

Heidegger's support for antisemitic measures as Rector of the University of Freiburg, 1933-1934¹

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Abstract

The relationship between Martin Heidegger and Jewish colleagues has long been controversial. Although Heidegger always denied being an antisemite, he also undertook significant action against Jews during his time as the rector at Freiburg University, promoting antisemitic policies such as the Aryanization of university staff and students and the destruction of Jewish authors' books. There were some exceptions to these policies, but even these exceptions did not completely go against the political will of the Nazi Party, thus showing Heidegger's ultimate support of the Nazi regime.

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Introduction

Martin Heidegger was one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century, but he was also a member of the Nazi Party between 1933 and 1945, the entire duration of Nazi rule.² Heidegger served as rector of the University of Freiburg between April 21st, 1933, and April 23rd, 1934, during the first year of the Nazi era. Evaluating Heidegger's relationship with Jews during his period as rector of the University of Freiburg is extremely important for two reasons. The first: the persecution of Jews was swift and immediate following the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933 with the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*, henceforth in this article known as GWB). The second: this was the moment when Heidegger was most active in politics. Although Heidegger would never again have such great political power (although he retained the ability to influence policies and measures as an *eminence grise*). It was, however, during his rectorate that Heidegger had administrative authority that directly affected Jews at the university.³

In April 1933, the academic senate of Freiburg elected Wilhelm von Möllendorf, a doctor and a member of the SPD, as rector of the university. However, Möllendorf "resigned" after a few days because of his unwillingness to cooperate with Nazi authorities and his refusal to implement antisemitic measures. Möllendorf refused to dismiss Jewish members of the university staff, to remove non-Aryan books from the library, and to allow the circulation of antisemitic propaganda throughout the university.⁴ In a 1966 interview, Heidegger reported that he was pressured by two previous rectors, Joseph Sauer and von Möllendorf himself, to take the rectorship for the sake of the university:

On the very day he was removed, von Möllendorf came to me and said: "Heidegger, now you must take over the rectorship," I said that I lacked experience in administration. The vice-rector at that time, Prof. Sauer (Theology), likewise urged me to become a candidate for the rectorship. For otherwise the danger would be that a party functionary would be named rector. The younger faculty, with whom I had been discussing the structure of the University for many years, besieged me to take over the rectorship. For a long time I hesitated. Finally I said that I was ready to take over the office in the interest of the University, but only if I could be certain of the unanimous agreement of the Plenum.⁵

However, this is far from the truth. Ott argues that Prof. Wolfgang Schadewaldt, a committed Nazi and a professor of Classics, proposed Heidegger as a new rector and planned the

² Rundiger Safranski, *Heidegger e il suo tempo* (Milan: Garzanti, 2008), 302-321.

³ By the 1930's, the University of Freiburg had become one of Germany's most prestigious universities (not to mention, one of its oldest). Prominent scholars of the time included Edmund Husserl, who was at the time the most important German philosopher.[#] Husserl was of course not the only prestigious academic in the humanities at Freiburg in the first half of the twentieth century, but Heidegger himself arrived at the university to serve as Husserl's assistant in 1928.[#] Another preeminent scholar in Freiburg during this time was Eugen Fink.[#] In addition, Edith Stein, one of the most important phenomenological philosophers, studied there for her PhD with Husserl as her advisor.[#] Freiburg's excellence was also not limited to the humanities. Freiburg also had a prestigious medical clinic and university hospital.[#] Among the illustrious members of the Faculty of Sciences were Georg von Hevesy and Hermann Staudinger, who both won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1943 and 1953, respectively.

⁴ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 141.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, 'Now Only a God Can Save Us: *Der Spiegel's* Interview (September 23, 1966)', *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen, trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo (London: Routledge, 2003), 25.

removal of von Möllendorf to facilitate the *Gleichschaltung* process.⁶ Moreover, Knowles reported that shortly before his election as rector, Heidegger was already in contact with the Nazi Ministry of Education and enjoyed its full confidence in pursuing all the policies that his predecessor refused.⁷ Therefore, Heidegger's defence is not true.

Many scholars, both in history and philosophy, would agree that Heidegger was pivotal in the implementation of antisemitic measures. For instance, Wolin, Knowles, Ott, Faye, and Farias⁸ have portrayed Heidegger as an extremist in politics or as the stereotypical Nazi bureaucrat who only sought to obey orders from above. However, there are a few dissenting views. Among Heidegger's defenders are Karl Moheling and Heidegger's son Hermann. Hermann Heidegger frequently tried to rehabilitate his father: as the editor of a volume about his father's life and actions, he underlined many times that Martin Heidegger tried to distance himself from the government and to keep some Jewish colleagues of his at the university.⁹ Similarly, Moheling presents Heidegger's rectorate as an act of opposition to Nazism.¹⁰ Moheling considers one sign of Heidegger's opposition to antisemitic policies to be his resistance to the publication of antisemitic posters.¹¹

This article will argue that as rector, Heidegger implemented Nazi policies at their very best and supported ideologically and culturally antisemitic policies via the "Against the Un-German Spirit" campaign, regarded as the natural continuation of the *GWB*.¹² Even when he attempted to protect some Jewish colleagues, Heidegger's position should not be interpreted as opposition to the antisemitic measures: he either sought to defend the university's prestige or to apply the exceptions provided by the *GWB*.

The Aryanization of the University under Heidegger

Heidegger implemented antisemitic policies at Freiburg University during his rectorate, despite his postwar claims that he became rector to prevent the politicization of the university.¹³ At his trial in 1945 and in *Der Spiegel*'s interview of 1966, he tried to present himself as an opponent of Nazism and its antisemitic policies. In fact, in the interview and his deposition, he claimed that he accepted the rectorate under pressure from his predecessor, von Möllendorf. This was to prevent a bureaucrat, as opposed to a scholar, from occupying the leading position in the university, which would destroy the university's independence.¹⁴ But it is the opposite which is true: Heidegger worked together with the Ministry of Baden to implement the *GWB* and other antisemitic policies aimed at limiting the presence of Jews at

⁶ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 143.

⁷ Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience', 183.

⁸ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 133-262; Adam Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience', *Probing the Limits of Categorization*, ed. Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 168-183; Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 36-37; Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 39-58; Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987), 79-177.

⁹ Hermann Heidegger, 'Preface', *The Review of Metaphysics* 38: 3 (March 1985), 468-469

¹⁰ Karl A. Moheling, 'Heidegger and the Nazis', *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1981), 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Guillaume Payen, *Martin Heidegger : Catholicisme, révolution, nazisme* (Paris, Éditions Perrin, 2016), 397.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, 'The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts', *The Review of Metaphysics* 38: 3 (March 1985), 483; Heidegger, 'Now Only a God Can Save Us', 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the university. Most importantly, the GWB aimed to expel all Jewish public servants from their roles, including university staff.¹⁵

Knowles suggests that Heidegger implemented the GWB with great enthusiasm and zeal,¹⁶ and there is material proof that this affirmation is correct. On April 28th, 1933, just a few days after his election, Heidegger sent a letter to all faculty deans, urging them to expel Jewish instructors from the university.¹⁷ He even failed to support Edmund Husserl, a close friend who had Jewish parents and had converted to Lutheranism. This episode indicates how much Heidegger was willing to sacrifice for the implementation of the new law; it had mainly been thanks to Husserl's recommendations that Heidegger had won a place at the University of Freiburg as a tenured professor.¹⁸ Additionally, Husserl's and Heidegger's families were close, almost inseparable before Hitler's rise to power.¹⁹ Despite this, Heidegger did not reciprocate in this moment of need. Husserl received his letter of dismissal on April 14th, 1933, and was bitterly disturbed by it, calling it "the greatest affront of my life."²⁰ However, Heidegger did not return the favour to his former mentor and confirmed the order of dismissal.²¹

Further episodes indicate that Heidegger desired the full implementation of the GWB. On June 7th, 1933, Heidegger sent to the minister of Baden a dossier on Prof. Liefmann, a Jewish member of the Freiburg Law School.²² The dossier included the results of three examinations commission on Prof. Liefmann's war wounds.²³ Although not explicitly specified, the purpose was clearly to demonstrate Liefmann's eligibility to remain at Freiburg University as a former frontline soldier, based on the *Frontkämpferprivileg* (section 2 of article 3 of the GWB).²⁴ Commissioning not just one but three exams suggests that Heidegger was extremely scrupulous in granting one of the few GWB exceptions and wanted to implement it at its very best. Additionally, this episode proves that Heidegger was in close contact with the minister, with whom he had to work for the application of the GWB.

Overall, Heidegger supported the Aryanization of the university and filled the gaps left by dismissed Jewish staff with Aryan professors. The GWB applied "if only one parent or grandparent is of non-Aryan descent,"²⁵ but Heidegger's half-Jewish assistant, Dr. Werner Brock, remained until August 1933 to "rearrange the seminar library."²⁶ Heidegger did not protest his ultimate dismissal.²⁷ On March 18th, 1934, Heidegger simply communicated to the Minister of Culture and Education of Baden that Brock, his former student, had been

¹⁵ 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, 7th April 1933', *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, ed. Roderick Stackelberg and Sally A. Winkler (London, Routledge 2002), 150-151.

¹⁶ Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's Nazi Conscience', 179.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁸ Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 25.

¹⁹ Yvonne Sherratt, *Hitler's Philosophers* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2013), 75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's', 168.

²² Martin Heidegger, 'Richiesta di benevolo esame per il Prof. Liefmann', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del cammino di una vita*, 114.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ 'Law', 151.

²⁵ 'First Regulation for Administration of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, 11 April 1933', *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook*, 151-152.

²⁶ Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's', 188.

²⁷ Faye, *Heidegger*, 43.

replaced as his assistant by Dr. Brocker, a non-Jewish philosopher,²⁸ and to whom he granted a status equal to the ordinary assistant.²⁹ Hence, it can be argued that Heidegger was working towards the overall Aryanization of the university staff, just as the Nazis programmed. Indeed, the Ministry of Baden was satisfied by Heidegger's actions in the process of Aryanization, deeming them "exemplary."³⁰ Additionally, Brocker was nominated as Heidegger's new assistant because he showed "camaraderie and spiritual superiority,"³¹ meaning that Brocker was a committed Nazi. This promotion furthered GWB objectives to build a new class of civil servants aligned with Nazi ideology.³²

Heidegger's support of the GWB was so strong that he was willing to sidestep faculty members and ignore all complaints about the feasibility of the policy. Some faculty deans requested more explanations on how to classify those who (after 1935 with the passage of the Nuremberg Laws) be considered *Mischlinge*, or Jews who had converted to Christianity.³³ Others were not ready to fire the most skilled technicians in their laboratory or the best paediatricians in the clinic.³⁴ However, Heidegger did not respond to these complaints and ordered the full implementation of the GWB with a letter to all faculty deans on April 28th, 1933.³⁵ Heidegger's order for the full dismissal of all Jewish university staff members, even if this went against more practical concerns, demonstrates his enthusiastic support of this measure and strong adherence to the principles of duty as rector.

Heidegger persecuted not only Jewish staff members but Jewish students as well, supporting the implementation of the Law for the Overcrowding of Schools and Universities issued on April 25th, 1933. On May 3rd, Heidegger wrote to faculty deans that Jewish students could make up a maximum of only 1.5% of the new class of students and 5% of returning students.³⁶ Heidegger's implementation of the Law against Overcrowding immediately after the GWB follows the logic of "cumulative radicalization" typical of the Nazi regime.³⁷ This policy drastically reduced the number of Jewish students at Freiburg, meaning that the university was even more Aryanized.

Moreover, on May 6th, 1933, Heidegger sent faculty deans a circular from Minister Eugen Fehrle: following an order by the Ministry of Education of Baden, scholarships would not be available to Marxists or Jews, while members of the SA and SS would receive priority.³⁸ In an article in the *Freiburger Studentenzeitung*, Heidegger stated further that the scholarship ban applied to any student who was not pure Aryan (including half-Jews), with the only exception being "students of non-Aryan stock who themselves fought on the front line or whose fathers died during the First World War."³⁹ This policy exceeded what was originally

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, 'Equiparazione agli assistenti ordinari', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 248.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Adam Knowles, *Martin Heidegger's Fascist Affinities: A Politics of Silence* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019), 5.

³¹ Heidegger, 'Equiparazione', 248.

³² Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (London: W&N, 2007), 27.

³³ Knowles, 'Martin Heidegger's', 173.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Guillaume Payen, *Martin Heidegger's Changing Destinies: Catholicism, Revolution, Nazism* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2023), 344.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 345.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 344.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

demanding by the minister⁴⁰ and is thus another example of the value Heidegger placed on racist policy.⁴¹ Heidegger was fully complicit in the cumulative radicalization of antisemitic policies coming from above.

In a 1929 letter to Victor Schworer, Heidegger declared that “the Judaization of Germany’s spiritual life must be stopped”⁴² and that a restoration of the German spirit could be achieved with “indigenous forces and educators.”⁴³ With all these actions, Heidegger was trying to accomplish goals that he had already made clear. This letter reinforces that Heidegger’s support for the GWB was not only dictated by political opportunism, nor was it a simple, isolated event in his life. Instead, it supported a project that he had deeply desired for a very long time. For this reason, it is impossible to think of Heidegger’s actions as a “compromise” or casual mistakes, as he defined them in his interview with *Der Spiegel*.⁴⁴ These actions were intentional.

Heidegger willingly supported the new measures included in the GWB and the Law Against Overcrowding of Public Schools. For this reason, Heidegger was a crucial element in building a politicized university, just as the Nazis intended. Indeed, the very scope of the expulsion of Jewish teachers and students was a form of Nazification of the university. The objective of the GWB was to build a university that expelled all politically unreliable civil servants and kept only Aryans.⁴⁵ In substance, Heidegger did not behave any differently from the other Nazi rectors who actively persecuted Jews and acted as “race experts.”⁴⁶ As rector, he obeyed orders from the ministry and sometimes radicalized them even further. For this reason, Karl Moehling’s thesis that Heidegger’s rectorate should be read as an act of resistance to Nazism and its programme is false.⁴⁷

The ideological antisemitic policies: Against the Un-German Spirit

Even before Heidegger was elected rector, the Ministry of Baden put pressure on von Möllendorf to implement cultural policies aimed at expelling Jewish and un-German influence from the university. Among these were the publication of the “Twelve Theses against the Un-German Spirit” and the exclusion of books by non-Aryan authors from the library.⁴⁸ It is important to highlight Heidegger’s role in these policies, not merely because Heidegger’s predecessor refused to implement them.⁴⁹ Book burnings were normally seen as the natural continuation of previous policies like the GWB.⁵⁰ Indeed, if the GWB restored public offices, book burnings were thought of by the Nazis as a restoration of culture.⁵¹ Cultural control had always been in the Nazi’s plans, and they had long advocated for a

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Martin Heidegger, ‘The Jewish Contamination of German Spiritual Life: Letter to Victor Schworer (1929)’, *Martin Heidegger: Philosophical and Political Writings*, trans and ed. Manfred Stassen (London: Continuum, 2003), 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Heidegger, ‘Now only a god’, 28.

⁴⁵ Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 27.

⁴⁶ Bela Bodo, ‘The Role of Antisemitism in the Expulsion of non-Aryan students’, *Yad Vashem Studies*, 30 (2002), 228.

⁴⁷ Moheling, ‘Heidegger and the Nazis’, 31-43.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, ‘Now only a god’, 25; Heidegger, ‘The Rectorate’, 491-492.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Payen, *Martin Heidegger’s Changing Destinies*, 353.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

German press that excluded any Jewish influence.⁵² The 24th section of the Nazi Party programme stated explicitly that “the Party fights the Judeo-Materialistic spirit.”⁵³ At universities, the destruction of “un-German” books naturally followed the expulsion of non-Aryan teachers.⁵⁴ The overall aim was to create a university environment in which there could be no corruption of young minds.⁵⁵

Heidegger said in his interview with *Der Spiegel* and a brief titled “The Rectorate” that he forbade the publication of an antisemitic poster called “Against the Un-German Spirit,” implying that he was hostile to the campaign from the very beginning.⁵⁶ These posters identified measures that had to be taken to preserve the German language and culture from Jewish contamination.⁵⁷ Joseph Goebbels himself ordered this type of placard to be published in German universities.⁵⁸ Freiburg’s previous rector, von Möllendorf, was hostile to the publication of these posters.⁵⁹ This point is particularly dear to Heidegger’s defenders like Moheling and Hermann Heidegger, who found evidence of Heidegger’s disagreement with Nazi racial policies in this incident.⁶⁰ Heidegger described the episode as follows:

On the second day after I had assumed office, the "student leader" with two companions visited me as Rector and demanded again the posting of the Jewish proclamation. I declined. The three students left remarking that the prohibition would be reported to the National Student Leadership. After a few days, a telephone call came from the Office of Higher Education [SA Hochschulamt], in the highest SA echelons, from the SA Leader Dr. Baumann. He demanded the posting of the so-called proclamation since it had already been posted in other universities. If I refused I would have to reckon with removal, if not, indeed, with the closing of the University. I attempted to win the support of the Badish Minister of Culture for my prohibition. The latter explained that he could do nothing in opposition to the SA. Nevertheless, I did not retract my prohibition.⁶¹

This account was thought to be true even by scholars who have taken an extremely critical stance against Heidegger, like Ott, Rockmore and Safranski.⁶²

Nonetheless, there is material evidence that this prohibition may not have occurred, suggesting that in fact, Heidegger supported this piece of antisemitic policy. Krebs reports in his autobiography that these posters were distributed all over Freiburg and even published in the *Freiburger Studentenzeitung*, a student newspaper, on May 2, 1933.⁶³ Although Heidegger had not yet given his inaugural speech (“The Self-Affirmation of the German University,” read on the 27th of May), he was already in charge and had the power to prohibit

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, ‘Now only a god’, 25-26; Krebs, *Reminiscences*, 70.

⁵⁷ Krebs, *Reminiscences*, 68-69.

⁵⁸ Hermann Heidegger, ‘Preface’, 469.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, ‘Now only a god’, 25.

⁶⁰ Moheling, ‘Heidegger and the Nazis’, 35; Hermann Heidegger, ‘Preface’, 468-469.

⁶¹ Heidegger, ‘Now only a god’, 26; Heidegger, ‘The Rectorate’, 491-492.

⁶² Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 188; Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism*, 78, 98, 112; Safranski, *Heidegger*, 310.

⁶³ Hans Krebs, *Reminiscences and Reflections* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 72 [N.B. Krebs reports the “Twelve Theses” fully in his autobiography, adding that “[m]uch of the fanatic, mystic, weird, and hysterical quality of the German text is softened by translation”].

the publication altogether. Krebs, a credible witness since he was present at Freiburg at the time this happened, put blame especially on Heidegger, saying that contrary to his predecessor, Heidegger approved the publication of the posters.⁶⁴ This evidence suggests that Heidegger lied in his *Der Spiegel* interview about his resistance to antisemitic initiatives. This episode reveals one of the most important mistakes made by those defending Heidegger's position, such as his son or Moheling. Both had simply accepted as fact that Heidegger prohibited the publication of the anti-Jewish decrees or the book burning at the university, without analysing whether this claim was true.⁶⁵

There is also evidence that Heidegger supported the destruction of non-Aryan books. In his *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger argued that his resistance to Nazi racial policies can also be found in his prohibition of the book burning in front of the university's main building.⁶⁶ These book burnings were scheduled to take place on May 10th 1933 across Germany as the culmination of the campaign "Against the Un-German Spirit".⁶⁷ Hermann Heidegger mentioned this point as a sign that his father always tried to distance himself from the Nazi regime, using his power as rector to counter this policy.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, there is material proof that this supposed prohibition by Heidegger never took place: Italian philosopher Ernesto Grassi and other eyewitnesses saw a book burning in Freiburg on May 10, in front of the university library.⁶⁹

Moreover, Heidegger supported the eradication of liberalism at the university, which was seen as a Jewish disease. Thesis 10 of the 'Jew Notice' called for "the determination and ability to overcome Jewish intellectualism and the threat it contains: the decay of the spirit of the German people through liberalism."⁷⁰ When writing to the University of Munich about the Jewish philosopher Hönigswald, Heidegger highlighted Hönigswald's liberalism as a threat leading inevitably "to a generic logic and mundane conscience."⁷¹ This decadent "mundane conscience" is in sharp contrast with the "German spiritual life."⁷² Heidegger also claims that Hönigswald's liberalism "deviates the attention from man in his historical rooting and the popular tradition of his origin in blood and soil."⁷³ This was not the only time that Heidegger wrote something like this. In his Black Notebooks, Heidegger defines the Jew as someone incapable of having a relationship with the soil.⁷⁴ Heidegger further strengthens his attack against Hönigswald's philosophy, saying it is "insidious" and "has already deceived and deviated many young people."⁷⁵ An emphasis on deception is also found in Thesis 5 of the poster "Against the Un-German Spirit": if a Jew "writes in German, he lies."⁷⁶ Hence, it can be argued that Heidegger was trying to defend the university from the liberal corruption that the Nazis despised so much in a battle against the un-German spirit. Indeed, the main

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Moheling, 'Heidegger and the Nazis', 35; Hermann Heidegger 'Preface', 468-469.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, 'Now only a god', 29.

⁶⁷ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 189.

⁶⁸ Hermann Heidegger, 'Preface', 468.

⁶⁹ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 189.

⁷⁰ Krebs, *Reminiscences*, 69.

⁷¹ Heidegger, 'Hönigswald', 248.

⁷² Heidegger, 'The Jewish contamination', 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Donatella Di Cesare, *Heidegger e gli ebrei: I "Quaderni Neri"* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2014), 171-172.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Krebs, *Reminiscences*, 69.

concern of Heidegger was not allowing Hönigswald to corrupt young people.⁷⁷ The expulsion of Hönigswald then was also part of a Nazi cultural policy.

Heidegger expressed similar thoughts even in private, thus demonstrating his commitment to the cause and that he did not support this campaign out of mere political opportunism. Further evidence of Heidegger's deep support for this kind of policy can be found in his letter to Schworer, in which he expressed concern about tutelage of the "German spiritual life"⁷⁸ and stopping its growing Judaization "in a larger and a narrower sense."⁷⁹ The destruction of Jewish works was a way to stop the process of Judaization.

In sum, Heidegger's claims that he resisted antisemitic cultural policies are false. Instead, it seems that Heidegger supported them, thus deepening his commitment to National Socialism and antisemitism. Arguably, Heidegger supported almost the epuration of Jewish influence at the university. This means that the historian should be very sceptical when treating Heidegger's *Der Spiegel* interview and his brief "The Rectorate: Facts and Thoughts" as reliable sources when it comes to the implementation of antisemitic policies at Freiburg University.

The Exceptions to the Policies: What value do they have?

The evidence here reported proves that Heidegger was a useful instrument in the hands of the Nazis and implemented antisemitic policies. Nonetheless, on some occasions, Heidegger resisted some antisemitic measures: these episodes are important pieces of his defence of his actions as rector in his interview with *Der Spiegel*. There were cases in which Heidegger attempted to retain some Jewish staff members at the university.

In his interview with *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger strongly emphasized that he tried to resist the firing of Professor George von Hevesy.⁸⁰ There is proof that Heidegger tried to keep him at Freiburg, and Hermann Heidegger used this episode as evidence that his father was not a committed Nazi.⁸¹ Indeed, on July 12, 1933, Heidegger wrote to the Minister of Culture of Baden that dismissing von Hevesy from his role would be detrimental to the international reputation of the university.⁸² Nonetheless, this should not be seen as a defence of Jews at the university, but rather as a defence of the prestige of the university. A close reading of the letter reveals that Heidegger was much more concerned with avoiding the possible decline of the international reputation of the university. Heidegger writes that "a permanent dismissal would cause the German Science and particularly to our University near the border [with France] a great damage that may not be repaired in the long run."⁸³ Heidegger also states that he is writing this letter "with full consciousness of the necessary and indispensable actuation of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service,"⁸⁴ meaning that he did not think of his action as an act of rebellion. Additionally, it must be mentioned that von Hevesy had recently won a considerable amount of money from the Rockefeller Foundation, which

⁷⁷ Payen, *Martin Heidegger's Changing*, 356.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Heidegger, 'The Jewish Contamination', 1.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, 'Now only a god', 31.

⁸¹ Hermann Heidegger, 'Preface', 468.

⁸² Martin Heidegger, 'Parere sul congedo von Hevesy e Frankel', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 132-133.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

he was going to use to fully renovate the Department of Physical Chemistry at Freiburg.⁸⁵ Losing von Hevesy would have meant losing the money.

The fact that Heidegger was more concerned with defending the prestige of the university rather than von Hevesy as an individual is proven if we compare his case that of Hans Krebs, a fellow chemist who was dismissed. Von Hevesy had already made extremely important contributions to the literature in radiochemistry. He had discovered the element of hafnium in 1922 and was an authority in his field by 1933.⁸⁶ Additionally, it was at Freiburg that von Hevesy had begun his research on the isotopes that would win him the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1943.⁸⁷ In contrast, Krebs was still quite young and not internationally recognized. By December 1932, he was only admitted as a *Privatdozent* of Internal Medicine.⁸⁸ Krebs had done important work on the cycle of urea synthesis, but this was the only important discovery he had made so far.⁸⁹ He would not discover the Citric Acid Cycle (today is known as the Krebs' cycle) until 1937, four years after his dismissal from Freiburg.⁹⁰ For this research, Krebs received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1953.⁹¹ It seems that Heidegger tried to keep at Freiburg only people who were famous, while he did not care much for the unknown. Hence, it is impossible to think of Heidegger's actions as a defence of the Jews, as he presented them in his interview with *Der Spiegel*.⁹²

It is also worth noting that the exceptions to the GWB, namely those listed in section 2 of article 3, were overall quite vague and left a lot of room for interpretation on the part of the rector.⁹³ Heidegger displayed this on July 17, 1933, when he tried to retain Eduard Frankel, a classical scholar. Heidegger again made it clear that his main concern was maintaining the international reputation of the university. Indeed, Heidegger wrote to the minister that Frankel was an excellent scholar and considered "among the best of German science on the antiquity in Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, England and the United States." He remarks that the University's reputation would be tarnished if Frankel were fired.⁹⁴ Heidegger opens the letter by claiming that Frankel's name does not appear in the list of those who fought at the front because of an ailment in his left arm and hand.⁹⁵ Heidegger tried instead to keep Frankel based on his service at the Thesaurus Linguae of Munich.⁹⁶ In this case, Heidegger is trying to apply article 3, section 2 of the GWB, which protected non-Aryan civil servants who had been in charge before 1914 from dismissal.⁹⁷ This means that Heidegger's request should not be seen as an action against the law; it was instead an attempt to apply the law fully.

⁸⁵ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 207.

⁸⁶ John D. Cockfort, 'George de Hevesy 1885-1966', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, 13: 13 (November 1967), 137.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

⁸⁸ Krebs, *Reminiscences*, 50.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-60.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-118.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 165-179.

⁹² Heidegger, 'Now only a god', 31.

⁹³ Ott, *Heidegger*, 207-208.

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'Parere sul Professor dr. Eduard Frankel', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2005), 136.

⁹⁵ 'Law', 151.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137; 'Law', 151.

However, the ministry believed Heidegger's justifications were insufficient, so Frankel was dismissed and moved to Oxford.⁹⁸ Despite this rejection, Heidegger did not resign in protest, nor did he pressure the government to withdraw its decision—he simply obeyed.⁹⁹ Frankel's failed defence reveals the difference between Heidegger and his predecessor, Professor von Möllendorf. When von Möllendorf was urged to dismiss the Jewish members of staff by the minister, he simply refused and resigned in protest; Heidegger did not show any sign of protest or disapproval for Frankel's dismissal and continued his position as rector until April 1934. This characterizes Heidegger as an obedient Nazi worker, who faithfully submitted to the minister. Nonetheless, these actions also demonstrate, as Payen argued, that Heidegger's support for the GWB was not absolute. The cases of von Hevesy and Frankel show that whenever antisemitic policies clashed with the university's prestige, they would be less welcome.¹⁰⁰

Heidegger tried to keep some Jewish professors at Freiburg by appealing to the GWB's two exceptions. For example, Heidegger defended his colleague Prof. Fritz Pringsheim, a jurist, from dismissal. Pringsheim had been a frontline soldier during the First World War and was very proud of his military service.¹⁰¹ For this reason, he could remain at Freiburg under section 2 of Article 3 of the GWB.¹⁰² Heidegger sent Pringsheim's certificate of war to the Ministry of Karlsruhe and told him that he did not have to fear for his position.¹⁰³ Here we have an example of Heidegger using his position as an intermediary between the university and the ministry to allow a Jewish professor to stay. Hermann Heidegger reported that his father confessed he wanted Pringsheim to stay at Freiburg. Heidegger's request was granted.¹⁰⁴ The ministry allowed Pringsheim to stay until 1935, when he was dismissed because of the Nuremberg Laws.¹⁰⁵ Heidegger was not responsible for this final dismissal because he had resigned in 1934, one year before the Nuremberg Laws came into effect. Nonetheless, this episode should not be read as an act of opposition to Nazi racial policies. Indeed, the strategy employed in Pringsheim's case was a mere application of a comma of the law (paragraph 2). Hence, much more than a "protection," Heidegger's actions constituted a full application of the law.

Heidegger also points out in the *Der Spiegel* interview that he defended Prof. Siegfried Joseph Thannhauser, a Jewish professor of internal medicine.¹⁰⁶ Thannhauser should have been dismissed from the university, but Heidegger claims that in a meeting, he persuaded the Minister of Baden to retain Thannhauser at Freiburg.¹⁰⁷ Hermann Heidegger used the defence of Thannhauser several times to show that his father was not a full-blooded Nazi.¹⁰⁸ However, it must be noted that Thannhauser had been a front-line soldier in the First World War, so he

⁹⁸ Hermann Heidegger 'Notes to "Parere sul Professor dr. Eduard Frankel"', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2005), 701.

⁹⁹ Ott, *Martin Heidegger*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Payen, *Martin Heidegger's Changing Destinies*, 344.

¹⁰¹ Tony Honoré, 'Fritz Pringsheim (1882-1967)', *Jurists uprooted: German-speaking Lawyers Émigré in Twentieth-Century Britain*, ed. Jack Beatson and Reinhard Zimmermann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210-211.

¹⁰² 'Law', 151.

¹⁰³ Martin Heidegger, 'Chiaro segnale per Karlsruhe', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 257.

¹⁰⁴ Hermann Heidegger, 'Notes to "Chiaro segnale per Karlsruhe"', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 701.

¹⁰⁵ Hermann Heidegger, 'Notes to "Chiaro segnale per Karlsruhe"', 144; Honoré, 'Fritz Pringsheim', 218.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, 'Now only a god', 31.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism*, 78; Hermann Heidegger, 'Introduction', 468.

was exempt from dismissal under section 2 of the same law.¹⁰⁹ Thus, this should again not be seen as an opposition to the GWB.

The two examples of Pringsheim and Thannhauser disprove Farias' argument that Heidegger was an extremist who persecuted Jewish teachers protected by the law.¹¹⁰ Heidegger applied the GWB fully, including its three exceptions. Of course, this does not mean that Heidegger was less guilty of having executed antisemitic laws. Instead, it indicates that he always operated within the legal frameworks the Nazis gave him, without excessive or fanatic persecution as Farias argued.

Another means by which Heidegger tried to avoid antisemitic legislation was recommending his former Jewish students for positions abroad. This point was often remarked on by those who wanted to minimize the extent of Heidegger's support for antisemitic policies. For example, Karl Jaspers reported to the Freiburg Denazification Committee that Heidegger's support of some of his former Jewish students abroad mitigated his support for Nazi racial policies.¹¹¹ For example, historian of philosophy Paul Kristeller lost his job at Freiburg because of the Civil Service Law.¹¹² Heidegger recommended him for a position at the University of Basel in Switzerland. The case of Kristeller is rather peculiar, since a petition to the minister for his maintenance at the University of Freiburg would have been impossible under the GWB. Kristeller was born in 1905 to a Jewish family and did not serve as a frontline soldier, nor was he employed in the civil service before 1914.¹¹³ In addition, Kristeller had completed his Ph.D. only in 1928 and did not have the same international reputation as von Hevesy or Frankel.¹¹⁴ He was too young to be renowned in academia. For these reasons, Heidegger tried to sustain his former student by recommending him to Prof. Haberlin at Basel for a position there. In his letter, dated 30th April 1933, Heidegger praises Kristeller's work and highlights his influential works on Ficino and Renaissance philosophy.¹¹⁵ Also, it is interesting to note that Heidegger opens this letter by saying, "Kristeller asked me to write to you."¹¹⁶ This line is important because it shows that in some cases, Heidegger still kept in contact with and replied to some of his Jewish students and was willing to help them.

A case analogous to Kristeller's was that of Dr. Werner Brock, another of Heidegger's Jewish students whom he also recommended to Prof. Haberlin at the University of Basel. On 11 August 1933, Heidegger wrote a letter stating that Brock was an excellent scholar and deserved absolute precedence before every candidate for the habilitation (second Ph.D.).¹¹⁷ Heidegger writes that "if an oral declaration from me is necessary, I will be available to come to Basel in September."¹¹⁸ Heidegger cared about Brock's well-being to a great extent and demonstrated this with the great support that he offered him. Hermann Heidegger also

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, 'Siegfried'.

¹¹⁰ Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, 161.

¹¹¹ Karl Jaspers, 'Letter to the Freiburg University Denazification Committee, December 22nd, 1945', in Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 148.

¹¹² Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'A Life of Learning', *ACLS Occasional Paper* 12 (April 1990), 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, 'Raccomandazione per il dr Kristeller', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 82.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, 'Il dr. Brock medita di cambiare abilitazione', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze del Cammino di una Vita*, 144.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

reported that in 1934, thanks to Heidegger's help, Brock obtained a scholarship to Cambridge.¹¹⁹

Philosopher Karl Lowith, one of Heidegger's philosophy students in Marburg, is a further case that is very similar to those of Kristeller and Brock.¹²⁰ Heidegger supported him and advised him when he emigrated to Italy after the GWB came into effect and he was dismissed from the University of Marburg.¹²¹

Overall, the cases of Brock, Kristeller and Lowith suggest that while Heidegger's support for antisemitic measures was strong within Germany, he was still well-disposed towards his former students abroad. However, it is important to note that these actions were not taken against the Nazi government. In fact, by recommending Jewish students abroad, Heidegger did not violate any piece of antisemitic legislation and fully respected the goal of the Aryanization of the German university. As already mentioned, Brock was replaced by Brocker, an Aryan philosopher.¹²²

Heidegger was, however, less supportive of other antisemitic cultural policies on some occasions. For example, the seventh thesis of the 'Twelve Theses,' which Heidegger (falsely) claimed he had banned across Freiburg, prescribed that works by Jewish authors should appear in Hebrew and, if in German, should be labelled as translations.¹²³ Heidegger did not comply with this rule, arguing that it was too extreme and that "everyone is making a fool of himself as best as he can."¹²⁴ However, this singular act of defiance does not negate the overall support Heidegger gave to the battle "against the un-German spirit" required of him by the party. The significance of this episode is thus questionable.

In summary, some antisemitic policies related to the university were not well-received by Heidegger. Indeed, Heidegger did try to keep some Jewish members of staff at the University of Freiburg, although this action should not be interpreted as a defence of the Jews as Moheling or Hermann Heidegger claim. Indeed, these actions were either a defence of the prestige of the university or a thorough application of the GWB. The image of Heidegger that emerges is not a fanatic as Faye¹²⁵ tries to argue, but neither is it a great defender of the Jews as Hermann Heidegger suggests. Instead, Heidegger was much more likely a cold executor of orders from above when it came to applying exceptions of the Civil Service Law, and a calculator when it came to defending the prestige of the university. This means that Heidegger never really tried to do much against such antisemitic policies.

Conclusion

In summary, evidence shows that Heidegger, in his capacity as rector, did participate in the persecution of the Jews via the implementation of antisemitic regulations at the University of Freiburg. He duly obeyed the minister when it came to implementing the Law for the

¹¹⁹ Hermann Heidegger, 'Notes to "Il dr. Brock medita di cambiare abilitazione"', *Discorsi ed altre testimonianze*, 144.

¹²⁰ Karl Lowith, *My Life in Germany before and after 1933: A report*, trans. Elizabeth King (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 45-47.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹²² Heidegger, 'Equiparazione', 251.

¹²³ Payen, *Martin Heidegger's Changing Destiny*, 354.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Faye, *Heidegger*, 151-173.

Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. Additionally, he adhered to other antisemitic policies such as the Law against Overcrowding of Schools and Universities and the campaign against the un-German spirit. In other words, Heidegger supported both the physical expulsion of the Jews and the attempted erasure of their intellectual work. Moreover, in cases where he defended a colleague against dismissal, he never went against the rules of the Civil Service Law and duly submitted to the will of the Ministry of Baden. Considering these factors, it is very difficult to excuse Heidegger from the charges of having participated in the Nazi government. His defence in the *Der Spiegel* interview and in “The Rectorate” is far from reality. Hence, there is no way in which Heidegger can be redeemed or excused, as some scholars, such as Moheling and Heidegger’s son Hermann, have tried to do.

Heidegger was indeed an obedient Nazi. It is not possible to think of Heidegger as ‘neither an uncritical fellow traveller nor an active party member,’ as his son Hermann described him.¹²⁶ Instead, as Knowles argues, Heidegger was an active perpetrator.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the extremist painting of Heidegger given by Faye is not correct. Indeed, there were some cases in which Heidegger preferred to defend the university’s prestige rather than following the minister’s requests immediately. For this reason, the stances taken by Faye and Knowles are too extreme. The scholar closest to the truth is Wolin, who argues that while it is undeniable that Heidegger was a Nazi, this does not mean he was a “dyed-in-the-wool Nazi.”¹²⁸ Indeed, there were occasions on which his fanaticism did not comply with the Nazis’ demands, like in the cases of Kristeller and Brock. Nevertheless, there are no signs that Heidegger opposed antisemitic policies. Moreover, the evidence found in private letters and the Black Notebooks suggests that Heidegger was deeply convinced that what he was doing was right. This makes it impossible to think of Heidegger as anything but antisemite, and a supporter of Nazi racial policies.

But what type of guilt does Heidegger incur for his implementation of these policies? It may be possible to recur to Karl Jaspers’ fourfold understanding of German guilt. Jaspers explains that criminal guilt arises when someone breaks a particular law.¹²⁹ In this case, Heidegger is not culpable since he did not technically break any law.¹³⁰ Then there is political guilt: “This, involving the deeds of statesmen and the citizenry of a state, results in my having to bear the consequences of the deeds of the state whose power governs me and under whose order I live. Everybody is co-responsible for the way he is governed.”¹³¹ Heidegger is guilty of having voluntarily submitted to Nazism and its delirious racial policies.¹³² Moreover, there is moral guilt, which Jaspers describes as follows: “I, who cannot act otherwise than as an individual, am morally responsible for all my deeds, including the execution of political and military orders. It is never simply true that ‘orders are orders.’”¹³³ Heidegger was responsible for a type of moral guilt from his actions as rector, his persecution of the Jews, and his despicable behaviour toward many such as Husserl.¹³⁴ Most importantly, there is metaphysical guilt, about which Jaspers states, “There exists a solidarity among men as human beings that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the

¹²⁶ Hermann Heidegger, ‘Introduction’, 468-469.

¹²⁷ Knowles, ‘Martin Heidegger’s Nazi Conscience’, 183.

¹²⁸ Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 180.

¹²⁹ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 25.

¹³⁰ Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism*, 295.

¹³¹ Jaspers, *The Question*, 25.

¹³² Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism*, 295.

¹³³ Jaspers, *The Question*, 25-26.

¹³⁴ Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism*, 295.

world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can to prevent them, I too am guilty.”¹³⁵ Both Heidegger and his defenders who excuse or deny his affiliation to Nazism must accept that they have metaphysical guilt, since if someone endorses a movement like Nazism, he necessarily preaches the superiority of one “race” over all others.¹³⁶

In summary, there is enough evidence to prove that Heidegger was an active supporter of Nazism as rector of Freiburg University. Heidegger did not try to oppose antisemitic policies and in fact supported them vigorously. Thus, he was a committed Nazi and a persecutor of the Jews in his capacity as rector.

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¹³⁵ Jaspers. *The Question*, 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

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