American universities today. For example, 98 percent of Yale faculty were reported as donating to the Democrats,⁴³ and hiring practices are underpinned by an identity synthesis system under which search committees include “Diversity representatives” to ensure that all “biases” are ruled out in “inclusive faculty searches.”⁴⁴ Other American universities, including those listed above, possess similar systems. While a Democratic affiliation (or any political orientation) does not necessarily equate to identity synthesis or anti-Zionism, a lack of viewpoint diversity in the university tends to produce an echo chamber that fosters increasingly extreme beliefs. In practice, a lack of scholarly dissent produces ideological assent.

The tactics exhibited by intellectual leaders during the Nazi era and today reveal similarities not only in philosophy but also in their commitment to movements aimed at tarnishing the collective image of the Jew and modernity. These tactics intersect at the point of their destructive propagation of counter-culture and modernity-rejecting sentiments, which, if executed loudly and extensively enough, promise to usher in redemption. Next, we will explore what lures disillusioned citizens to take the bait of the Messianic promise and its inevitable demise.

According to Heidegger, Germany, which traced its roots to ancient Greece, needed to be destroyed in order to revive its authenticity and Western civilization. Echoes of this German Messianic ideology can be seen in former President Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” campaign, which has done much to make redemptive antisemitism and Messianism an attribute of the American far-right rather than the far-left. However, while the ends of these two extremes may never *touch*, they do *meet* in a horseshoe-like fashion, as posited by French philosopher Jean Pierre Faye.⁴⁵ As Richard Wolin describes in *Heideggerian Marxism*, “[Herbert] Marcuse’s testimony concerning Heidegger’s pedagogical prowess conforms with that of the philosopher’s other prominent students” including Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hans Jonas, and Karl Lwith, who all “affirmed that what they found unique in Heidegger’s approach was his capacity to revivify antiquated philosophical texts in light of present historical needs and concerns.”⁴⁶ Indeed, Heidegger was the inspiration for many Marxist-oriented scholars of the New Left, most notably the German-Jewish philosopher Marcuse. He was riveted by the seminal *Being and Time* and served as Heidegger’s assistant at Freiburg until they parted ways due to Heidegger’s National Socialist activities. He ultimately rose to become a leading figure in critical theory, identity synthesis, and revolutionary philosophy.

Although Marcusean and Heideggerian philosophy do not completely align, both hold, in their own unique ways, that “reason,” deemed subjective and/or ontological, calls for “revolution.”⁴⁷ Anti-Zionists chanting for an “intifada revolution”—the destruction of Israel through terrorist acts—or a “student-led revolution,” while occupying campus plazas and breaking into buildings in the name of justice and people power, exhibit exactly the kind of tactics that Heidegger and Marcuse would encourage in order to destroy modern systems. Both falsely posit that destruction will bring forth a new utopic era, although it ultimately only leads toward the opposite: greater instability and eventual demise—as was the case in Nazi Germany.

Educational Reform: Streaming Ideology into the University

The sustainability and progress of any society begins and ends with education. Contemporary education, however, has faced criticism for its excessive focus on vocational training, both in the 1930s and today. Heidegger criticized the “specialization, fragmentation, technologization, and consequent degeneration of the university into vocationalization.”⁴⁸ He sought to eliminate academic freedom from the university because it was partly responsible for the vocationalization of education due to its “disingenuous character and negative implications” and its lack of focus on Being.⁴⁹ Universities in contemporary America face similar criticisms, namely that they are “pipelines to the workforce,” that they are overly focused on science, math, and technology (STEM) subjects, and that they have become “inequality machines” with little regard for cultural, racial, and sexual awareness. Many identity synthesizers echo Heidegger’s criticism on the vocationalization of education. Students should undoubtedly learn to question their “Being” and become aware of their identity, except that a clear boundary is crossed when education moves from fostering critical thinking to imposing specific thoughts. In other words, students are taught not how to think but what to think, with professors depicting a utopian version of reality.

During the 1930s “the literate bourgeoisie ... saturated with [Volkisch] ideology ... actualize[d] the Volkisch notion of deeds to help diffuse the spirit of the German volk”⁵⁰ through university channels. This gradual shift led to the overt Nazification of Germany’s higher-learning institutions, transforming them into hubs for Nazi youth groups preparing to join the war effort and champion the “anti-Jewish revolution.” Arguably, Heidegger rejected the Nazi takeover of the universities, “reject[ing] the *politicization* of the university, the Nazi attempt to transform the university into a standing reserve of intellectual and material resources for the German war machine.” Heidegger declared himself a champion for the constant study and question of “Being” and

was even tolerant of Jewish faculty. At the same time, however, he held that Nazism possessed the “inner truth and greatness” to counter the technologization and thus degeneration of society.⁵¹

Uniting around “philosophy as the queen of the sciences,” Heidegger sought to unite research and teaching, which would breathe the life of philosophy into research and prevent it from being “more bound to his particular domain.” This unity is manifested in Heidegger’s educational vision for “armed service,” “knowledge service,” and “labor service,” which would invigorate the strength of the “primordial German essence.” This activism would tie “the three bonds—*by* the people, *to* the destiny of the state, *in* a spiritual mission.” As Heidegger writes in his *Self-Assertion in the German University*, “Germany’s student body [would be] on the march” to achieve this mission of redeeming the German Volk.⁵² Hence, it is once again evident that Heidegger’s mission was not merely academic but a clear effort to mobilize his students toward Nazi politics.

Mouk asserts that “the short march” of identity synthesis started on the “training ground” of the American campus. “By 2010, the advocates of the identity synthesis were teaching hundreds of students around the country every year.” Heidegger’s rallying cry for unity around a common cause and using philosophy as a unifier of the sciences parallels how left-wing DEI models employ their own philosophical unity and inevitably advance a political mission. All college freshmen must undergo orientation that includes DEI training, and “even students studying science, business, or engineering [are] likely to learn about ... postmodernism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory.”⁵³ Look no further than the “anti-racist”⁵⁴ medical course at UCLA or “decolonial, liberatory, and anti-oppressive theories and approaches to clinical treatment” at George Washington University (GWU).⁵⁵ Ironically, both mandatory diversity courses, one in medicine and the other in diversity and psychology, traded medicine for Marxism⁵⁶ and diversity for anti-Jewish discrimination.⁵⁷

Just as Heidegger’s philosophical basis lent itself to antisemitism, so do curricula influenced by identity synthesis and anti-Zionist ideology. In a psychology course taught at the GWU, for example, Dr. Lara Sheehi frequently cites the Jewish state of Israel as the epitome of colonial oppression and a major impediment to decolonization of psychological practices. More recently, on April 19, 2024, at a conference hosted by GWU’s Institute of Middle East Studies, faculty members described Israel as a “genocidal,” “racist,” and “settler-colonial” entity and stated that students must attain “knowledge practices for resistance”⁵⁸ in order to rebel against it. Faculty at the conference proposed to “decolonize knowledge” by teaching their worldview “quietly in the classroom” to “reclaim their academic power.” As in the German universities of the Nazi era, “leadership and aristocratic ideals were exalted above [the] democra[tic]”⁵⁹ tenet of academic freedom, molding the minds of youth in a direction bent toward a revolutionary political mission that would rid society of the collective Jew. When anti-Zionist identity synthesizers chant “Zionists off our campus now,” as they have done repeatedly over the past year, they “really mean it.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

“It should be stated clearly that Germans became Nazis because they wanted to become Nazis and because the Nazis spoke so well to their interests and inclinations.”

—Peter Fritzsche

Universities in 1930s Germany and today’s American campuses serve as small-scale reflections of broader society, providing valuable insights into future trends. Those German students shaped by philosophies that nurtured Nazi activism would voluntarily join antisemitic youth groups and ultimately lead antisemitic political parties, which they considered noble causes. With historical hindsight of the Holocaust and an understanding how Nazi ideology fueled anti-Jewish sentiment, it is essential to recognize the ostensibly pure academic philosophies that can morph into antisemitic ideologies and how academic integrity

and reliance on facts can be compromised under the guise of radical political transformations.

To recap, this paper has examined Heideggerian philosophy and anti-Zionism employing Yascha Mounk's *The Identity Trap*. Mounk suggests that while the origins of identity synthesis ideology may have been well intentioned, falling into the identity trap only breeds more societal division and is counterproductive to its stated goals of diversity and inclusion. Heideggerian philosophy also appeared well intentioned, with its revolutionary ideas on Being, education, and promoting the welfare of the German people. However, this paper has demonstrated that political actors can weaponize plain ideas, transforming them into destructive tools for political plans. Such ideas become incredibly appealing during times of crisis.

Furthermore, my analysis reveals the resemblance between and contributions of Heideggerian and anti-Zionist philosophies when it comes to promoting antisemitic ideologies.

Firstly, in the examination of Being and Identity, in the section entitled "In the Spirit of Race: Identity and the Volk," it becomes apparent that a philosophical worldview centered on a distinct interpretation of Being and Identity is prone to "othering" those identified as adversaries by the group. This is evident in the false dichotomies of historical/ahistorical, authentic/inauthentic, and rooted/unrooted held by Heidegger and the notions of oppressor/oppressed, colonial/decolonial, and racist/antiracist that form the basis of the identity trap. The difference between the two lies in the fact that identity synthesis cloaks the desire for supremacy and power in the language of victimhood and the struggle for human rights, while Heidegger is clear that on a societal level *Dasein* only applied to the German Volk. Indeed, the former thus can be regarded as more insidious than the latter.

Next, in the examination in the section entitled "A Messianic Era: Redemption and Revolution," it becomes evident that both Heidegger

and the proponents of anti-Zionism aim to dismantle existing power structures in order to invert power dynamics, not to restore stability and ensure equality. Thus, revolution is deemed necessary to bring about a Messianic era. In both cases, the more extreme the movements and the more they pervade society, the greater the peril to the Jews and to citizens in general.

Lastly, the section entitled “Educational Reform: Streaming Ideology into the University” reveals that the politicization of the student body was almost inevitable given the infusion of Being and Identity-centered philosophies and rhetoric into curricula, effectively indoctrinating students and lowering academic standards, same the leadership failed to act against.

In response to the recent violence against Jewish students and anti-Israel rioting at Columbia University, Dani Dayan, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, addressed a letter to former Columbia University President Minouche Shafik. In it, he voiced a critical concern: “There is a naïve belief that [the] academy is immune to bigotry and [that] the causes that students and professors lead are inherently ‘good causes,’ even if sometimes ahead of their time.” Dayan draws a parallel with the University of Heidelberg in 1930s Germany, once as esteemed as today’s Columbia, and argues that it declined because the leadership failed to uphold a commitment to the enduring principles of truth and rationality within academic disciplines.⁶¹

In order to forestall a slide into the abyss akin to the one witnessed in Nazi Germany, the Western world must heed Dayan’s cautionary words. We must guard against the corruption of virtuous philosophies into extreme ideologies and address the grave consequences of the intellectualization, moralization, institutionalization, legalization, and normalization of anti-Jewish hate and its contributing philosophies.

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