

## HEIDEGGER AND ARENDT: SIMPLE ROMANCE OR INTELLECTUAL COLLABORATION?

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**ABSTRACT:** Philosophy, through its story, is fertile in the cases of amorous relations between philosophers. If for a long time, the couple Sartre-Beauvoir had been the more noticed, it remains that the relationship Heidegger-Arendt is from now on highlighted because of the protean implications of this juvenile passion that has become a senile obsession with dreamlike allures that can't be overcome. What is immediately striking is the blatant opposition between the master of Fribourg, anti-Semite and Nazi ideologue, and Arendt, young Jewish student, victim of Nazism. How then to catalogue this relationship: should we associate it to romance without any intellectual extension or should we perceive in it an ounce of intellectual collaboration? This article aims to take this question by treating it in the right measure, in reverse of any pernicious extrapolation which leads to unfortunate assimilations.

**Keywords:** Nazism, Totalitarianism, Anti-semitism, Politics, Philosophy.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The history of thought, in general, is loaded with numerous cases of amorous relations between thinkers from various horizons. George Sand and Alfred de Musset, Albert Camus and Maria Casares, Victor Hugo and Juliet Drouet, Franz Kafka and Felice Bauer, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, and the list is far from being exhausted. But apart from the idyll Verlaine-Rimbaud whose discovery had the effect of an electroshock in the midst of public opinion, because of the homosexual nature of this relationship, no other relationship will be that so commented, discussed and even censored as the one who will bind Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. A careful observation of their respective paths suggests that we are in the presence of two intellectual and philosophical personalities that everything seems to oppose. On one hand, Martin Heidegger: very influential professor of philosophy, rector of the University of Fribourg, engaged anti-Semite, and Nazi ideologue. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt: young Jewish student, outcast under the Hitler regime fierce slayer of the totalitarian system of which nazism is its most abject expression. From this point of view, it seems to be obvious that this two figures were made to be opposed; however, against all odds, between the two, a juvenile romance will be born which will become a senile obsession with unsurpassable dreamlike looks. Therefore, it is important here to take charge of the nature of the relationship between Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. How can we explain and understand the detonators of this "dangerous" link? What are its ins and outs? Should this be seen as a simple romance between souls that love each other? Should this be seen as an intellectual alliance which leads to the treason of the Jewish people by Arendt? Examining this questioning requires that we first of all get close interest about Heidegger's nazism, then go to the tumultuous nature of this relationship with Arendt, and finally, that we identify the dangers of an assimilation of Arendt to her master and lover.

### II. HEIDEGGER AND THE HITLERIAN NAZISM

It is not obvious to speak about the Nazism of Martin Heidegger, because in this regard, there is a live controversy which opposes, using the terminology of Louis Althusser, the Heideggerians of the right (Walter Birmel, Jacques Derrida, Jean Beaufret, Jean-Luc Nancy and Donatella Di Cesare) and the Heideggerians of the left (Jürgen Habermas, Theodor Adorno, Hans Jonas, Victor Farias, Emmanuel Faye). Far from naively entering into this polemic, we are interested here in Heidegger's writings, because it seems to us that in the analysis of thought, only the author's texts are authentic and authoritative.

If we are to believe Hermann TalloNoubissi, "Nazism designates, in fact, the official doctrine of the German state from 1930 based on the affirmation of the superiority and purity of the German people, worthy of dominating the so-called inferior races especially the Jews"[TallaNoubissi: 2017; 29]. Such a definition has

the merit of quickly highlighting both the genesis of Nazism, its foundations and its teleological perspective. Not seeing things differently, Simone Keller, evoking the totalitarian system, specifies very opportunely that: “totalitarianisms are not, with all due respect to Jean-Luc Nancy, eruptions of fate, that is to say disasters coming from who knows where. They are implemented by individuals to whom we can attribute responsibility for them; they have economic, political and social causes, which it is up to us to determine and understand” [Kellerer: 2017]. The question worth its weight in gold here is how much responsibility does Heidegger have in setting in motion this abject system of barbarism on a human scale?

Contrarily to the position of the guardians of the Heideggerian temple who questions with great quibble the Nazism of their “icon”, let us evoke the adventures of the adhesion to Nazism of the author of *Lettresurl’humanisme*. He joined the Nazi party (NSDAP) in 1933 and on this occasion, he made a Profession of faith of German professors toward Adolf Hitler. In an epistolary exchange with his brother Frits Heidegger, he presents Adolf Hitler as providential man endowed with “an incredible and sure political instinct” [Weill; 2016]. Concerning his membership with the Nazi Party, the author of *Cahiers Noirs* considers that this membership is legitimate “not only because of an internal conviction, but also (because he was) conscious of the fact that it was the only way to make possible a purification and an enlightenment of the Nazi movement” [Weill; 2016]. Long before, in 1916, he wrote to his future wife Elfriede that: “the envy of our culture and universities is indeed frightening and I think the German race should find enough inner strength to reach the top” [Gertrude Heidegger; 2005: p. 51]. It should be remembered that it is under the rectorate of Heidegger that we will witness the abolition of scholarships to Jewish students, just as the German intellectual world will be amazed when he learns that under his leadership, Edmund Husserl will be withdrawn from his philosophy incarnation coupled with the formal prohibition of teaching because of his Jewish origin.

Those who still doubted about Heidegger’s Nazism are flabbergasted when the *Cahiers Noirs* are published. For Yves Charles Zarka, “the revelations contained in Heidegger’s *Cahiers Noirs* go far beyond anything we knew about his relationship to Nazism, because they contain passages that reveal his positions, unpublished and unheard of, on the Jews and on the Shoah. Indeed, far from having remained silent on the Shoah, as one might think, a silence that some interpreted positively as relating to respect for the unspeakable and uncommonly measured character of this tragedy, Heidegger on the contrary writes texts presenting his positions in this regard in a very explicit manner” [Zarka, 2015: pp. 73-76].

According to the director of the Revue *Cités*, things are now clear: “it was, in fact, still possible for some, before their publication, to maintain the idea that if Heidegger had been a Nazi, this was only an accident in his personal and intellectual history, but in any case, this engagement did not affect the core of his thinking, and that moreover, he had never been racist or anti-semitic. However, this reassuring position with regards to the thinker of being, who aimed precisely at saving his philosophy and maintaining belief in its considerable significance for us, against all odds, is no longer absolutely tenable. The *Cahiers Noirs* indeed reveal the reality of its anti-semitic racism and its intrinsic link with the thought of being. The thought of being emerges from the halo of darkness in which it had remained. The Volumes 94, 95 and 96 of *Cahiers Noirs* reveal thoroughly the roots of Heidegger’s anti-semitism in his thought of being, of the ontological difference between being and being and the destiny of German” [Zarka, 2015: pp. 73-76].

The *Cahiers Noirs* are unquestionably the perfect expression of Heidegger’s anti-semitism and racism. According to Zarka, “all this with no doubt seems incredible, unworthy of a thinker, however tiny it may be, unworthy of a philosopher, yet such is the representation that Heidegger makes in the *Cahiers Noirs* of the Jewish, German and the central stake, because apocalyptic, of the war” [Zarka, 2015: p. 74]. Going further than Zarka, Emmanuel Faye offers an indictment fundamentally against the one he accuses of having introduced Nazism into philosophy [Faye; 2005]. According to him, Heidegger’s thought is not a “philosophy”, at most, it is an “ideology” at the service of Nazism. Faced with such a situation, Faye’s conviction is very clear: “such a work [that of Heidegger] cannot continue to appear in the libraries of philosophy” [Faye; 2005: p. 513]. Therefore, there is an urgent need to stop “this intrusion of Nazism into human education” [Faye; 2005: p. 518]. Such thought can only be placed “in the depths of the history of Nazism and hitlerism” [Faye; 2005: p. 513].

Obviously, with all due respect to the guardians of the heideggerian temple, the master of Fribourg did indeed have a fundamentally Nazi “thought”, to the point that it would not be excessive to consider him with Carl Schmidt as software theorists with whom Hitler will make a monstrous use. The whole question here is now to know what can justify the relationship maintained between Heidegger and Arendt when we know how tumultuous the relationship was?

### III. THE MASTER OF FRIBOURG AND THE JEWISH STUDENT: A TUMULTUOUS RELATIONSHIP

Let us say it at the outset: the story of the romance between Heidegger and Arendt is that of an unusual relationship between two figures of philosophy that everything opposed at first glance. Nothing could, if we compare their intellectual trajectory and their egotistical experience, predict this romance with twists and worthy

of a telenovela. Martin Heidegger internationally renowned philosophical expert, inveterate anti-Semite, racist, German ethnocentrist, married man; backwards, Hannah Arendt, a young Jewish student, a withdrawn figure with a sagacious and precocious intelligence. Let's listen to her portrait, made by her fellow student Hans Jonas: "shy and reserved, with surprisingly beautiful features and lonely eyes, she (Hannah Arendt) immediately appeared as exceptional, unique, yet indefinable. Intellectual brilliance was not uncommon in these places. But there was in her an intensity, an inner director, an instinctive search for quality, a groping quest for essence, a way to get to the bottom of things, which spread a magical aura around her. We felt an absolute determination to be herself a stubborn will that was matched only by her great vulnerability" [Jonas;1996: pp. 79-80].

Arendt had a difficult childhood full of pitfalls. Educated by her grandfather because of her father's illness, the latter died when Arendt was only 7 years old. And as if that were not enough, 4 years later her father also died. This tragic family experience forged in her a strong personality and an unwavering strength of character. Thus, for having asserted her atheism in class, she was fired, and it was as a free candidate that she passed her baccalaureate. It was in the spring of 1924, at the age of 18, that Arendt met the man she would later call "the secret king of thought". But it was in February 1925 that she became the lover of her teacher, who was already married by the way. For Hannah Arendt's most credible biographer, "when Hannah Arendt met Martin Heidegger, everything changed. He was a character in novel, a poet, with gifts of a genius, apart from professional thinkers as well as the students who adored him; starkly beautiful, simply dressed in a peasant style, passionate skier and enthusiastic ski instructor. Hannah Arendt was much more amazed than her retrospective homage admits, by this union of thinking and living" [Young-Bruehl; 1986: p. 61].

The romance lasts only the time of the blink of an eye, because at the beginning of May of the same year, the couple's first dispute and Arendt first disillusion. Heidegger refuses to leave his wife to remarry Arendt. Shocked by the brutality of reality, she leaves Marburg to join Husserl in Fribourg; spending just a semester there, she then went to Heidelberg where Karl Jaspers taught. In 1929, she got married with Günther Stern. And in a letter to Heidegger in 1950, she writes nostalgically that: "I was firmly resolved, you see, when I left Marburg, never to love a man in my life again, which did not prevent me from marrying afterwards with the first comer, without loving him" [Arendt, 2002. Young-Bruehl, 1999]. All of the correspondence between Heidegger and Arendt is now available for consultation. We discover in them the great poet and romantic who writes to his lover that: "please, Hannah; give me a sign of life, give me a few more words from you. I can't let you be just a shooting star. Write as you can write, provided it is you". Aware that his mistress had lost faith in their romance, he tries to reassure her in a very impressive language: "each of us remains at the height of the existence of the other, or in other words, of the freedom of granting faith and the intimate necessity of imperturbable trust, this is where the confirmation of our love resides". Due to the principle of the reciprocity of this love, Arendt writes to his lover that: "if God grants it, I will love you better after death, I love you and you know it, like on the first day..." [Arendt, 2001]

The above text allows us to understand, in need be still, the depth of the romance that bound the two lovers. We can easily see that Arendt had invested herself better than her master in this relationship; she tried to save their love affair, she very courageously assumed her reputation as mistress of the summit of Fribourg. She remained attached to him despite the two nuptialities she will have.

But could we then assimilate Arendt to Heidegger by making this romance the intangible proof of Arendt's treason against her community, or, should we see this romance as a simple adventure not possessing any impact on each other's intellectual position? What is at stake here is to succeed in defining the specter of this relation while avoiding the pitfall of an excessive assimilation of Arendt to Heidegger.

#### IV. THE DANGERS OF ARENDT'S ASSIMILATION TO HEIDEGGER

We can reduce the Heidegger-Arendt idyll to two reading grids. At first glance, the first grid consists in saying that their rapprochement was limited only to their romance without any intellectual collaboration. Likewise, the second reading grid is the perfect opposite at the first grid, here we admit that Arendt was not only Heidegger's mistress; she was also at the service of the destruction of her people from the moment she decided to become the lover of the one who contributed to intellectually to the destruction of the Jewish people. For our part, each of these readings has asperities that it is important to highlight.

The first tendency which consists in reducing Arendt's relationship to Heidegger to a mere romance seems to overlook that Arendt significantly contributed to the *fama* of the master of Fribourg. Indeed, if Heidegger could boast about a reputation in Germany, it is never the less clear that the worldwide distribution of his work owes a lot to the contribution of his lover, especially in the North American universe. According to Emmanuel Faye: "Heidegger could have never forged his reputation as the greatest thinker of the twentieth century on his own. He was greatly helped for this, and if the role of Jean Beaufret or, on another, more academic level, that of Hans-Georges Gadamer was certainly decisive [...] the figure who will have contributed the most, after 1945, to the planetary diffusion of Heidegger's thought is unquestionably that of Hannah Arendt" [Faye; 2016: p. 12].

In the same perspective, it is noted that, on the death of Karl Jaspers (whose aversion to Heidegger was not feigned), Arendt frees herself from the weight of the influence of her thesis supervisor and erects her lover as a “secret king of thought”, dethroning Emmanuel Kant. Praising Heidegger’s merits, she writes frantically that: “there was then, after the First World War, in German universities, not undoubtedly a rebellion, but a large-scale malaise in the academic teaching and student activity, reaching all faculties which were more than simple professional schools and all students for whom study meant more than preparation for a job [...] The University in general or the schools – the neo-Kantians, the neo-Hegelians, the neo-Platonists etc. – where the old school discipline like the theory of knowledge, aesthetics, ethics, logic etc., which was not really transmitted but rather emptied of its substance by a bottomless boredom. Against this activity which is all in all comfortable and in its own quite solid way, there was then, even before Heidegger’s appearance, a small number of rebels [Husserl, Jaspers, Scheler]. [...] What this small number had in common was – to put it in Heidegger’s words – that they knew how to distinguish between an object of learning and a thing thought, and that the object of learning to them was pretty much indifferent. The news reached then those who was more or less expressly aware of the break in tradition and of the dark times which had begun to dawn [...] The news which attracted them to Fribourg to the *Privatdozent*, and a little later to Marburg, said: there is someone who actually attains the things that Husserl proclaimed [of the things themselves], who knows they are not an academic matter but the concern of the thinking man, and this, in truth, not only since yesterday and today, but always; and who, precisely because for him the thread of tradition is cut, discovers the past at fresh [...]. The news said it quite simply: the thought is again alive, it makes speak about the cultural treasures of the past which one believed dead and here they propose things quite other than what one believed in while being wary of it. There is a master; maybe we can learn to think” [Arendt; 1986: pp. 308-310].

Arendt’s words, the dithyrambic tone of which we can not dispute, clearly show his contribution to the globalization of his thought. Moreover, in a correspondence to Heidegger, she confesses to him that her work condition of a modern man is a work which bears the seal of the most absolute heideggerianism. She also specifies that: “I asked the publishing house to send you a book from me [...]. You will see that the book does not include a dedication. If everything had always happened between us as it should have – and saying between us, I am not targeting neither you nor me [allusion made here to Elfried Heidegger who did not hide his aversion and his disdain for Arendt, mistress of her husband] –, I would have asked your permission to dedicate it to you; its conception dates back to the very beginning of my stay in Fribourg, and so to speak, it owes you everything in every respect” [Faye; 2016: pp. 360-361].

The second approach is to make Arendt an intellectual collaboration of Heidegger; but also and above all to claim that his emotional proximity has led to an intellectual proximity. From this point of view, the author of *Between past and future* is blamed to have betrayed the Jewish by signing a convent with the “devil”.

Such a reading that we can accuse of caricatural and partial obscures the criticism or the line of demarcation between Arendt and Heidegger. Indeed, Arendt, notably in her analysis of politics, opposed Heidegger, whom she accused of having a conception of politics that is blinded by the excessive idealism of political Platonism. According to Jacques Taminiaux, “when Heidegger considers the Greek world, it is in relation to a single criterion, which is the excellence of the *biospolitikos* celebrated by Plato. In doing so, he takes for granted that his struggle against doxa, sophist and rhetoric is perfectly legitimate. He therefore does not pay the slightest attention to the previous criteria of excellence against which Plato took part: that of the *biospolitikos*... Never the he considers the possibility for the doxa, the discourse of the sophists, the rhetoric, to be completely legitimate fact in view of this previous criteria” [Taminiaux; 1992: p. 25].

From there, Arendt looks forward to surpassing Heidegger’s approach: “this re-examination is carried out on the basis of the excellence of the *biospolitikos* ... admittedly, Heidegger is not even cited in the book; (*The Human Condition*) but this is for the simple reason that it does not deal with the theoretician *bios théôrêtikos* itself. But the whole book, in its structure as well as in its themes, can be read as a reply to Heidegger with regard to this excellence which the *bios théôrêtikos* intends to supplant.

Arendt being interested in Heidegger’s masterpiece (*Sein und Zeit*), reproaches him for not having drawn all the consequences of his duality “being and time”. In this regard, Jean-Claude Poizat writes that: “in this 1927 book, Heidegger seeks, so to speak, to root out thought from its metaphysical matrix, and to reveal it for what it is, that is to say, a kind of act. This act is referred to being-man, or rather to *Dasein* (being-there): that is to the only being for whom essence and existence are identical. Among the “being” *Dasein* is the only being that “exists”, which means that he is the only one who question the meaning of his being. In Heidegger, the being of man thus appears as a “being-in-the-world”. The basic structure of its existence, called “worry”, consists of an effort to maintain its existence in the world. Thus man, as an existent, is both a “being-thrown” (he is always caught up in a certain situation in the world) and a capacity for transcendence (he can form projects with regards to this world). This duality places the existing face to face with an alternative: either it abandons itself to an unauthentic life, in the mode of the banality of daily existence ‘the existence of the “one”’, or it tears itself away from these inauthentic determinations to find an authentic mode of existence.

As a result, the French specialist of Arendt believes that: “this opposition between alienation in the common world and the authenticity of the self, constitutes in Arendt’s eyes, the central error of Heidegger. In fact, *Dasein*[Poizat; 2013:p. 217.] is marked by the experience of “disturbing strangeness”. He feels like he is not at home in the world, and he experiences anxiety about it. [...] In sort, Heidegger himself would have covered what made the novelty and the interest of his discovery, by obscuring the understanding of human existence as “being-in-the-world”. The negation of plurality could only lead him, ultimately, to a philosophy that was oblivious to both man and the word” [Heidegger; 1986].

In the meantime, it is plausible to understand that Arendt’s relation to Heidegger cannot be extrapolated excessively. As for their romance, apart from Heidegger’s marital status which makes their affair reprimandable, we don’t have to question sentimental impulse. For Arendt’s contribution to the dissemination of Heidegger’s work, one must avoid leaving the impression that she has aligned herself with her master’s anti-Semitism which would be a real scandal. In Arendt’s defense, we point out that she had not, contrary to those who crudely overwhelm her, read the *Cahiers noirs*. She would have had access to these texts that the deal would be different. Our plea is to rebel against our popular tendency to overwhelm Arendt with the abysmal depth of Heidegger’s Nazism monstrosity. Emmanuel Faye, known for his harsh criticism of certain aspect of Arendt’s thought, never overwhelmed nor judged her on the grounds of her romance with Heidegger. This is why he wrote that: “what distinguishes Arendt from Heidegger, which explains why our criticism does not focus with the same intensity on the work of both, is that it does proceed from the purifying and exterminating intentionality to which the writings left by the latter testify. We did not want to burden Arendt with the weight of an excessive criticism” [Faye, 2016: p. 536].

Likewise, from our point of view, it is important to avoid devoting Heidegger’s thought to gemonies, like Faye. While we must vigorously denounce the anti-Semitic and racist theses of the Nazi ideologist, we must at the same time avoid radically rejecting the thought of Heidegger which undoubtedly conceals an inexhaustible wealth. It is from this point of view unfair to say the least, to reduce such protean thinking to its sale collaboration with nazism. Do the apologetic theses of Plato and Aristotle on the subject of slavery or eugenics leads us to want fireworks of their works? The answer is certainly no.

It is in this perspective that we must understand the words of Jean-Luc Nancy according to which: “philosophy cannot be immune to the upheavals of time. The incessant controversies over the writings of the German author are never more than a desire to exorcise the filthy world of our world and to nestle us in political correctness [...]. We get away too well by rushing to throw these books into the fire: it is our entire story that is”[Nancy; 2017]. This is the same story we hear from the Italian philosopher Di Cesare, for her, to free oneself from Heidegger also mean getting rid of the landscape of modernity enlightened by lights; reassured by faith in progress, by unlimited confidence in progress” [Di Cesare 2016, p. 28]. Also, she recommends us, to consider that “the *Cahiers noirs* resemble the logbook of a castaway who crosses the night of the world: the distant light of a new beginning is its guide”[Di Cesare 2016, p. 24]

## V. CONCLUSION

At the start of this reflection, we were interested in the nature of the relationship between the major figures of philosophy, Arendt and Heidegger. Better than any other intellectual couple, these two products of the German philosophical tradition have crystallized so much attention on the grounds that their individual trajectories did not dispose them to be together. The force of things or the cunning of the history to use a metaphor from Hegel, ended up putting together contradictions in an unprecedented sentimental negativity. If the Heidegger-Arendt relationship shocked so much, it is less because of the master of Fribourg’s marital status than because of his anti-Semitic and racist view; which theses mainly attacked the community to which his lover belonged. Now, on this basis, should we see Arendt as a collaborator in her master’s Nazi project? Our conviction was unquestionably opposed to such a desing. Therefore, we must see things in their proper measure: Arendt contributed good soul/bad soul to the dissemination of the thoughts of her master; however, she is not responsible for the latter’s Nazi ideology. We must therefore avoid all intellectual extrapolation and all falsification and historical revisionism. Also, if we must denounce the prospect of exterminating the thought of the German rector, it must be admitted grounds that he was a Nazi ideologue. Our approach is therefore that of a call for balance and eclectism, since all thought has untenable aspects. That is why one cannot get rid of Heidegger’s thought cheaply. Donately Di Cesare had the clairvoyance to write that: “he who is a philosopher supports complexity and lives in the chiaroscuro of reflection”[Di Cesare 2016, p. 7]. Ultimately, in philosophy better than elsewhere, you have to know not to exaggerate.

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