togetherness

thinking

Andrej Božič (*Ed.*)

THINKING TOGETHERNESS

Phenomenology and Sociality

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Phenomenology and Sociality

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A Way Out of Nazism?
Heidegger and the "Shepherd of Being"

Abstract: Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi movement in the early 1930s is both a renowned and an extensively debated topic, which has recently been brought into the spotlight once again with the publications of the so-called *Schwarze Hefte*, raising new questions regarding well-established issues. The paper addresses the topic of the "shepherd of being" as it recurs in the *Black Notebooks* from the second half of the 1940s, by testing the hypothesis that the shepherd represents a key figure of Heidegger's philosophical way out of Nazism. This topic not only relates to Heidegger's own involvement, but also to those peculiar transformations of political power brought about by the spread of totalitarianism, which Heidegger was able to perceive and partly also analyze, and which are still recognizable in our present time, as both Foucault and Agamben have pointed out.

Keywords: Martin Heidegger, *Black Notebooks*, totalitarianism, political leadership.

1. Introduction: New terms for a *vexata quaestio*

In light of the publication of the first volumes of *Schwarze Hefte* (*Black Notebooks*), Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi movement has been recently addressed once more, raising new questions about longtime established issues. In particular, this discussion concerns two main points: on the one hand, Heidegger's account of his own active commitment to the political plans of the National Socialist Workers' Party during the period of his rectorship of the University of Freiburg in 1933–1934,[1] and, on the other hand, the controversial

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1 See, among others: Zaborowski 2010; Farin and Malpas 2016; Espinet *et al.* 2018.

charge of anti-Semitism.[2]

The *Schwarze Hefte* that date back to the 1930s and 1940s are the *Überlegungen* (translated into English as *Ponderings*) and the *Anmerkungen* (*Notes*). The first, basic finding provided by these *Notebooks* is that Heidegger's intense and radical *Auseinandersetzung* (confrontation) with Nazism extends way beyond his "short-lived, though concerted, partisanship for Hitler's regime,"[3] and continues, intermittently and with varying intensity, for approximately eighteen years, from the end of 1932 to 1950. By taking a philosophical, non-ideologically oriented interpretation of the whole Heidegger affair, we are able to pinpoint the two key experiences involved in this crucial *Auseinandersetzung* that outlives the actual duration of the Nazi regime, and that appears often in the *Notebooks* from the 1930s and 40s. First, the "great error" of the rectorship, as Heidegger himself calls it in *Ponderings and Intimations III* (Heidegger 2016, 145).[4] Second, the denazification process that Heidegger had to face immediately after the war. These two experiences in combination give rise to a unique meditation marked by "despair" (*Verzweiflung*), which affects Heidegger's "thinking of ~~beyng~~ [*kd*]" throughout the second half of the 1940s, as we read in the 1947–1948 *Anmerkungen IV* (Heidegger 2015, 387).[5]

In this desperate and hopeless confrontation, National Socialism is interpreted by Heidegger, together with other representatives of nihilism, such as Bolshevism and Americanism, as a prominent historical expression of the late outburst of modernity, namely, as a substantial phenomenon included in

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2 See, among others: Homolka and Heidegger 2016; Mitchell and Trawny 2017; Lapidot and Brumlik 2017.
3 See Löwith 1995, 7, as cited in: Thomson 2005, 32.
4 On the "error" of the rectorship in 1933, see the important, albeit later reflections in the *Anmerkungen*, in: Heidegger 2015, 98 f., 127, 143, and 147 f. See also Crowell 2016.
5 On the role of despair, see: Carbone 2021c and Cera 2020. In this paper, we use *kd*, in brackets, an abbreviation for *kreuzweise durchgestrichen*, in reference to Heidegger's habit of crossing out the word *Seyn* or *Sein* in his later writings using an X-shaped cross similar to the *crux decussata* (on this, see Ardovino 2005, 86). We have rendered it graphically simply by adding a strikethrough on the term. Furthermore, the word *beyng* is conventionally used in the *Ponderings* translations to render the German word *Seyn*. In cases where there is no English version available of the cited texts, all translations are this author's own.

those "machinational signs" (Heidegger 2017, 5) that go back to the dominant, epoch-making *Machenschaft* ("machination"),[6] which is not to be overlooked and underestimated, as he writes in the 1939 *Ponderings XII*.[7]

Moreover, as is already well known, these *Ponderings* and *Anmerkungen* show that the confrontation with Nazism, and particularly with the regime of power established by the Nazis, revolves around the question of technology, not least thanks to the groundbreaking take on technology elaborated in these *Schwarze Hefte* (Mazzarella 2021). Therefore, Heidegger's confrontation with Nazism entails a profound meditation on the very notion of power (*Macht*) and its transformations related to fundamental aspects of everyday life under the Nazi regime, such as communication strategies, propaganda, social control techniques, the display of hegemony, or the nature of authoritarian violence.[8] All these topics can be found in the *Black Notebooks*, and they will be deepened by later philosophical investigations devoted to the European totalitarian regimes of the past century, particularly by Foucault (2003; 2007) on biopolitics, and by Agamben (2017) on sovereignty.

In this context, one of the most relevant topics that comes to the foreground in the *Schwarze Hefte* from the late 1940s is the shepherd of being (*der Hirt des Seins*). Indeed, before the *Notebooks* were released, we knew the figure of the shepherd of being only through some important, albeit rather sporadic and scattered mentions in Heidegger's published work. To name but a few, these include: the *Letter on "Humanism"*, the *Anaximander's Saying*, both dating back to 1946, the 1949 conference entitled "The Turn" (*Die Kehre*), the 1963 letter to Takehiko Kojima, and the 1969 seminar in Le Thor.[9] In the 1947–1948 *Anmerkungen III*, *IV*, and *V*, the figure of the "shepherd of being" gains a key role.[10]

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6 See, e.g., Heidegger 2016, 217.
7 See Heidegger 2017, 5 f. For an insightful as well as useful assessment of this crucial period, based on a close reading of the *Black Notebooks*, see the "critical reconstruction" by Esposito (2021).
8 See Trawny's "Afterword" to *Ponderings II–VI*, in: Heidegger 2016, 386.
9 See, respectively: Heidegger 1998, 252 and 260; 2002, 262; 2003, 63; 2006, 160; 2012, 67.
10 See, especially: Heidegger 2015, 51, 118, 312, 371 f., 376, 378, 383 f., 402, and 458. An extensive analysis of the figure of the shepherd of being in the *Schwarze Hefte* can be found in: Carbone 2021b, 94–116.

The hypothesis that shall be put to the test in what follows is that the shepherd of being represents a pivotal figure for Heidegger's *Auseinandersetzung* with Nazism, and, in particular, that this *Denkfigur* (figure of thinking), as we would like to provisionally call it, indirectly represents a tentative philosophical way out of Nazism. Indeed, the figure of the shepherd hints back not only to Heidegger's own involvement in the political plans of the National Socialist Party, but also to the peculiar transformations of political power and political leadership brought about by the European totalitarian regimes during the same years as the *Black Notebooks*. Transformations that are still recognizable in our present time, as both Foucault and Agamben have pointed out.

Methodologically, this hypothesis is based on a combined reading of Heidegger's 1946 *Letter on "Humanism"*, published in 1947, where the figure of the shepherd of being famously appears, and the *Black Notebooks* dating from approximately the same period (1946–1949). The proposed hypothesis also implies that, in those years of despair, the figure of the shepherd is intended by Heidegger as guiding *Ereignis-Denken*, the thinking of the event of appropriation of humans and being. The *Denkfigur* of the shepherd of being recapitulates the overcoming of metaphysics, directing *Ereignis-Denken* towards the present historical destiny, which stems from the harrowing and catastrophic conclusion of the Second World War, as well as from the tragic consequences of the criminal totalitarian leaderships in Europe.

During a very intense period of about four years (from *Anmerkungen I* to *Anmerkungen IX*, collected in volumes 97 and 98 of the *Gesamtausgabe*), the figure of the shepherd of being attracts, with varying intensity and in a non-systematic manner, all the key themes of *Ereignis-Denken*, which can be found in the aforementioned *Notebooks*, such as (i) the need to come to terms with the irretrievable forgottenness or oblivion of being, (ii) the way towards the completion of the overcoming of metaphysics, and (iii) the corresponding overcoming of the human being as *animal rationale*. As regards the period indicated for the purposes of the present argument, it should be noted that in the *Anmerkungen IV* (1947–1948) the "shepherd of ~~beyng~~ [*kd*]," who is charged with the duty to protect the complete forgottenness of being, is depicted as the coming human being, or the "future man" (Heidegger 2015, 383) who

becomes the mortal man, and that, after 1949, the shepherd simply gives way to the "mortals," in the plural.[11]

2. Neither a metaphor nor a leader of people

In what follows, we shall focus on two different interpretations of this *Denkfigur*, arguing that both are proved wrong by what can be read today in the *Black Notebooks*. The first thesis holds that the shepherd of being is a metaphor, and nothing more. The second thesis compares the shepherd to a *dux gregis*, a Latin expression that literally means leader of the flock. This latter case implies the consequence of taking the shepherd of being as evidence that Heidegger's fascination for Hitler, the *dux*, the *Führer* of his country, continues after his involvement in the Nazi politics, and even after the war had ended. The first position tends to neutralize the figure of the shepherd, reducing it to a mere metaphor to be explained through something else. The second one tends to emphasize it beyond its actual significance, in order to use it to explain something else. In both cases, the meaning of the *Denkfigur* of the shepherd, as well as its role in *Ereignis-Denken*, are overlooked. Since both the meaning and the role can be reassessed thanks to the new source material provided in the *Schwarze Hefte*, it should be noted that the two theses considered in what follows were formulated before the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, and also before the publication of volume 82 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, which provides some very important, albeit only a few, notes to contextualize the figure of the shepherd of being (Heidegger 2018a, 563–576).

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In his famous work on Heidegger's way through phenomenology to thought, Richardson (1963, 439, 525, and 524 f.) refers to the *Hirt des Seins* as a

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11 On mortals in later *Black Notebooks*, see, especially, Heidegger 2020a, 134–137, 141 f., 181, and 191. On the use of the plural "mortals" by Heidegger, borrowed "from the Greeks," see Arendt (1994, 443) who explains that "[w]hat is important here is not the emphasis on mortality, but the use of the plural." Since Heidegger "has never articulated the implications of his position on this point," Arendt is careful to add that "it may be presumptuous to read too much significance into his use of the plural" (ibid.). However, the *Anmerkungen III–IX* recently issued in the series of the *Black Notebooks* are extremely helpful in clarifying the importance of the shift from *man* to the plurality of *mortals*.

metaphor. In turn, in the essay that presents the French version of Heidegger's 1945 conference entitled *Die Armut* ("Poverty"), Lacoue-Labarthe (2004, 50 and 65) simply dismisses the topic, claiming that it is worse than a case of an unlucky metaphor; rather, the shepherd of being is "pastoral rubbish" and "Neolithic reverie."

Such alleged residual "rubbish" has been deemed to have implications for Heidegger's path of thinking. It has been claimed, for instance, that the figure of the shepherd represents an "idyllic, rustic metaphor" (Pastore 2001, 199) that appears in the *Letter on "Humanism"* with the specific task of mitigating and diminishing Heidegger's involvement in the Nazi movement. According to this viewpoint, his involvement with the Nazi regime is purposely not mentioned in the 1946 letter, since the *Humanismusbrief* is a self-absolving statement and is part of Heidegger's indirect strategy of denying responsibility for his political error of taking on the rectorship. Yet, to take the shepherd of being as a rustic metaphor is not only misleading, but it is contrary to what Heidegger explicitly argues. Furthermore, and beyond Heidegger's arguments, this position does not allow us to fully grasp the philosophical role of such an important *Denkfigur*.

As we read in the 1947–1948 *Anmerkungen IV* (Heidegger 2015, 371 f.), if the human being is thought of as the "shepherd of being," the existence of the shepherd, in this case, has nothing in common with the idyllic life of a herdsman (or sheepherder), not even in name. This point had been already clarified in the 1946 *Anaximander's Saying*, published in the 1950 volume of the *Holzwege*:

> Preservation as the protection of being belongs to the shepherd; a shepherd who has so little to do with bucolic idylls and nature mysticism that he can become the shepherd of being only if he remains the place-holder for the Nothing. Both are the same. (Heidegger 2002, 262.)[12]

The reference to the "place-holder for the Nothing" is crucial, since, according to Heidegger, the shepherd of being, namely, the future human being, is basically a mortal who does not possess anything, not even his or

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12 On this, see also David 1993.

her own death, because death means radical dispossession. As we are told in *Anmerkungen IV*: the shepherd is above all a mortal, and a mortal is one who essentially exists in the complete and irretrievable abandonment by beyng. Therefore, a mortal is able to dwell in the proximity of the heart of "departure," of *Abschied* (Heidegger 2015, 384). Heidegger flags such complete abandonment by crossing out the word "*Seyn*" ("beyng") with an X-shaped cross (here rendered as a strikethrough line), so that in these *Black Notebooks* the shepherd is mostly called: *Hirt des ~~Seyns~~ [kd]*, shepherd of ~~beyng~~ [kd].[13]

In the *Anmerkungen III* (which date back to 1946–1947), we read that if humans truly become mortals, namely, if humans enter the relationship with death in the sense of the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*), then humans become the "shepherd of ~~being~~ [kd]" who can protect the forgottenness of being in its simplicity. In this context, also the task of the thinkers is set. The thinker is the "shepherd of letting go" (*Hirt des Lassens*), and to let go means "to guard the dwelling in the neighborhood with death" (Heidegger 2015, 285). And vice versa, to conceive humans as the shepherd that guards or protects the oblivion of the truth of beyng means, as we read in 1949–1950 *Anmerkungen VIII*, that "the shepherd can ex-ist as thinker. The shepherd is then one who gathers the flock, and the flock are the thoughts of the world that is to be thought." (Heidegger 2018b, 239 f.)[14]

The "essential poverty" mentioned in the *Humanismusbrief* as the key feature of the "shepherd of being" (Heidegger 1998, 260), together with the essential mortality conferred in the *Black Notebooks*, makes the shepherd

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13 On the crossing-out of Seyn, some important clarifications are to be found in the 1947 *Notebooks* called *Vier Hefte I* (Heidegger 2019, 56, 69, and 83 f., in particular).
14 A similar take on what thinking can be is to be found in the incipit of the 1951–1952 lectures devoted to the topic *Was heißt Denken?*: "Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking. For we are capable of doing only what we are inclined to do. And again, we truly incline toward something only when it in turn inclines toward us, toward our essential being, by appealing to our essential being as what holds us there. To hold genuinely means to heed protectively, to let a herd graze at pasture. What keeps us in our essential being holds us only so long, however, as we for our part keep holding on to what holds us. And we keep holding on to it by not letting it out of our memory. Memory is the gathering of thought." (Heidegger 2008, 369; trans. mod.)

the temporary, but pivotal figure of *Ereignis-Denken* in the second half of the 1940s. In *Anmerkungen III*, we are told that "[t]he event of appropriation is the appropriation of man in the neighborhood with death" (Heidegger 2015, 291). To be a neighbor of death is a trait that defines human existence, that distinguishes human beings from any other being, and such a distinctive feature—Heidegger remarks in these *Anmerkungen*—consists in assigning humans to poverty and dwelling (Heidegger 2015, 289 and 291 f.).[15] In his private notes on the *Humanismusbrief*, included in the aforementioned volume 82 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, the ancient Greek term "θνητός" is used by Heidegger, in order to define the mortal being that is sustained by language, "Λόγος," precisely to designate the mortal being that inhabits the Λόγος, in symmetrical opposition to (or as a reversal of) the metaphysical definition of the ζῷον λόγον ἔχον, the living being that is supposed to possess language as an instrument (Heidegger 2018a, 574, 580, and 583).

Mortality and poverty are the two basic features of the shepherd of being, namely, of the future man, which emerge throughout the *Black Notebooks* from the second half of the 1940s. As such, they are to be understood in the broader critique of the metaphysical determination of the human being. In the *Notebooks* from this period, an attempt is also made to dislocate meditation, in order to reach a different place, from which to think about the essence of humanity, as we read, for instance, in a passage from the 1948–1949 *Anmerkungen VI*, which mentions the "*Reich (das regere) des Ereignens*," namely, the "reign (*regere*) of appropriating" (Heidegger 2018b, 36). Here, the term "*Reich*" (reign), is specified by Heidegger by placing the Latin expression "*regere*" (to direct, to guide, to control) in brackets immediately after it. Human beings guide, direct, or control nothing, not even their essential poverty. Indeed, to be poor, as Heidegger argues in these pages, is possible solely within the "reign of appropriating," a reign that is reached only through the historical destiny assumed in its entirety, and not if humans decide to be less rich and wealthy.

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15 On animality and death, see: Crowell 2017, Ardovino 2021, and Polidori 2021.

3. Poverty and mortality: The "future man"

The second thesis on the shepherd of being that has now been proved wrong by the recent availability of the *Black Notebooks* concerns its political meaning, which implies the question: to whom do we entrust our essential finitude marked by radical, irreparable mortality? In a relatively recent assessment, we read that: "Heidegger's shepherd is part of an idealised agrarian past and alludes to Plato's shepherd in *The Statesman* in which leaders of the *polis* herd both animals and men." (Broglio 2008, 127.) Despite the fact that this position on the "idealised agrarian past" had been proved wrong, even before the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, as we have already read in the *Anaximander's Saying*, this essay by Broglio provides some interesting insights. For instance, he focuses on Nietzsche's satyr and Heidegger's shepherd of being as representative figures for each philosopher, as well as the differences between them. In fact, Nietzsche and Hölderlin are the two possible direct sources for Heidegger's *Denkfigur* of the shepherd of being (Carbone 2021a). In both cases, for Nietzsche and Hölderlin, as is the case also for the Italian poet Leopardi, the shepherd is an anxious and errant *peregrinus* (foreigner, stranger, alien), essentially separated by the flock, with no homeland and no community.

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Secondly, even though the conclusions on Heidegger's "nostalgia" or "mistake" are misconceived (Broglio 2008, 135 f.), the final reference to Plato's *Statesman* made by Broglio is quite interesting, since the model for the political ruler that Plato addresses critically in the dialogue called Πολιτικός (*Statesman*) is precisely the figure of the shepherd king, which was largely widespread in ancient Euro-Mediterranean cultures and can be found in the Hebrew *Bible* (e.g., King David) or in Homer's epics, as Benveniste (2016, 377–382) has argued regarding the "shepherd" of the people (ποιμήν λαῶν).

It is worth briefly recapitulating Plato's argument here, in order to cast a light on Heidegger's shepherd. In the dialogue Πολιτικός, Plato carefully separates the role of the best statesman from the activity of any ordinary herdsman, since the best statesman should not gather the people and feed them, which is exactly what the herdsman does with the flock.[16]

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16 See, for instance: Πολιτικός 267c–268d, 274e–280b, 301a–301e, and 310e–311c

On this point, there is no possible ambiguity in Heidegger's position: to be a shepherd does not mean to guide a flock. The shepherd of being is no herdsman. In the aforementioned private notes on the *Humanismusbrief*, Heidegger warns that the shepherd is not the shepherd of a flock, namely, is not the "slave" of the flock, and is not a "*Kuhhirt*," a German word that indicates a cowherd (Heidegger 2018a, 572). Thus, the fact that the shepherd has nothing to do with these more or less bucolic idylls is quite clear in what Heidegger explicitly says about this important *Denkfigur*, and it is also reaffirmed in the 1957 *Black Notebook* entitled *Winke I*: the true shepherd does not make something or someone else move (Heidegger 2020b, 66 f.) and, consequently, does not seek followers or aims to guide anyone.

It should be noted in passing that the reflection on "environmental ethics" can be cast anew, by relying on the Heideggerian perspective, in which the figure of the shepherd is not deemed to be the "guardian" of animality or even of "non-human animals," who would be compelled by the reckless progress of the train of civilization to create and maintain "refuge areas for wildlife and other animals to live out a more appropriate, natural existence—letting these animals be more authentically" (Turner 2009, 161, 164, and 162). By contrast, the relationship with animals goes back to the relationship with animality. This latter is grounded in essential mortality, which, in turn, is understood within the call for the fundamental protection of the forgottenness of being.

Again, the *Black Notebooks* published so far also prove to be pivotal in this respect. In fact, not only do these *Notebooks* warn against what the shepherd is not, but they also provide a positive meaning, which can be summarized with the Heideggerian expression to be found in the important private notes on *Humanismusbrief*: the shepherd is the "*Hirt des Brauchs*," the "shepherd of use" (Heidegger 2018a, 572).[17]

The topic of use also recurs in the same *Notebooks* where we find many of the notes on the shepherd, namely, in the *Anmerkungen IV*, with

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and, respectively, Plato 2006, 42–49, 66–87, 156–161, and 192–195.

17 One can also translate this as the shepherd of "usage," according to the English translation of the expression "*der Brauch*" in the *Holzwege* (Heidegger 2002, 276), or even as the shepherd of "need," since, in *Ponderings XIII*, "*das Brauchen des Seyns*" is rendered as "the need for beyng" (Heidegger 2017, 96).

different formulations: "*Sage des Brauchs*," the "saying of use," or "the event of the appropriation of use" (*Ereignis des Brauchs*).[18] It is worth taking into consideration that what Heidegger calls "use" ("*Brauch*") is essential to mortality with regard to *Geviert*, the Fourfold that gathers earth and sky, mortals and divinities, since "use is the event of appropriation of mortals as such," which we can read, for instance, in the 1952–1953 *Vigiliae I* (Heidegger 2020a, 90).

In the notes devoted to the *Humanismusbrief* (Heidegger 2018a, 571), Heidegger explicitly refers back to a number of pages from the 1947–1948 *Anmerkungen IV*, where we are told that to think of humans as the "shepherd of being" "has nothing in common with the shepherd of a pastoral idyll," not even in relation to the designation of the word "shepherd." He goes on to explain that we know nothing about the shepherd, if we think of the shepherd as starting with the flock, "particularly if we intend the human flock," and that we should not assume this for moral purposes, since the shepherd is not a moral model (Heidegger 2015, 371 f.). On the contrary, as we read some pages further on, the shepherd is "the friend of the riddle of use," and "this shepherd has nothing to do with a flock" (Heidegger 2015, 376). In the same *Anmerkungen*, we read that "use" is "the danger," insofar as use is also the "preservation of ~~beyng~~ [*kd*]." Accordingly, then, "the shepherd of ~~beyng~~ [*kd*] has nothing to do with flocks," but relates to the "protective heed" that comes with radical mortality. The shepherd—we read further on—"compels us" to exist in the mode of such protective heed in the face of danger. The human being, as shepherd, should not "avoid" danger, but should "protect" it. The human being is the "shepherd of ~~beyng~~ [*kd*]," "the future man," but not just any man, "rather, the essential man," namely, above all, "the one who thinks" (Heidegger 2015, 382 f.). Heidegger goes on to explain that the shepherd gives shape to the "future man" only on the basis of "~~beyng~~ [*kd*]," that is, only on the basis of the irretrievable oblivion of the truth of our historical destiny, which is summarized in the idea that humans belong to "use" (Heidegger 2015, 383). As he states in the 1945 conference entitled *Die Armut*, such

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18 See Heidegger 2015, 326 f.

historical destiny is essentially marked by poverty.[19]

These few remarks on the shepherd of being presented here with reference to the recently issued *Black Notebooks* are sufficient to understand that Heidegger did not intend the shepherd as a leader of the masses, which are gathered as a flock, or as a leader of people. Briefly stated, Heidegger's shepherd of being has nothing to do with a *dux gregis*.[20] On the contrary, if we place this *Denkfigur* between Heidegger's radical critique of *Macht*, of power, which also stems from his confrontation with the Nazi regime, on the one hand, and the desperate and hopeless rush forward of *Ereignis-Denken* in the late 1940s, on the other, we can observe that the shepherd carries out the deposition of any possible leadership, of any *Führerschaft*, and takes up the guardianship (*Wächterschaft*) of the historical destiny of mortals. However, such guardianship, as we read in some of the notes to the 1944 lecture-course on Heraclitus, does not mean surveillance, since the "shepherd is no policeman" (Heidegger 2018c, 294).

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19 Poverty is, indeed, "the overtone of the still hidden-sheltered ownmost of the Western people and their destiny" (Heidegger, Kalary, and Schalow 2011, 8).
20 See Mincă (2014, 85), who suggests a possible comparison in this vein.

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