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## Sunrises and bloody sunsets

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Russell makes interesting connections between Nietzsche's thought and psychoanalysis, particularly Winnicott and, in a beautiful *tour de force* in the final chapter, Lacan. Both Winnicott and Nietzsche valued *play* as a 'kind of doing that is not distinct from being, a kind of doing that being is' (p. 105). As for Lacan, though he never drew on Nietzsche, he would have certainly appreciated (and said something effectively close to it) Nietzsche's astonishing idea of the *self as neurosis* (Bazzano, forthcoming).

Conspicuously absent from the book is Otto Rank, who not only parted company with Freudianism in the 1920s because, despite 'call[ing] itself a psychology of the *unconscious*', it promoted in his view 'the scientific glorification of consciousness' (Rank, 1932, p. 222); not only did he exert a pivotal influence on Carl Rogers (Kramer, 1995), thus creating a link between post-Freudian and humanistic therapy; Rank was also the last century's most coherent Nietzschean psychologist. His emphasis on the creative will of the individual; his understanding of incongruence and mental distress as a failure in creativity; his focusing on the client and on the client's ability to self-direct her creativity towards a more meaningful, individuated existence are only a few examples of Nietzsche's influence and of the correct application of his insights.

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## Sunrises and bloody sunsets

**The banality of Heidegger**, by Jean Luc Nancy, translated with an introduction by Jeff Fort, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, 96 pp., £21.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0823275939. Reviewed by Manu Bazzano

This formidable little book is a tightly argued response to the publication, still ongoing, of Heidegger's sprawling *Black Notebooks*. In them, the German thinker puts to good use his incantatory jargon to add metaphysical clout to one of the vilest prejudices in history: anti-Semitism. He wrote of *Weltjudentum* (world Jewry), the notion of a 'Jewish World Conspiracy', and in concocting the image of a global network of uprooted, unpatriotic and scheming Jews, he unwittingly followed the advice of another renowned anti-Semite, T.S. Eliot, who advised poets to steal rather than borrow. Heidegger was no poet, though in his late, sibylline pronouncements

fancied himself as a pre-Socratic dreaming under an olive tree of a bucolic *Dasein* unharmed by the evils of science and socialism.

What the book unmasks is the embarrassing fact that Heidegger took this 'most banal, vulgar, trivial, and nasty discourse that had long been scattered across Europe' from a 'miserable publication, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*' (p. 23).

Nancy's merit is to have found an argument that is all the more devastating as it is measured. It does not simply condemn Heidegger but investigates the reasons for the condemnation; it is unsettling because in the process it indicts the history of the West and of Christianity in particular. Heidegger was one of the most sophisticated intellectuals of twentieth-century Europe; his anti-Semitism is not shouty, incoherent, or (as apologists are keen to say) limited to a handful of ill-conceived statements. It is deeply philosophical; it permeates his thought; it is an incisive statement about world history. It is also utterly banal. Its banality evokes that perceived by Hannah Arendt (2006) in Eichmann during his trial in Jerusalem, an observation that continues to be misinterpreted to this day as indifference to evil. But it was not indifference; it was instead, as Nancy writes, 'an attempt to indicate ... the extent to which it had been possible for judgements and practices that converged in the extermination of some five million people to be made into a banality' (pp. 1–2).

Eichmann's defence strategy had focused on describing the huge order-execution machine of the concentration camp he presided over in utterly normalized terms that made them sound banal and did not question the deeper motives behind those orders. Despite the righteous indignations Arendt's remarks have provoked, the painstaking work of historians and analysts of the last 50 years confirmed she was dead right.

Eichmann dutifully followed orders; he then went home for dinner with the wife and kids. Heidegger followed the ignorant and prejudiced *doxa* of anti-Semitism of the 1920s and 1930s and turned it into a philosophy. But what kind of philosophy? The first task of any philosophy worth its salt is to think critically. Heidegger's failure here is not only moral, social and political. It is a philosophical failure. He proved incapable of applying vigilance and critical faculty to a vulgar and murderous thought that the majority of people in the early years of the twentieth century fell for. He sheepishly followed the abject thinking of *das Man*, the 'they' whose mediocrity he had so lucidly decried in his works.

Most philosophers had expressed a fierce criticism of anti-Semitism appealing to either 'democratic or religious, Marxist or humanist convictions', while Nietzsche 'clearly detected' the 'vulgarity inherent in racism' (p. 4). Not a single trace of this is present in Heidegger.

He believed instead in the need for a second beginning, a new sunrise in the *Abendland* (evening-land, the place where the sun sets) of the West. The first beginning had occurred with the Greeks. But in order to have a new sunrise, Heidegger tells us, we need to bring about 'the complete destruction of the Greek beginning' (p. 9), the destruction of Western civilization as we know it. We need to bring about a complete shipwreck, a task that needs its 'appropriate people' (ibid.). And, Heidegger says, 'this appropriate people [are] the Jewish people' (p. 10). In his notebooks he writes:

The question concerning the role of *world Jewry* is not a racial question but the metaphysical question that bears on the type of human modality which, being *absolutely unbound*, can undertake as a historical 'task' the uprooting of all beings from being. (Cited on p. 10)

'Historial' (rather than 'historical') is the translation of *weltgeschichtlich* (literally, 'world-historical'), an expression used by Heidegger in order to give metaphysical import to the perceived world-historical role of the Jewish people in bringing about nothing less than the demise of the West. This is not common or garden racism but racism elevated to dizzy ontological heights. It is, Nancy argues, not so much Nazism as a worldview but a form of "archi-fascism"

... a kind of hyperbolic revelation of a destinal truth of being based on "a people" (p. 13). 'World Jewry' is for Heidegger the synthesis of all the evils that befell the West, the quintessential evil he found scattered in Bolshevism, Americanism, rationality, democracy, technology, the necessary evil that in shipwrecking our land of sunset will bring about a new sunrise.

Among other vices such as calculation, commerce and shrewdness, he sees the Jews bringing about the demise of Western culture by spreading *Bodenlosigkeit*, the *groundlessness* or lack of soil of those 'citizens of nowhere' berated by Theresa May during a speech at the Conservative Party conference in Birmingham in 2016. Groundlessness, Nancy quotes Heidegger as saying, is 'being bound to nothing, making everything serviceable for itself (Jewry)' (p. 20). The other evil is what Heidegger calls, literally, *mishmash*, the true beginning of the end, 'the mixing, confusion, and indistinction of peoples in a humanity that does not place high enough the *humanitas* of man' (pp. 22–23). All of these arguments can also be found, word by word, in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. That a shrewd thinker 'so adept at tracing provenances ... did not ask where anti-Semitism could have come from' (p. 27), that he would blindly follow tabloid-style prejudices is precisely what constitutes Heidegger's banality. But he 'knows very well what he is doing', Nancy writes; Heidegger collects 'banal rubbish for the sake of higher ends' (p. 24). In so doing, he also shows a lack of historical consciousness and of common historical sense, conspicuous in a thinker who has supposedly made of historical 'Being-in-the-world' his trademark contribution to philosophy.

Heidegger is uninterested in questioning the origins of anti-Semitism because of the predominance in his thought of *archeotropy*, i.e. a need to turn towards a beginning. This notion 'prevents consideration of any development, any history in the simplest sense of a succession of events' (p. 33). There is also misrecognition in Heidegger of the initial *split* introduced by the Judeo-Christian culture, a split that for Nancy signalled 'the mutation of a relation-to-self' (ibid.) and, for Foucault (1986), brought about the very birth of the self as we know it before *askesis* and care of self in Hellenic culture. With the advent of monotheism, the self becomes split and begins to be judged, loved, consulted and summoned. Part and parcel of this split, overlooked (and replicated) by Heidegger, is Christianity's rejection of Judaism. In this painful process, Christendom rewrites its own identity, transposing its own self-hatred into a body that it sees as other, as errant (both 'wrong' or bound to err, and 'wandering') and, crucially, that does not belong to the modern European state – a split that is then painfully replicated *within* Judaism with the birth of Zionism.

These historical events, I feel, ought to interest psychologists and psychotherapists because at their core are the disastrous self-hatred and painful rifts of an entire culture. Not only is Heidegger unwilling to diagnose them; he is in fact substantiating them by adding his philosophical gloss to a dishonourable tradition of hatred that has characterized the history of the West at least since Rome – a hatred that is, at heart, *self-hatred*. In a passage that clearly invokes Heidegger while referring to 'we' as a culture, Nancy explains:

We do not like the Jews, or technics, or money, or commerce, or rationality ... We do not like ourselves, perhaps precisely because we would like to be 'ourselves' – which most often we believed we had to interpret as 'to be Greek', misrecognizing in this way that with and after the Greeks a great deal has happened that did not always come from the Greeks. (p. 39)

That 'we' in Nancy's text is not merely rhetorical: you and I are also implicated in the destructive and self-destructive horror that is the history of the West and that continues to manifest as hatred of difference and otherness and that 'indulges in beginnings and ends ... in sunrises no less than bloody sunsets' (p. 62). I understand Nancy to be saying that the hatred of anti-Semitism, so eloquent and virulent in Heidegger is, at heart, *fear*: a fear of anything that might constitute uncomfortable reminder of fragility, errancy and wandering, of transience

and complicity with the wind. One thing only will remain of our cities, Brecht said once: the wind blowing through them. Being acquainted with this primordial fear, with the existential anxiety of impermanence, may work as useful antidote.

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## A practice of love

**The death of desire: an existential study of sanity and madness**, by M. Guy Thompson, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2016, 230 pp., £28.58 (paperback), ISBN 978-1138790223. Reviewed by Rebecca Greenslade, Existential psychotherapist

First published 30 years ago, this second edition of *The Death of Desire* is M. Guy Thompson's undertaking to offer both revision and fidelity to his first edition, written originally as a doctoral dissertation. Drawing on three subsequent decades of psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic practice, Thompson achieves an erudite and contemporary exploration into the role of desire in sanity and madness. The book remains loyal to its first edition in its attempt to deepen the discourse between the existential and psychoanalytic traditions, a chiasm that Thompson acknowledges has been receding through contemporary relational psychoanalysis but nonetheless requires further attention. As a psychoanalytic psychotherapist who trained in existential phenomenology with R.D. Laing, Thompson is well placed to bridge this gap; it is no coincidence that the book shares its subtitle, *An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, with R.D. Laing's first work, *The Divided Self* (Laing, 1960), and it is clear that Laing's legacy continues to be a vital force behind Thompson's thinking and practice.

A key change between the first and second editions is replacing the term 'psychopathology' with 'sanity and madness'. This, Thompson explains, is because the term 'psychopathology' has lost its metaphorical function of referring to an experience of existential unease, or simply something that has gone wrong in a person's life. Instead, it is a term that has come to be firmly located within a biomedical model approach to treating people diagnosed with 'mental illness', a psychiatric paradigm that Thompson rejects. His concern lies with understanding human distress from an ontological, not pathological vantage point. Through using the term 'sanity and madness', therefore, Thompson encourages his readers to engage with an *existential* enquiry into the ways humans suffer and experience malaise. He explains:

By situating my exploration of the relation between desire and sanity and madness I hope to remove the concept of madness (occasioning all forms of mental and emotional distress) from any vestige of pathological and medical connotations, and return it to where it belongs: the everyday agony and ecstasy of living, in all its attendant mystery and complexity. (p. xii)

What is unique about Thompson's approach is how deeply he draws on Freud to articulate his own existential phenomenology. Part of the book's brilliance is its exposition of Freudian ideas,