Absence of Soil, Historicity, and Goethe in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*: Sheehan on Faye

JOHANNES FRITSCHÉ

Abstract: In a paper entitled “Emmanuel Faye: The Introduction of Fraud into Philosophy?” (*Philosophy Today* 59[3] [2015]), Thomas Sheehan accuses Faye of committing many blunders in *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*. In this paper, I address what is according to Sheehan himself the most important part of his paper, namely his charges against Faye’s interpretation of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. I show that they are all wholly unfounded. All the aspects of *Being and Time* that Sheehan addresses speak not only not against Faye but rather even for Faye.

Key words: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, historicity, destiny, fate, *Bodenlosigkeit*

In the summer issue of 2015, *Philosophy Today* published a paper by Thomas Sheehan entitled “Emmanuel Faye: The Introduction of Fraud into Philosophy?” (EF), in which Sheehan rebukes, in extraordinarily strong terms, Faye’s book on Heidegger’s introduction of Nazism into philosophy, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935* (HI).¹ In this paper, I shall address the longest part of Sheehan’s paper, namely his critique of Faye’s interpretation of *Being and Time*, that is, Sheehan’s claims regarding the issue of historicity in §74 and Heidegger’s usage of the word *Bodenlosigkeit* (absence of soil, groundlessness) throughout the book. In the first section, I argue that Sheehan misquotes Heidegger; that his critique of Faye rests on the usual “American” interpretation of §74; that he realizes that this interpretation has a crucial weak spot; that his remedy to save it is wrong; and that from the viewpoint of a different and much more plausible interpretation of §74 Faye is right. In addition, I show that Sheehan’s reference to Goethe boomerangs. In the second section, I show that Sheehan is wrong—in
fact, terribly wrong—regarding Heidegger’s usage of Bodenlosigkeit. Heidegger does not refer, as Sheehan claims, to the unfoundedness of philosophical positions but to what he regards to be the uprootedness of modern societies. In the last section, I defend Faye’s translation of Bodenlosigkeit as absence de sol (absence of soil). In sum, Sheehan’s critique of Faye’s interpretation of Being and Time lacks any foundation. All the aspects of Being and Time that he addresses speak not only not against Faye but rather even for Faye. In addition, for this reason, much, if not all, of Sheehan’s critique of Faye’s book as a whole is, according to Sheehan’s own criteria, void.²

Sheehan on §74 of Being and Time

As to the political dimension of Heidegger’s concept of historicity in §74, there are, basically, two groups of interpretations. For the first, the individual remains the center of the historical happening. For the second, however, it does not do so; rather, the National Socialist community of the people emerges as the main player. Sheehan belongs to the first group, and claims that the notion of historicity is politically neutral except that it excludes a vote for Hitler (EF 381n45). Rockmore, in a chapter in a book from 1993, belongs to the second group, and so does my book from 1999 (HD), with its very detailed interpretation of §74 and an extensive comparison of Heidegger with Hitler, Scheler, Lukács, and Tillich. Sheehan mentions only Rockmore (EF 380n44).

Sheehan’s first point concerns the issue of community. He quotes Faye saying that in §74 “the ideas that are at the foundation of National Socialist doctrine are already present—the Gemeinschaft (“community”) understood as Schicksalsgemeinschaft (“a community of destiny”) and Volksgemeinschaft (“a community of the Volk”)” (EF 379; see HI 16).³ Sheehan claims “that the two Nazi terms [Faye] cites above—Schicksalsgemeinschaft and Volksgemeinschaft—appear nowhere in §74 or anywhere else in Being and Time” (EF 379), adding that “Being and Time never speaks of a Volksgemeinschaft, only of das Geschehen des Volkes, the historical life of a people, any people” (EF 379n40). However, Sheehan is wrong. Heidegger does not say “das Geschehen des Volkes.” Sheehan has left out two words and one comma. For, Heidegger designates with the term Geschick (destiny) “the occurrence of the community, of the people [das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes]” (BT 352.4–5 = SZ 384.31–32).⁴ After Hitler’s “seizure of power,” at the latest, Heidegger will, as for instance in his rectoral address in May 1933, say “Volksgemeinschaft” (RZ 113). There is no significant difference between “Volksgemeinschaft” and “der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes.” At the time of Being and Time, Heidegger might have thought that the word Volksgemeinschaft sounded too blunt. However, the main reason for his formula is a philosophical and political one. Most of the different groups and parties on the political right
during the Weimar Republic maintained that Geschick as Gemeinschaft (community) was the main parameter and actor in history. However, they disagreed over the issue of which of the different communities should have priority. Scheler, who was for Heidegger the main source regarding the issue of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (society) and the strongest philosophical force worldwide (see HD 87), had laid out a hierarchy of four types of large communities. At the top is the worldwide Catholic love-community (which, according to Scheler, had been real until the end of the Middle Ages), followed by culture-communities (e.g., Western Europe), the different states, and the Volksgemeinschaften. All the communities of the latter three types should serve the love-community, and the Volksgemeinschaft is the lowest type mainly because, in it, the individual counts exclusively regarding its contribution to the Volksgemeinschaft (HD 97–100). Hitler, however, claimed that the Volksgemeinschaft was the highest, or the only, community (HD 71–87). Thus in the quoted sentence Heidegger proceeds philosophically in the correct way: first the kind and then the specification. In addition, he seems, like Hitler, to equate Gemeinschaft and Volksgemeinschaft.\(^5\) Faye is therefore fully right when he summarizes that Heidegger understands Gemeinschaft as Volksgemeinschaft. In addition, prior to the sentence with “of the community, of the people” Heidegger talks about Schicksal (fate) (BT 351–52 = SZ 384) and immediately thereafter about Geschick and Schicksal to the effect that destiny directs the individuals and their fates (BT 352 = SZ 384).\(^6\) Faye refers to the latter passage before he quotes the two sentences containing Heidegger’s determination of Geschick (BT 352.2–5 = SZ 384.29–32) (HI 16). Thus, he may reasonably use in his summary the term Schicksalsgemeinschaft even though Heidegger himself does not do so at that place.

Sheehan’s second point concerns the issue of Geschick (destiny), Schicksal (fate), and individuation. Faye maintains that, in §74, Heidegger shows that the most radical individuation of an individual is “realized not in the individual but in the organic indivisibility of the Gemeinschaft of the people” (EF 380; see HI 17). According to Sheehan, Faye turns on its head not only §74, but also the “most basic tenet of Being and Time” (EF 380), namely to ground the I and Dasein’s radical individuation in the thrown-openness of existence (EF 380). In the footsteps of so many other American interpreters (see HD 7–13, 207–15, et passim), Sheehan maintains that, in §74, Heidegger shows how an individual can distance himself from the They (or, as Sheehan translates, the “crowd” [MS 180]) and choose its own individual destiny, its Schicksal, out of the many possibilities contained in the heritage (EF 380, 381; see MS 179–83), and how “we can also forge a common destiny, a Ge-schick” (EF 381). However, this understanding of Schicksal and Geschick flies flatly in the face of the way Germans at Heidegger’s time—both those who “believed” in Schicksal and Geschick and those who did not do so—used these notions. Individuals don’t produce their Schicksal or Geschick. Rather, Geschick and Schicksal precede them, and in one way or the other make
themselves known to the individuals. The individual can accept its Schicksal or try to evade it, and only unwise people will do the latter—unwise, because they will finally not succeed. Or, in a broader sense, anything “inescapable” is, as Scheler put it succinctly, “fate—not choice [Schicksal—nicht Wahl]” (HD 143) (see HD 71–87, 89–92, 131–36, 140–41, 143, 289–92n66 et passim). Everything Heidegger, Hitler, and Scheler say in sentences with the words Geschick and Schicksal is easily understandable on the assumption that they use them in their everyday core meaning and the related ones, and they neither explicitly nor implicitly indicate that they would not follow common parlance.

In his recent book on Heidegger, Sheehan comments as openly as he does coyly:

The word “fate” (Schicksal) may be a bit too Wagnerian for what Heidegger means here. The word must be stripped of any notions of a fatalistically predetermined “destiny” that is “sent” to me. Schicksal as it is used here should be understood in terms of the German adjective schicklich (fitting, proper): it refers to my freeing up and embracing a concrete possibility that befits my thrownness into mortality. My “fate” (if we choose to use the word at all) is my freedom to make my own history in the light of my radical finitude. (MS 183)

Sheehan obviously acknowledges that his interpretation requires that Heidegger employs Schicksal in a meaning that is the precise opposite of its usual one. In addition, he obviously assumes that this is very unlikely unless Heidegger uses Schicksal with a different word in view. Sheehan displays so often his philological interests. Here, however, he hasn’t added any comment or note. As a matter of fact, schicklich is used only rarely and its main meaning is that a certain behavior is appropriate in a given situation, is required by custom, tact, ethics. It is, say, not schicklich to make jokes at a funeral. In other words, a behavior is schicklich for me, because it is the application of a social norm to a given situation. Other than that, a person, or tool, can be said to be schicklich for a specific job; or, say, your new coat is schicklich for you, i.e., it enhances your look. All this has nothing to do with my freedom to make my own history. However, even if Sheehan could offer any example in his favor, Heidegger had obviously not thought of such a case. For, schicklich is was sich schickt, and it is custom or, as Heidegger says, “the they [that] restrict[s] the possible options … to what is correct and proper [was sich gehört und schickt]” [BT 181 = SZ 194; “proper” in the sense of “appropriate / required” and not “characteristic of / of one’s own”]). As such, schicklich has in common with Schicksal that, in both cases, it is a matter of accepting what one has not produced and what one should not resist. Thus, if Heidegger had used schicklich in Being and Time (which he apparently hasn’t), it would have been either in the sense of was sich schickt or of Schicksal, both opposite to what Sheehan proposes.7

Since Sheehan’s remedy is ineffective, Heidegger’s authentic Dasein will not be the postmodern version of the proverbial American self-made man. In fact,
when one honors language, does not ignore the presence of the community of the people, and compares §74 with other philosophical and political texts of the time, one recognizes that Heidegger summarizes here the notion of history of the then rightists and the script of the revolution they hoped for: Gesellschaft (society) has emerged and has destroyed Gemeinschaft; at some point in this downward plunge, however, Geschick will raise its voice, enter the stage of history as its main player, and demand that the individuals submit themselves to it, which the authentic individuals do while the inauthentic ones try not to listen; Geschick reveals to the authentic individuals their individual roles in the happening and the community, their fates, and demands that they demolish Gesellschaft and revitalize Gemeinschaft. In addition, Heidegger opts for the Volksgemeinschaft as the relevant Gemeinschaft (see the summary HD 124–42, HB 255–58, 266–69, or NS XX–XX). In brief, Heidegger shows that Geschick demands that the individuals give up their status as autonomous subjects and subjugate to the Volksgemeinschaft. For rightists, this was in no way fatalistic. Rather, fate ennobled, and it was the entry into a world of loyalty, trust, and love and a relief from the burden of autonomy. Heidegger’s is neither a logic of “fatalism” nor “of reconciliation or of dialectical mediation but rather one of transfiguration” (HD 322–23n57). Therefore, also on the second account Faye is right.

Sheehan gives Faye credit for not committing the “embarrassing blunder of Richard Wolin” (EF 381n47). Wolin, Sheehan assumes, does not know that, in §74, Heidegger “is quoting” (EF 380n45) a line from Goethe, “Ein jeglicher muß seinen Helden wählen [Each must choose his hero].” When, during “the last session of the conference in New York” on Heidegger’s Black Notebooks in September 2014, Sheehan publicly conveyed his knowledge to him, Wolin “dismissed it out of hand (and without any discussion) as irrelevant” (EF 381–82n47). Wolin was right in doing so. Heidegger does not quote Goethe. He just says, without quotation marks and reference, “that the Da-sein chooses its hero [daß das Dasein sich seinen Helden wählt]” (BT 352 = SZ 385; modification of the translation is mine, J.F.). Sheehan obviously presumes that, if someone quotes without any comment, he must use the citation in the same “spirit” as its author supposedly does. This is hermeneutically certainly very naïve, especially with regard to the hermeneutics of Heidegger’s fundamental ontology and in a situation in which, as in the Weimar Republic, it was common practice for political parties and intellectual trends to increase their reputation by claiming for themselves authoritative poets or philosophers. In this sense, an allusion to Goethe might indeed increase the appeal of §74 to the educated and autonomous bourgeois subjects. Sheehan quotes more than the first line: “Ein jeglicher muß seinen Helden wählen, / Dem er die Wege zum Olymp hinauf / Sich nacharbeiten.’ (In Anna Swanwick’s classic translation: ‘Each must select the hero after whom / To climb the steep and difficult ascent / Of high Olympus.’)” (EF 381n45) The alleged presence of Goethe is for Sheehan
obviously a confirmation of his American interpretation of §74 and a reason to exclude Hitler from the possible choices of authentic Dasein: the Olympian poet and Hitler just simply cannot coexist in the same paragraph and book. It is strange that Sheehan seems not to notice that the citation backfires on him. Not being a native English speaker I don't comment on the English translation but just point out that the German phrase *sich jemandem nacharbeiten* is indeed quite tough a formulation: the hero leads the way, I have to follow him, and I have to struggle as hard as I can, without on this steep ascent necessarily being able to see where the hero leads to. Thus Heidegger tells the educated bourgeois subjects that already their hero Goethe had told them what rightists at Heidegger's time are demanding, namely to give up autonomy and self-determination and subjugate oneself to a leader, especially since it is not Goethe's but certainly Heidegger's phrase that does not exclude the possibility that many or all submit to the same hero. In addition, during the Weimar Republic, the notion of the *Held* (hero) was used primarily by rightists, and for them the paradigmatic *Helden* were the *Helden von Langemarck*, the German soldiers at Langemarck in World War I: the “German” *Held* did not find self-fulfillment in radical individuation and singularity but rather in sacrificing himself and his life for the common good and the community of the German people (HD 1–6, 240–42n23, 282–83n36, 324–26n60; GN 25–29, 309–29 et passim). After Hitler’s “seizure of power,” Heidegger claimed, from his perspective rightly, that the beginning of World War I and the National Socialist revolution followed the script of his notion of historicity in *Being and Time* and that the German soldiers in World War I were paradigmatic instances of his notion of anticipation of death (see HB 272–74, GN 301–29). Thus, as rector he dedicated the matriculation ceremony in November 1933 and all future ones to Langemarck (we “place this ceremony into the actuality, and under the symbol, of *Langemarck [diese Feier in die Wirklichkeit und unter das Sinnbild von Langemarck stellen],*” [RZ 199; see HB 272, GN 315]). The students should choose the German soldiers at Langemarck and, of course, in the first place Adolf Hitler as their hero (HB 274, GN 320), the end point of the destruction of autonomy begun in *Being and Time*. In sum, *Being and Time* is indeed, as in the title of Faye’s book, an *Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*.

**Sheehan on Bodenlosigkeit in Being and Time**

Other than in a quotation from Count Yorck (BT 366 = SZ 401) the word *Bodenlosigkeit* (absence of soil, groundlessness) occurs in *Sein und Zeit* eight times. Sheehan claims that “in each instance it refers to the unfoundedness of a philosophical position” (EF 383). He does not provide any comment, reference, or example except the quotation from Count Yorck (EF 384). However, especially since he distinguishes in this context between reference and meaning (see my
next section), he obviously assumes that in each instance Heidegger talks about a philosophical position, characterizes it as unfounded (bodenlos), and uses the abstract noun, Bodenlosigkeit, to point out this unfoundedness.

On October 15, 1925, about one and a half years before the publication of Being and Time, Heidegger said in a speech on the occasion of the wedding ceremony of his brother the following:

The incomparable value of such a union can only be appreciated if one bears in mind how life of today gravitates / crowds entirely toward / into the big city [wie das heutige Leben ganz in die Großstadt dringt], and that the human beings that determine life there are uprooted [entwurzelte] human beings. The Bodenlosigkeit of present-day life is the root of the growing decay. And all renewal and innovation would remain hopeless, if one did not again manage to restore the leading and giving forces back from out of the native soil [aus heimatlichem Boden zurückzuführen]. And this union gives us the guarantee that such possibilities are still open. If we could make a wish, it would be that this union set an example. But this again involves the task of choosing a life of simplicity and sound sense of mind—a life that does not fall prey to the pseudo-culture, a life that, in its exemplary character, may once again show loyalty to the clod / soil [Treue zur Scholle]. (RZ 53)

About eight years later, shortly after Hitler’s “seizure of power,” Heidegger writes in the Black Notebooks about his hometown:

Again—the world is under renovation, in the process of being converted to itself. We are re-approaching truth and its essentialness—we are becoming disposed toward taking over everything that truth demands and gaining a foothold in it—toward having-a-firm-stand-on-the-Boden [boden-ständig]. Boden-ständig can be the one who, having come out of the Boden and been nurtured by it, stands upon it—this is what is primordial [das ursprüngliche] [sic]—that which often resonates through my body [Leib] and mood [Stimmung]—as though I walked through the fields, plow in hand, along solitary field-paths amongst ripening corn, through the wind and fog, sun and snow, which kept the blood of the mother [der Mutter] [his mother, J.F.] and that of her ancestors circulating and pulsating…. The other ones who are boden-ständig— they are those for whom these roots [Wurzeln] have died off but who insist on returning to the Boden and its esteem.

In the Black Notebooks from about four years after this, that is, around 1938, after his disappointment with empirical National Socialism (which made him discover the “true” National Socialism [NS XX]), he characterizes modernity as “that which is without Boden [Bodenlose]” and continues:

Perhaps, what will “win out” in this “struggle,” in which what is at stake is the absolute aimlessness and which, therefore, can only be the caricature of the
“struggle,” is the greater Bodenlosigkeit, the one that feels pledged to nothing, the one that makes everything subservient to itself (the Jewry).  

The three quotations show that for Heidegger the word Bodenlosigkeit is related to the words entwurzeln and Bodenständigkeit. (Wurzel is “root,” entwurzeln “to uproot,” and Bodenständigkeit is a composite of Boden and an abstract noun that is, as it were, at the same time the abstract noun to the verb stehen [to stand], the noun Stand [stand[ing], footing] and the adjective and adverb ständig [permanent, constant]; thus Bodenständigkeit is “the having-of-a-firm-stand / footing on the Boden,” the opposite of Bodenlosigkeit [and a paradigmatic instance of constant presence].) In the first and the second quotations, Heidegger definitely does not talk about a philosophical position, and most probably he does not do so in the third quotation either.

Sheehan does not mention that Heidegger uses entwurzeln and Bodenständigkeit in the same context as Bodenlosigkeit, perhaps because he is aware that entwurzeln and Bodenständigkeit are normally not used in discussions about the foundations of philosophical positions. He will point out that none of these three quotations is taken from a philosophical text of Heidegger’s. However, the three words at stake occur together in Being and Time as well. In §35, Heidegger characterizes idle talk (Gerede) as a phenomenon which constitutes the mode of being of the understanding and interpretation of everyday Da-sein. . . . And since this talking has lost the primary relation of being to the being talked about, or else never achieved it, it does not communicate in the mode of a primordial appropriation of this being, but communicates by gossiping and passing the word along. . . . Idle talk is constituted in this gossiping and passing the word along, a process by which its initial lack of ground to stand on [Fehlen der Bodenständigkeit] increases to complete groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit]. . . . The groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit] of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public, but encourages it. . . . The fact that one has said something groundlessly [bodenlose] and then passes it along is in further retelling sufficient to turn disclosing around into a closing off. . . . Da-sein can never escape the everyday way of being interpreted into which Da-sein has grown initially. All genuine understanding, interpreting . . . come about in it and out of it and against it. . . . The they prescribes that attunement, it determines what and how one “sees.” Idle talk . . . is the process of being uprooted [Entwurzeln] understanding of Da-sein. . . . being existentially uprooted [entwurzelt] idle talk is itself in the mode of constant uprootedness [Entwurzelung]. . . . the uncanniness of the suspension in which Dasein can drift toward an increasing groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit] remains concealed to actual Da-sein itself. (BT 157–59 = SZ 167–70)

In the entirety of §35, Heidegger does not talk in a single sentence about philosophy or philosophical positions but, as he explicitly says, about the They (even
though he would certainly say that many philosophers are engaged in idle talk). Probably according to all interpreters, the They is the public sphere, in the broadest sense, or, as Dreyfus claims, the ensemble of all the social practices, many of which people follow without any awareness. Heidegger is analyzing here and in the entire part on falling prey (Verfallenheit) (§§35–38) how, in his view, the They restricts the possible options for ordinary and inauthentic people to what is correct and proper, and how, therefore, these people communicate, gossip, read newspapers and journals and look for entertainment in movie theaters, in particular the people in the big cities. In §§35, 37, and 38, he does not talk at all about philosophy and does not mention either any possible similarities (perhaps, for instance, the lack of “primordial appropriation”) between the behavior of the ordinary people and the unfoundedness of a philosophical position. However, even if he might have had some in mind, this would not make him refer to a philosophical position in Sheehan’s sense. To be sure, in §36, the section on curiosity, he points to pure intuition as the “foundation [Fundament] of Western philosophy” (BT 160 = SZ 171), but only to emphasize that curiosity is the opposite of thaumazein in Aristotle (BT 161 = SZ 172). Thus, in the entire part on falling prey he only refers to philosophy to stress that he is not talking about philosophy and philosophical positions.

It is difficult to imagine anyone would think the quoted passage is about philosophy. Thus, as one could already do regarding his maneuvers discussed in the preceding section, one might consider this to be fraudulent on Sheehan’s part, as he does concerning Faye. However, things look even stranger when one turns to the other instances of Bodenlosigkeit in Being and Time. The quoted passage contains three of them. The next three occur in the same part on falling prey, namely in §38, likewise in sentences about the They (“But when Da-sein itself presents itself with the possibility in idle talk and public interpretedness of losing itself in the they, of falling prey to groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit]” [BT 165 = SZ 177]; “Da-sein plunges . . . into the groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit] and nothingness of inauthentic everydayness” [BT 167 = SZ 178]; “The kind of movement of plunging into and within the groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit] of inauthentic being in they constantly tears understanding away from projecting authentic possibilities” [BT 167 = SZ 178]). It is only in the last occurrence in the entire book that Heidegger does indeed talk about philosophical theories. However, he adds “ontological” to “Bodenlosigkeit,” obviously because he regards this as a special usage of Bodenlosigkeit (“Do not the paralogisms . . . reveal the lack of ontological foundation [ontologische Bodenlosigkeit] of the problematic of the self from Descartes’s res cogitans to Hegel’s concept of the Spirit?” [BT 412n19 = SZ 320n1]). In the context of the quotations from §38, Heidegger says of the inauthentic everydayness that “the opinion may now arise that understanding the most foreign cultures and ‘synthesizing’ them with our own may lead to the
thorough and first genuine enlightenment of Da-sein about itself” (BT 166 = SZ 178). Thus, when he writes close to the beginning of the entire book that the “tradition uproots [entwurzelt] the historicity of Da-sein to such a degree that it only takes an interest in the manifold forms of possible types, directions, and standpoints of philosophizing in the most remote and strangest cultures, and with this interest tries to veil its own groundlessness [Bodenlosigkeit]” (BT 19 = SZ 21), he may think of contemporaneous cultural fashions (“Indian wisdom! Orientalism! Gauguin in the South Sea!”). However, even if he talks about philosophical theories, about historicism, Sheehan’s case does not significantly improve: in six, or even seven, out of the eight occurrences of Bodenlosigkeit in Being and Time Heidegger does not talk about the unfoundedness of philosophical positions, and when he does so, he seems to regard this as a special usage.\(^{14}\)

In addition, Sheehan will certainly agree that Bodenlosigkeit is by no means the only name for the unfoundedness of philosophical positions. Rather, there is the vocabulary of Grund (Grundlage, Grundstruktur, etc.) (ground, foundation, basic structure, etc.) and Fundament (foundation). Probably, he will also agree that, in philosophical texts, this language is employed much more frequently than that of Boden. As a matter of fact, in Sein und Zeit Heidegger uses the vocabulary of Grund around eight hundred times, that of Fundament around one hundred fifty times, and that of Boden only around seventy-five times—and he uses the adjective grundlos (groundless, baseless) three times, in each case precisely in the sense of an unwarranted assumption or the unfoundedness of a philosophical position (BT 222, 277, 291 = SZ 239, 300, 316).\(^{15}\) One would have, therefore, expected him to say Fundamentlosigkeit, Grundlosigkeit, Grundlagenlosigkeit, or something similar, but not Bodenlosigkeit (“Herr Colleague, your theory lacks any Grundlage!”). Thus, from the viewpoint of philosophical language, there must be something special about Bodenlosigkeit, Entwurzelung, and Bodenständigkeit—which is, of course, that this language was distinctively used by the political right, already before the Weimar Republic.\(^{16}\)

The three quotations at the beginning of this section fit into this picture. In the first, from 1925, Heidegger deplores what he regards to be the Bodenlosigkeit of society at his time, and he hopes that it will disappear and Bodenständigkeit recur. In the second quotation, from shortly after Hitler’s “seizure of power,” he expresses his confidence that the National Socialist revolution will bring back Bodenständigkeit, and in the third, after his disappointment with empirical National Socialism, he refers, in unison with National Socialist ideology, to the Jewry as the vanguard of Bodenlosigkeit. In the first two of these quotations, Heidegger certainly characterizes a life-world as bodenständig if it is rooted in the Boden, in the earth as arable soil, and as bodenlos if it is not rooted in this way. A proponent of Bodenständigkeit will interpret the Bodenlosigkeit of a life-world and the Bodenlosigkeit of a philosophical position as the result of not-being-rooted-
in-the-soil. Each life-world has specific characteristics that differ from those of other life-worlds as well as from those of philosophical theories, whether founded or unfounded, and so does each bodenlose life-world. However, all the bodenlose life-worlds have in common that a life-world is bodenlos if it is uprooted from a life-world that is rooted in the soil. In addition, a philosophical position is bodenlos if it belongs to an uprooted life-world. Since, in Being and Time, Heidegger opts in §74 for the community of the people and, in §§35–38, does not talk about philosophical positions but, just as in the first two of the three quotations and probably also in the third one, about the modern life-world, and since, already in Being and Time, he regards the modern life-world—liberalism, society—as a deficient mode of being-with-others that has fallen away from the pre-modern life-world of community (see HD 274–78, HB 258–62, GN 57–66), he most probably uses in §§35–38 the notion of Bodenlosigkeit—if not exoterically, as it were, then at any rate esoterically—in the sense of not-being-rooted-in-the-soil. In addition, since he claims that modern philosophy of subjectivity since Descartes covers up handiness and is world-less (BT §§19–24), he possibly regarded in Being and Time the “lack of ontological foundation [ontologische Bodenlosigkeit]”[BT 412n19 = SZ 320n1] of modern philosophies as a consequence not only of their forgetfulness of the question of being but also of their not-being-rooted-in-the-soil.

Even if, however, these two reductions were still absent in Being and Time, one finds them after 1927. In a report on the neo-Kantian philosopher Hönigswald in 1933, Heidegger labeled the fact that Hönigswald had got a position at the University of Munich a “scandal / shame [Skandal].” For, neo-Kantianism is a philosophy that is “cut to the figure of liberalism,” since it dilutes the essence of man into a “free-floating [freischwebendes] consciousness” and “a universal logical world-reason”; in this way, the attention “was turned away from the human in his historical rootedness [geschichtlichen Verwurzelung] and in his folkish tradition of his descent [Herkunft] from out of Boden and blood [Blut].” (RZ 132)18 In The Origin of the Work of Art from 1935, Heidegger presented for the first time the notion of Erde (earth) and claimed that the pre-Socratic life-world was grounded in the earth, as he showed in his interpretation of a Greek temple. The “rootlessness [Bodenlosigkeit]” (OB 6 = HW 8) of occidental thinking began in the epoch of metaphysics, with the Latin translations of Greek terms, and this thinking is bodenlos because it no longer occurs in a world that is grounded in the earth. Taking van Gogh’s painting of a pair of shoes—for Heidegger, most probably erroneously, peasant shoes—as the Nordic equivalent to the Greek temple in the pre-metaphysical world, he says, similar to the second of the three quotations: “On the leather [of the shoes] lies the dampness and richness of the soil [Boden]. Under the soles slides the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls. The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth [Erde], its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field” (OB 14 = HW 19).19
In sum, it is obvious that Sheehan utterly misrepresents Heidegger’s usage of *Bodenlosigkeit* in *Being and Time*. Heidegger does not talk about “the unfoundedness of a philosophical position” (EF 383) but about what he regards to be the uprootedness of modern societies. In addition, the occurrence of the vocabulary of *Bodenlosigkeit* and *Entwurzelung* marks obviously the entry of politically right-wing language into philosophy.

**Bodenlosigkeit as Absence of Soil**

Given his false interpretation of Heidegger’s usage of the word *Bodenlosigkeit*, Sheehan would translate it into French most probably with *absence de fondement* (or *absence de fondements*, since he, wrongly, translates the singular, *Boden*, as plural [“‘grounds’ and ‘lack of grounds’” {EF 383}]; the plural is *Böden*). Faye, however, who “is not a native speaker of German” (EF 383), renders it as “‘absence of soil’ (absence de sol)” (EF 383; HI 12; sol: soil, earth, homeland, ground). During “a private conversation” in Sheehan’s presence in the context of the conference I already mentioned, “Professor Karsten Harries, who is a native speaker of German . . ., pointed out the meaning of *Bodenlosigkeit* to Faye” and thus “demolished Faye’s claim about ‘absence of soil’ on elementary philological grounds” (EF 383). Nonetheless, the next day “Faye continued to use his mistranslation” (EF 383) in a public lecture.

Sheehan does not tell readers what Harries said about the meaning of *Bodenlosigkeit*. However, Sheehan obviously thought that this meaning entitled speakers to refer to the alleged absence of any *Grund / Grundlage* (foundation) of a philosophical position but excluded “soil” as a possible meaning of *Boden in Bodenlosigkeit* to the effect that speakers were not allowed to use *Bodenlosigkeit* to refer to the soil of the earth and its absence. Now, irrespective of any other concerns *Grund(losigkeit)* and *Boden(losigkeit)* are just simply two different words. When asked about the meanings of the word *Grund* native German speakers will say, “reason, cause, foundation, bottom (of a body of water, a vessel [say, a schnapps bottle], a valley)” (*Satz vom zureichenden Grund = principle of sufficient reason*). When asked about *Boden*, however, the same speakers will immediately say, “something to stand on,” i.e., “a surface on which one (being the physical body, pulled by gravity, that one is) can stand (on one’s feet) or lie.” (In deep water, one *hat keinen Boden unter den Füssen* [has no Boden under one’s feet].) If one is standing in a room of a building, this *Boden* is the *Fußboden*, the *Boden* for the feet, the floor; the floor on top of a building and the entire volume covered by a slanted *Dach* (roof) is the *Dachboden*; and buildings cannot but stand on the *Erdboden*, the *Boden* of the *Erde* (earth). The word *Erdboden* normally refers to a larger, or unspecified, part of that surface. When one wants to refer to that spot on which one is actually standing or living, one can leave out *Erde* and just say, in the
singular, (dieser [this]) Boden, as Heidegger does and emphasizes by hyphenating the word bodenständig and as in the logo of the National Socialist Ministry for Food and Agriculture (“Blut und Boden [Blood and Soil]”). A Boden in this basic sense always excludes (me from) all the surrounding areas: I am standing here and not anywhere else, I was born in Swabia and not in Westphalia or anywhere else. In addition, the Boden on which one was born and grew up is a particular Boden. According to many, it has some influence on who one is or has become. According to many rightists, this Boden is even a major characteristic of an individual, for racist rightists in combination with one’s race. Thus, the paradigmatic meaning of the word Boden in its basic sense as a surface to stand on is, in particular for rightists, Heimatboden, one’s homeland, native soil. In addition, many rightists at Heidegger’s time exploited the “exclusive” character of any Boden: those who are not bodenständig on “our” Boden shall be excluded from it and “us.” For, foreigners are, or shall be, bodenständig somewhere else; liberals and socialists deny their Boden; being bodenlos (without Boden) gypsies live under the condition of (Heimat-)Bodenlosigkeit (absence of [homeland]-soil); and the Jews are not only bodenlos but even destroy any Bodenständigkeit and are, therefore, the incarnation of Bodenlosigkeit, of the absence of (being rooted in the) soil (of the Heimat), since they feel, as Heidegger says, pledged to nothing and make everything subservient to themselves. As the quotations from Heidegger show, for a rightist Boden acquires in this context of course “depth,” the depth of the earth whose surface it is. Any translator has to find a way to convey the difference between Grund and Boden, especially any Heidegger translator, because of Heidegger’s normal usage of Grund and his right-wing usage of Bodenlosigkeit.

Sheehan might point out that Heidegger employs Boden frequently with regard to the foundations of his own project and of other philosophical theories. However, as was mentioned, Heidegger uses words with Grund much more frequently, and Boden in this sense is a welcome variation of Grund / Grundlage / Fundament. Sheehan will perhaps object further that there is a third possibility, one that he seems to find in the sentence on the Jewry from 1938 that I quoted above, namely a “lack of ontological groundedness (not ‘absence of soil!’)” (FE 385n63; terminologically, he would ignore that, in Being and Time, Heidegger uses “ontological” precisely to single out the groundlessness of philosophical theories). Here, Sheehan might be right, depending on what exactly he means. However, as my quotations show, if Heidegger thought of types of Bodenlosigkeit different from both the unfounded-ness of a philosophical position and the absence of soil, he did so from 1925 on, at the latest, on the background of Bodenlosigkeit as absence of soil.

Even without further pros and cons it has become obvious that once one recognizes Sheehan’s more than “embarrassing blunder” (EF 381n47), Faye has much better cards than Sheehan does. The meanings of Boden and Grund in general as well as Heidegger’s usage of Grund and Bodenlosigkeit just simply speak for Faye.
In addition, as a native French speaker explained to me, *absence de sol* can convey *absence de fondement* but not the other way around; *absence de sol*, in contrast to *absence de fondement*, can have the anti-Semitic connotations and meaning that *Bodenlosigkeit* often had at Heidegger’s time, and there is no third word to translate *Boden* in this context. I have my musings about *absence*. However, I keep them to myself in honor of Sheehan’s deep respect for the distinction between native and non-native speakers of a language.

*Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, Turkey*

**Notes**

1. The following abbreviations are used:
   - GN = Johannes Fritsche, *Geschichtlichkeit und Nationalsozialismus in Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014), revised German translation of HD.
Absence of Soil, Historicity, and Goethe in Heidegger’s Being and Time

Insertions in square brackets (“[]”) are Sheehan’s or mine. HB contains a summary of HD and my papers on the issue. GN contains some new parts (57–70, 207–10, and 282–329). I very much thank Ian Moore for his help with the English language.

2. Sheehan creates the impression that Faye’s entire book would pretty much stand and fall with Faye’s interpretation of *Being and Time*, especially since he claims that, if Faye is wrong regarding *Bodenlosigkeit,* “much of [Faye’s] book collapses and, along with it, his recent edited collection *Heidegger, le sol, la communauté, la race* [Paris: Beauchesne, 2014]” (EF 383; see 369, 385). However, he provides no further commentary on this contention. What is more, he treats only passages from the first and the ninth chapters. As to Faye’s main topic, presented in chapters two through eight, namely Heidegger’s unpublished seminars from 1933 to 1935, Sheehan just simply says that he “had learned some notable things from” Faye (EF 370). For a list of all of Sheehan’s charges in EF, see Matthew Sharpe, “Of Idols and Tribes, Forests and Trees: On Sheehan’s Extraordinary Claim that Emmanuel Faye is a ‘Fraud’” (https://www.academia.edu/18241579/Of_idols_and_tribes_forests_and_trees_Some_Considerations_on_Sheehans_extrardinary_labelling_of_Emmanuel_Faye_a_Fraud_, accessed December 28, 2015), 4n8. Sharpe rejects as inconclusive or otherwise erroneous several of Sheehan’s claims not related to *Being and Time* (ibid., esp. 16–26).

3. *Schicksal* is normally translated as “fate” and *Geschick* as “destiny.” Sheehan’s quotation marks in his insertions might create the impression that the insertions are Faye’s, an impression not unwelcome to Sheehan. Thus, perhaps they are, so to speak, a minor Freudian fraud on Sheehan’s part.

4. The replacement of the indefinite article “a” in front of “people” with “the” is mine. The indefinite article both in Stambaugh’s translation and Sheehan’s comments takes away the polemical character of Heidegger’s formula and transforms him into a multi-culturalist of Herder’s type (see HD 238f.n17).

5. Since Scheler had sufficient conceptual means to distinguish his position from Hitler, he turned, precisely because of Hitler, in the Twenties away from any rightist politics and defended the Weimar Republic (see HD 142–48, NS).

6. See on these sentences note 8 below.

7. *Was sich schickt* is, literally, “what sends itself [to you],” just as *Geschick* and *Schicksal* do. I, in turn, *schicke mich in* = *füge mich in* (send myself to = comply with) *was sich schickt*, *Geschick*, or my *Schicksal*. For the history of *sich schicken*, *schicklich*, and *Schicksal*, see Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm (München: DTV, 1984), vol. 14, 2649–54, 2658–60.

8. See for Löwith’s individualistic interpretation of Heidegger (a projection of his own agenda onto Heidegger) and its influence on the American scholarship, HD 207–15, 355, NP = GN 282–300. §74 does not come out of the blue. Rather, *Being and Time* as a whole displays in its structure and “choreography” the rightist notion of history, with its final emergence of destiny, and culminates in the condensed presentation of that notion in §74, adding the specifications concerning revolutionary rightist politics and the community of the people (see HD 29–68, 124–42, 274–79n25; more concisely HB 258–66, GN 57–106, 177–99, 309). Sheehan claims that the German phrase *sich zusammensetzen aus* in the sentence beginning with “Destiny is not composed of individual fates [setzt sich nicht aus einzelnen Schicksalen zusammen]” (BT 352.5–7 = SZ 384.32–34) is not, as Faye has it, *reposer sur* (EF 382–83). This is certainly right.
However, while Faye's rendering is in no way inappropriate regarding the meaning of the entire sentence and might even be better than Heidegger's own formulation, Sheehan's interpretation of the sentence and his American interpretation of §74 could not be further off the mark (except, perhaps, Dreyfus's interpretation [see HD 326–27n60]). See on the whole sentence, the following ones, and the sentence with "konstituiert sich" (SZ 383; in the spirit of the American interpretation of §74 Stambaugh's "is . . . constituted" [BT 351] turns it upside down) HD 51–62, 131–34, 262–63n32, 268–69n3, 283–84n51 et passim. For "Miteinandersein" (SZ 384 = BT 352, "being-with-one-another") in the sentence with sich zusammensetzen aus, see HD 133, 283–84n51 et passim, HB 261, 267, GN 186–87 et passim, NS XXn21. Sheehan finds the "emphatic climax of Being and Time" in "SZ 385.11–18" (= BT 352.19–24 = BTM 437.6–12) (EF 381; see MS 182–83), most interpreters, by contrast, in the two sentences containing erwidern and Widerruf (SZ 386.3–7 = BT 352.43–352.3 = BTM 438.1–5) at the end of the following paragraph (see on them [and the mistranslation of the first of them in BT, BTM, and Martineau] HD IXf., 7–28, 66–67, 133–36, 292n66, 335–36n72 et passim, HB 275–76n21; Sheehan follows BTM and Martineau [MS 180n89]). Compare for Sheehan's steps leading up to his interpretation of fate MS 178–82 with HD 37–67 et passim.

9. For instance, as Tönnies notes in 1931, the liberals, the conservatives, and the leftist parties as well each claimed Hegel for their agenda (Ferdinand Tönnies, "Hegels Naturrecht," in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, ed. Helmut Reichelt [Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1972], 783).


11. Martin Heidegger, Überlegungen II–VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938) (GA 94), (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2014), 38; the ellipsis is Heidegger's. For "the mother [die Mutter]" and "the father [der Vater]" in Hitler, see HD 76, 249.


15. By contrast, without the instances in quotations from Count Yorck (SZ 401, 402, 402 = BT 366, 367, 367) the adjective bodenlos occurs twice in the context of everydayness (SZ 169, 177 = BT 158, 165) and twice regarding a philosophical project (SZ 312, 330 = BT 288, 303).

Absence of Soil, Historicity, and Goethe in Heidegger’s Being and Time

Kaiserreich. Sprache, Rasse, Religion (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). I thank Uwe Puschner for these references, especially since my “archive” is presently not accessible.

17. Liberalism (with the Jews as the paradigmatic liberals) was for Heidegger the name for the foe throughout his career. When, around 1937, he got disappointed with empirical National Socialism, he claimed that it had relapsed into liberalism (see NS).

18. Freischwebend is for Heidegger another expression for bodenlos (see SZ 36, 177 = BT 32, 165). It does not follow from Heidegger’s case that the vocabulary of Boden in other philosophers has right-wing and anti-Semitic connotations and meanings.

19. See already the references to Volk, Erde, Heimat (homeland), world, history, and Bodenständigkeit in the first draft of The Origin of the Work of Art (Martin Heidegger, “Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerks: Erste Ausarbeitung,” Heidegger Studies 5 [1989]: 12, 19–20, 22), according to Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann from 1931/2 (Martin Heidegger, “Zur Überwindung der Aesthetik: Zu ‘Ursprung des Kunstwerks,’” Heidegger Studies 6 [1990]: 5n*). I thank Ian Moore for this reference. It is often said that Heidegger’s analysis of handiness is centered on the user and producer and therefore incompatible with National Socialism. This may well be the case and would precisely be the reason why Heidegger grounded his theory of art and production on the notion of the earth in the thirties.

20. According to Heidegger, destiny has established in the modern epoch as truth the very uprooting of any Bodenständigkeit that the Jews, due to their race, had always already practiced before modernity (NS XX–XX). Hitler had proclaimed already in Mein Kampf that the Germans should conquer Russia (HD 82). This was not a matter of the removal of Bodenlosigkeit but of the acquisition of Lebensraum (space for living) for the German people, the Volk ohne Raum (people without space), privileged by its race and Heimatboden to rule over the entire Erdboden. See for Hitler’s usage of Boden and Raum Karl Lang, “Der Terminus ‘Lebensraum’ in Hitlers ‘Mein Kampf,’” Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 13(4) (1965): 426–37. I thank Barbara Zehnpfennig for this reference. Heidegger’s lecture course in Summer 1942 on Hölderlin’s poem “Der Ister” (the river Danube) boiled down to a justification of Germany’s war on Eastern Europe from the vantage point of the history of being. After World War II, German gentleman-farmers who had fled from the areas occupied by the Russian army to Western Germany were said to have lost their Grund und Boden, Boden most probably referring to the land they had owned and Grund to the farm(-buildings, etc.). For the history of Boden, bodenlos, and Grund, see Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, vol. 2, 210–16; vol. 9, 667–732.