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Drama around a war-time Heisenberg letter

*Das Ideal lässt sich am besten
an den Opfern messen, die es
verlangt.*

(Ascribed to C.F.v. Weizsäcker;
Untranslatable since "Opfer" can
mean either sacrifices or victims)

Abstract

A recently published 1943 Heisenberg letter has been interpreted as reporting on a sudden chasm in a close relation between Heisenberg and Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker. With reference to other sources concerning the relations and attitudes of these protagonists it is argued that there was from the beginning an imbalance and lack of congruence in important ways, persisting over time, the 1943 incident rather being an atypical expression of frustration, with little repercussion on the relationship. This letter can even be interpreted as a unique expression of its author's resentment of phraseology with roots in Nazi rhetoric.

Keywords: Heisenberg, Weizsäcker, Heidegger, relations, National Socialist rhetoric

1. Heisenberg's version

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Elisabeth o. Werner Heisenberg
(Leipzig University Archive)

In a letter to his wife Elisabeth, called "Li" (14 October 1943; Hirsch-Heisenberg, 2011, p.224), who had moved with the children to the family's secondary residence in the Bavarian Alps, Werner Heisenberg (WH) reports on "a long conversation" the evening before with his friend and former protégé Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (CFvW). A section of this letter (which is reproduced here *in extenso* as Appendix) has recently been given an interpretation as evidence of a dramatic rupture of a presumably close friendship:

*In these days, there are ubiquitous arguments over wartime efforts. Carl Friedrich v. Weizsäcker [CFvW was, since a year, full professor of Theoretical Physics at the *Kamfuniversität* in Strasbourg] is here and yesterday evening I had a long conversation with him on the same matters which you discussed earlier with Mrs. Westphal [Maria Westphal was a friend of Elisabeth H's, living in Freiburg]. Basically, there is no understanding whatsoever between us; this way of making principles of everything and demanding 'ultimate decisions' is entirely foreign to me. Weizs. [sic] can declaim sentences like: he would be quite at ease in a totally destroyed city, because then one would be sure that it [?] would not be repeated, and that the individuals would be ennobled, by their experience of guilt and penitence, to reflect in a different way – this being a reference to the new faith which is his own confession. Then he continues that this faith naturally is the implacable foe of the faith of the old world,*



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in particular that of the Anglo-Saxons, and that also Christ had said that he has not come to bring peace but the sword – whereupon one has again arrived at the outset, namely that whoever does not share my faith must be exterminated. To me this never-ending circular argument about the most sacred goods that have to be defended with fire and sword is absolutely unbearable. Apparently I am entirely un-German in this. Against my normal habit, in such discussions I get into such violent opposition that in the end I can only represent the boring petite bourgeoisie.

This excerpt has been interpreted (Schäfer, 2013; 2014) as strong evidence of "a sharp contention" [*ein scharfer Widerspruch*]; "abysmal difference" [*abgrundtiefe Verschiedenheit*], "unrestrained staggering" [*unverhohlene Erschütterung*], and "consternation" [*Erschreckung*], and that WH is "deeply distressed" [*tief verstört*] and "in shock" [*schockiert*] when he writes this letter the following day. It is suggested that the former friends would probably never forget this "violent exchange of ideas" [*explosiver Gedankenaustausch*], and that their later unanimity in accounts of wartime co-operation is therefore particularly impressive as a "stratagem" [*strategische Aufführung*] (Schäfer, 2014).

One is reminded (*mutatis mutandis*) of the chasm in the relations of Bohr and Heisenberg in Copenhagen in September 1941.

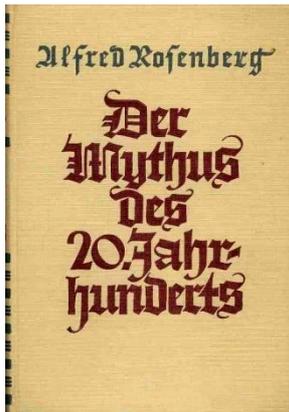
We have to remember that we only have WH's perception of the incident, the way he chose to render it in the letter. An immediate impression is that of indignation and disappointment, but intellectually rather than emotionally or morally. For all we know, CFvW may not even have noted WH's reaction as he habitually ventilated his latest reflections on the human condition in general and the political realities in particular, interlaced (as we shall see) with Heideggerian *idées reçues*.

2. Faith and world-view [*Glaube und Weltanschauung*]

To understand the situation, we have to investigate the possible or intended meanings of vague expressions and innuendos provided in the letter:

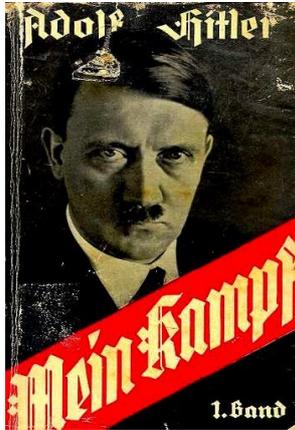
- A) WH refers to a pseudo-psychological assertion by CFvW that total destruction has the positive effect on the attitudes of individuals as they, out of their experience of guilt and penitence (not specified), would realize the need for a new faith or creed [*Glaube*]. This faith, shared by CFvW, is not described in the letter, but might be related to CFvW's personal perception of Heidegger's abstract philosophy, which *inter alia* propounded an "ennobled" Freiburg version of National Socialism (Schäfer, 2014, p.511-512, 517).

- B) CFvW claims that his faith is obviously [*natürlich*] the irreconcilable foe of the faith of the old world, in particular of the world of the 'Anglo-Saxons'. This conceptually and semantically strange utterance sounds like an echo from a Heidegger lecture in 1942 (which CFvW can well have attended): *"We know to-day that the Anglo-Saxon world of Americanism is firmly determined to annihilate Europe, thus our fatherland [Heimat] and thereby the foundation of Western culture [Anfang des Abendlandes]* (quoted in Schäfer, 2014, p.512). The concept of "faith" (as in point A) here is not religious. As it is used, it refers rather to a world view [*Weltanschauung*] and to political objectives, as indicated by WHs remark on "the most sacred goods which have to be defended with fire and sword". This inevitably brings to mind concepts like *Volk*, *Lebensraum* and even *Rasse*.



Here it is relevant to note that in the ubiquitous NS-rhetoric "Glaube" was quasi-synonymous with "acceptance of NS ideology". This is obvious from a Führer-speech on 1st May 1935: *"My will - and this must be realized by all - is your faith [Glaube]. My faith is for me as for you everything in this world! But the greatest that God has given me on this earth is my people! My faith rests in the people. It is the people I serve through my will, and to the people I consecrate my life"* [1] (Schmitz-Berning, 2007, p.276). One can here compare with the Heidegger-quotation in note [11]. The party ideologue Alfred Rosenberg could, with characteristic abstruseness, perceive a new religion in the 'new faith': *"But a new faith awakes to-day. The myth of the blood, the faith that, by defending the blood, we defend in the first place the divine within man. Faith, embodied by the most brilliant insight, that Nordic blood is a mystery that has vanquished and superseded the obsolete sacraments."* [2](*Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1940, p.114)

- C) CFvW also had made reference to the Gospels to support a bellicose conviction, namely (considering the context of the discussion, apparently in support of the German war and expansion effort) Matthew 10:34 (*I have not come with peace but with the sword*). This is a particularly obscure locus (a parallel is found in Luke 12:49-51), here taken out of context and given a theologically unjustified interpretation. But anyway it would be a fallacious argument for CFvWs purpose, an *argumentum ad verecundiam*. As usual, one could find antithetic statements, like John 18:36 (*My kingdom is not an earthly kingdom*) and Matthew 26:52 (*Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword shall perish by the sword*), from much



- clearer contexts. The same fallacy seeking support from Biblical loci, has been notoriously applied over the ages to justify political, ideological, and even personal agenda [3].
- D) Eschatological imagery about "fire and sword" as expression of the wrath of God and the perseverance of righteousness had older Biblical roots, as in Isaiah 66:16 *"For by fire and his sword the Lord will execute judgment on all people and many will be those slain by the Lord."* Ironically, this phrase was incorporated in NS-rhetoric, though with a rather different meaning, as is evidenced by a quotation from the SS-periodical *Das Schwarze Korps* (24 November 1938, a fortnight after the pogroms of the Crystal Night 9-10 November): *"... the necessity to exterminate the Jewish underworld exactly as we are used to eliminate criminals from our state of law and order, namely by fire and sword"* [4](Kershaw, 2000, p.213). The Führer had himself, with Wagnerian pathos, introduced the metaphor on the last page of Part 1 of *Mein Kampf* (with reference to his recitation of the 25 theses of the NSDAP party program in the Hofbraukeller on 24 February 1920): *"A fire had been ignited and one day from its embers will come a sword that will resurrect freedom for the German Siegfried, and for the German people its life"* [5].
- E) The ideological and political stance CFvW wanted to argue in favor of is only vaguely indicated. But the formulations and vocabulary must have been perceived by WH against the background of current rhetoric in the public sphere, and by his familiarity with CHvWs susceptibility to impression by authorities (see section 4). Clearly, he does not regard these opinions as small-talk but as expression of a fully conscious and seriously meant attitude. With obvious disapproval he recognizes, in CFvWs oration, parroting *"this never-ending circular argument about the most sacred goods that have to be defended with fire and sword"* and the implication that *"whoever does not share my faith has to be exterminated."* WH regards this attitude as "unbearable" [*unerträglich*] and works himself, against his habit, into such fierce contention [*in so heftige Opposition geraten*], that he cannot argue rationally, but opts out of the debate, calling his own attitude (perhaps ironically) "entirely un-German". For a decidedly patriotic person, this sounds like a strong dissociation from CFvWs stance, as it is perceived by Heisenberg.
- F) The allusion to an earlier conversation with Maria Westphal has been interpreted as a prudential circumvention of a direct account of the incident (Schäfer, 2014, p. 508): *"The conspicuously vague hint indicates that both conversations moved in a perilous zone, breaking taboos of political discussion...."* But this is contradicted by Heisenberg's

account. The phrase "entirely un-German", if intercepted by the "Security Services" could be fatal, as expressing defeatism.

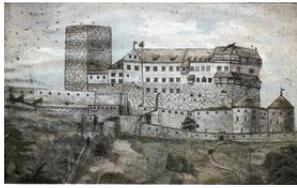
3. Ambiguous relations

Before discussing a possible chasm in the relation between WH and CFvW one has to consider the nature of that relation, which is described in some detail by Cassidy (1992, 2014, 2015): Their acquaintance began in early 1927 in Copenhagen where CFvW's father Ernst worked at the German embassy and WH worked in the Niels Bohr Institute. CFvW was a school-boy of 15 and WH (26) already famous for his groundbreaking work in Quantum Mechanics. A rather imbalanced 'friendship' developed. WH soon invited CFvW to hiking tours and he frequented the Weizsäcker home. CFvW moved to Leipzig as a student in 1929, and passed his doctorate in physics in 1933, *not* with WH but his colleague Friedrich Hund. He pursued his post-doctoral work [*Habilitation*] under WH finishing in early 1936, then went to Berlin, first as assistant to Lise Meitner at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) for Chemistry, soon changing to KWI for Physics (then led by Peter Debye). From 1939 CFvW participated in the German nuclear fission program, also after he had, in 1942, been installed as professor of Theoretical Physics at the *Reichsuniversität* in Strasbourg, also known as *Kampfuniversität* (cf. note [14]).

5

After the war his interest turned more towards Philosophy, Theology and Politics, including a kind of "theory of everything" characterized as *Spinorism* (Lyre, 2003) – (not to be confounded with *Spinozism!*). We do not know how WH *really* valued CFvW's physics or his philosophy of science. Apart from the post-graduate work in Leipzig and the nuclear fission work at KWI-P there was not much direct scientific cooperation. Indeed there is only one common published paper, a 3-page note written during the detention at Farm Hall in Autumn 1945 (Heisenberg & Weizsäcker, 1948). According to CFvW, WH early on discouraged his philosophizing. But WH was not himself immune, as is evident from his posthumously published 1942 essay *Ordnung der Wirklichkeit* (Heisenberg, 1989 [1942]). CFvW's philosophical writings are, by the way, not uncontroversial among scholars in contemporary philosophy (Kanitscheider, 1993).

So the "intimate friendship" was not primarily based on common research interests. It therefore seems enigmatic what WH might mean when writing to his mother on 29 October 1934 (Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003) he states that "*Karl-Friedrich is in good shape, he works pretty much and pays me a short visit almost every day. There are actually only three really significant persons who exert important influence on my research: Bohr, Robert Honsell and Karl-Friedrich*". Cassidy (1992, p.84) mentions Honsell *en passant* as a friend of youth with



Burg von Pappenheim



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philosophical inclinations, later working as a district judge, *nota bene* in the NS administration of justice.

Cassidy (2014, 2015) points at a strange feature in Heisenberg's self-image, at odds with his otherwise perfect control of his interests and performance. In letters to his mother and confidant, we read – in rather high-strung language - concerning the relationship to CFvW (quoted from Hirsch-Heisenberg, 2003 and Cassidy, 2014): "*To me indeed only that night in Pappenheim and being together with Weizsäcker's have given my life any meaning*" [6] (27.10.1932); "*This world [of the Weizsäcker's] is through Karl-Friedrich very close to my heart.. It has already had a deep meaning for my life that I can be together with Karl-Friedrich and it can hardly be called a mistake... Thus to demand from me that I should eliminate this part of my life as mistake or disorder [Krankheit] would be as if you demanded that I should sell music and piano in order to have better meals....Therefore it is important for me to be able to see KF at least once a day*" [7](27.10.1932); In a letter to his mother (9 October 1932) WH had referred to a letter from CFvW's mother expressing disapproval of WH showing emotional interest in CFvW's younger sister Adelheid (b. 1916). It appears from this correspondence that CFvW's parents, as well as WH's mother believed (rightly or wrongly) that there was a homoerotic element in the relation between WH and CFvW (note the expression 'mistake or disorder'). CFvW's parents practically declared WH *persona non grata* (letters 9 and 27 October 1932, Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003). This did not deter WH from defending the *Staatssekretär* at the Wilhelmstrasse trials in Nuremberg in 1947, where he develops the *Abmilderer* (attenuator) hypothesis (Heisenberg 1947; Schwarz, 2013; 2014). It is remarkable (and not without a certain logic) that EvW had moral principles when feeling the duty to defend the family honor, while he had no scruples when, as high civil servant in the Third Reich, he *de facto* contributed to the realization of the *Endlösung* (Conze, 2010, p.391ff.)

However, the friendship with CFvW continued: "*Only this friendship with Carl-Friedrich, who gives serious thought to problems of society with his characteristic diligence, allows me some access to this topic which is otherwise alien to me*" [8](8.10.1934, Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003); and, after CFvW announced his betrothal: "*Carl Friedrich has become engaged, even if not yet officially. You must not talk to him about this. For almost ten years I have not had any other person for myself than him, and now he goes away, for ever... I must have really good luck if my life is to come to anything in the end.*" [9](28.2.1936, Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003). The last comment expresses a state of mind that also might reflect the political situation – a month earlier the party newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* had launched what became known as the *Deutsche Physik Affair* (Cassidy, 1992, p.349ff.; Schwarz, 2012), which had traumatic implications for WH. But on the whole, there is in these

letters a strangely melodramatic tone - the situation is reminiscent of Antonio and Bassanio in the opening scene of *The Merchant of Venice*.

In the course of 1936 it became clear that Ernst v. Weizsäcker definitely refused to accept a marriage between WH and Adelheid, who then married an officer in the Wehrmacht. WH writes: "*The relation to the Weizsäcker family is likely to break off completely, and therefore everything will be different. You must excuse that I have not been keen on talking with you about these matters... Meanwhile I will devote myself to the work for which I seem to have come to this world; and reminiscences of what is really important will accompany this work like sweet music*" [10] (12 November 1936, Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003). WH married Elisabeth ('Li') Schumacher on 29 April 1937 after three months' acquaintance (Cassidy, 1992, p. 367; 372)

As part of the background to the alleged chasm in the relation between WH and CFvW, we should note that CFvW, like WH, Otto Hahn, EvW, Heidegger and their consort belonged to the stratum of conservative, anti-democratic elite, that in the early 1930s welcomed the NS movement, believing in its potential for resurrecting Germany to its earlier status (Struve, 1973; Mommsen, 1989; Walker, 1989, introduction). This is evident (if we discard the idea of facile opportunism) from contemporary statements (e.g. Hachtmann, 2007, *passim*; Schwarz, 2013). One characteristic example is Heidegger's speech to the Freiburg students on 3 November 1933 "*It is not theories and ideas that shall direct your being. It is the Führer himself and only He that is the reality of the present and the future and its law*"[11] (Farias, 1989, p.176). Of the three physicists mentioned, only Heisenberg was, temporarily, in danger of losing the status of 'political reliability' (in the "Deutsche Physik"-affair (cf. notes [13] and [21]), and throughout the war they were engaged in the top-secret German nuclear fission program, whatever they thought about the NS regime.

4."Basically, there is no understanding between us"

At the first encounter with WH in 1927, 15-year old CFvW declared his ambition to develop "a philosophical interpretation of Nature" (Schäfer, 2014, p.510 and note 24), while WH more pragmatically suggested some physics studies to begin with. But CFvW was no longer an adolescent in 1935, when he reported on a meeting with Heidegger in uncritically devoted admiration, asserting that Heidegger was the most important philosopher of the 20th century, the one who best understood the unsolved problems of the epoch. But simultaneously he came under the spell of the philosopher's ideas of the "intrinsic truth and greatness of the [NS-] movement" [*die innere Wahrheit und grösse der Bewegung*], and of

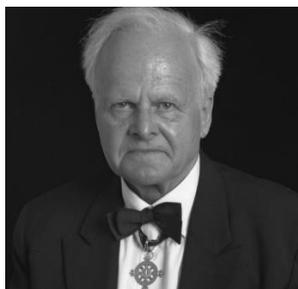
regarding not only Soviet communism but also and "Western decadent democracies" (in particular the 'Anglo-Saxon') as the major enemies of the German *Volkstum* (Schäfer, 2014, p.513; cf. section 2B). And his little modest day-dreaming in 1939 seems particularly immature, when he imagined himself convincing Hitler of a "reasonable" international policy by using his 'unique' knowledge of bomb construction as argument [e.g. Hoffmann, 1993, p.338, where CFvW in an interview recalls: "... then the top leaders, including Adolf Hitler, will have to meet with me..." [12)].

We further can conclude that CFvW was regarded as "politically reliable" in NS-Germany. He was not a member of NSDAP but of the closely party-related and important NSDDB [NS university teachers' association (Walker, 1989, p.68)] – and it is here not irrelevant that CFvW's father, whom CFvW admired as *pater familias* was (at the time of the conversation) member of NSDAP and a "honorary" SS-General, recently having left the position of Ribbentrop's Secretary of State in the Foreign Office - to become German ambassador to the Vatican. Further, CFvW was a member of the "Uranverein" (the German nuclear fission program), he could travel abroad (e.g. twice to Copenhagen in 1941, when WH still had difficulties after the Deutsche Physik-affair [13]), he was (as mentioned before) recruited to the NS-"Kampfuniversität" in Strasbourg in 1942 [14]. And he was proposed by German authorities as director of the Niels Bohr Institute after its confiscation in December 1943 by the German wartime administration, although he declined in a message to WH (16 January 1944): [...] *Wirtz wrote me quite confidentially that he had heard from Diebner that the German representation in Copenhagen is thinking of giving me the job of directing the Bohr institute. He has undoubtedly told you about it already. However, if I am the first to tell you about it, please don't mention it to Diebner. Although it practically goes without saying, I wish to give you definite assurance that I would be decidedly unhappy to take on that kind of post. If this plan is still intended I would be very grateful to you if you could use your influence to change it [...]* [15]. Note that the date of this message is only three months after the events described in WH's letter to "Li" referred to in Section 1 above.

At his arrest by General Groves's ALSOS mission in May 1945, CFvW immediately decides to cooperate, delivering documents and equipment to the Allies (Walker, 1989, p.158). At Farm Hall he has completely switched loyalties to the Allies, even talking about moving to the UK, and generally trying to play a dominant role, next to WH. It was CFvW who developed the declaration, which Max v. Laue facetiously called "*Die Lesart*" [the interpretation], namely that the German fission project never had the objective of producing nuclear weapons: any such ideas had been resisted for moral reasons

– if they the physicists had decided to go ahead, they would also have proved successful (Bernstein, 2001, p.351).

But there were disharmonies. In an interesting incident at Farm Hall [16] [Bernstein, 2001, p.101, 21 July 1945] we hear: Bagge: "Did you notice how Heisenberg wiped the floor with Weizsäcker?" Korsching: "And how! I rubbed my hands with joy. It is of course very degrading that he [CFvW] cannot even do a few simple calculations." Bagge: "Heisenberg can of course make it up with him, if later he publishes the thing together with Weizsäcker". Korsching: "As far as I know Heisenberg, he will not do that". Apparently CFvW had antagonized some colleagues by an arrogant attitude in the "Uranverein". This conversation would be even more interesting if we think that the gentlemen assumed that the room was "bugged", which indeed it was! (There are many conversations in the Farm Hall reports that seem to be directed towards the "ears of the walls" rather than to the conversation participants).



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Others were more appreciative. In his diary notes from Farm Hall, Otto Hahn writes (Hahn, 1945, 12 December): *Weizsäcker surely works on all kinds of things. [...] Unimaginable gift of fast perception and application* [17]. With unheeded admiration, Max v.Laue in his correspondence with Lise Meitner (Lemmerich, 1998, 30 November 1942) writes: *I am still entirely under the impression of the Weizsäcker lecture. This man could really transform the listener to a new person. I cannot recall ever having experienced anything similar. [...] Whether Weizsäcker will turn out being a great physicist might remains to be seen. Definitely he is a great individual* [18]. CFvW had read a paper three weeks before in the Harnack House (the meeting place of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft) on the subject "The question of the infinity of the world as an example of symbolic thinking in the natural sciences" [*Die Frage der unendlichkeit der Welt als Beispiel für symbolisches Denken in der Naturwissenschaft*]. Lise Meitner maintained a more reserved critical attitude.

CFvW himself acknowledged his problematic lack of perspicacity in his youth, when years later he wrote (somewhat obliquely): *In retrospect I consider my patterns of making commitments and expressing opinions in those days as an immature expression of premonitions or perceptions, that went beyond my powers of intellectual mastery. I had to acquire a rationally dispassionate approach, [and to redress (?)] a piece of poorly internalized enlightenment and respect for political wisdom and the principles of of legality and liberalism.*" [19] (Weizsäcker, 1988, p.361). When that book appeared in 1988, its author was hailed in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for his "deeply reflected papers" dealing with "the central crisis of humanity" and he was presented as "one who dwells close to the sources of wisdom", while an obituary in *Die Welt* (28 April 2007) had the title "Universalgelehrter".

5. An atypical reaction

To this background I venture to suggest an alternative interpretation of the Heisenberg letter to Li (14 October 1943) under discussion. I think that Heisenberg knew the character and loquacity of CFvW quite well [20] from many non-research conversations on a wide range of current issues. Very likely WH will have talked with his wife repeatedly about his relation to CFvW, which was collegially friendly but strangely imbalanced both on the scientific and the emotional level.

In Autumn 1943, when the war fortunes had turned badly and Germany was subject to heavy bomb raids, the frustration and disappointment naturally was expressed by many, also under influence of state propaganda, in bellicose terms where biblical references out of context should serve as justification and "proof" of righteousness (even of the NS cause).

Heisenberg may well have recognized the NS-connotations of terms like "Glaube", "mit Feuer und Schwert" and "heiligste Güter". Expressed differently: It was imprudent of CFvW to use a language with terms ubiquitous in the *Lingua Tertii Imperii* if he wanted to be understood differently. This purposeless speechification and idiosyncratic philosophizing with Heideggerian intimations (and propped up with biblical *ad hoc* citations) had little affinity to Heisenberg's style, and this could explain the feeling of repugnance which is so evident in the letter to Li (14 October 1943). If the present interpretation of the background to the letter to Li is largely correct, this letter might be a unique document, where WH, who from bitter experience (the *Deutsche Physik* affair) had realized that for survival he had to maintain the status of "politically reliable" [21], perceives it as transgressing bounds of decency and beyond justification to phrase one's political and moral stance in terms of NS-Rhetoric – or in an indistinguishable simile.

Considering the early, almost passionate, attachment described by Cassidy (1992, 2014), it would not surprise if the phrase "Ich verstehe mich im Grunde überhaupt nicht mit ihm" represents a feeling of disappointment and alienation that had developed over time rather than a discovery [*Entdeckung* (Schäfer 2014)] in October 1943 - perhaps it dated back as far as February 1936 (when CFvW announced his marriage plans), and now surfaced as a hidden message to "Li" that the old feeling for CFvW was definitely gone. I suggest that the "outburst" in this letter can be understood simply as an expression of WH being impatient and annoyed at wasting his time, in particular if he had heard the same talk before, and that there is no need for descriptors like those listed in the paragraph following the above quotation from WH's letter of 24 October 1943. The

irritation may well have abated by the time the letter was dropped down the mailbox, so that things could go on as usual without any dramatic chasm.

Notes:

[1] *Mein Wille – das muss unser aller Bekenntnis sein – ist euer Glaube! Mein Glaube ist mir – genau so wie euch – alles auf dieser Welt! Das Höchste aber, was mir Gott auf dieser Welt gegeben hat, ist mein Volk! In ihm ruht mein Glaube. Ihm diene ich mit meinem Willen, und ihm gebe ich mein Leben.* When the Richard Kuhn was awarded the 1938 Nobel Prize (chemistry), he declined – following a ban issued by the NS government when the pacifist C. v. Ossietzky had been awarded the 1935 Peace Prize – adding: „The Führer’s will is our faith“ [*Des Führers Wille ist unser Glaube*] (Deichmann, 2007, p. 477). This example of a citation verbatim is indicative of the process of alignment.

[2] *Heute erwacht aber ein neuer Glaube: der Mythos des Blutes, der Glaube, mit dem Blute auch das göttliche Wesen des Menschen überhaupt zu verteidigen. Der mit hellstem Wissen verkörperte Glaube, dass das nordische Blut jenes Mysterium darstellt, welches die alten Sakramente ersetzt und überwunden hat* (Alfred Rosenberg: *Der Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts*, München 1940, p.114) . In a letter to his mother (26 Jan. 1935, Hirsch-Heisenberg 2003, p.234) WH writes, indifferent to possible interception: ”That you take the *Mythos des 20 Jahrhunderts* so seriously is more than it deserves. I have for a long time got used to the fact that exactly the most wanton and absolute stupidity finds the greatest propagation in the public.” [...*ich habe mich längst daran gewöhnt, dass gerade der leichsinnigste und kompletteste Unsinn in der Allgemeinheit die grösste Verbreitung findet.*]

[3] In poetic terms:

The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.

An evil soul producing holy witness

Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,

A goodly apple rotten in the heart:

O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

Shakespeare: Merchant of Venice I:3

[4] *Im Stadium einer solchen Entwicklung ständen wir daher vor der harten Notwendigkeit die jüdische Unterwelt genau so auszurotten, wie wir in unserem Ordnungsstaat Verbrecher eben auszurotten pflegen: mit Feuer und Schwert.*

[5] *Ein Feuer war entzündet, aus dessen Glut dereinst das Schwert kommen muss, das dem Germanischen Siegfried die Freiheit, der deutschen Nation das Leben wiedergewinnen soll* (A. Hitler: *Mein Kampf*, Vol. 1 [1925], München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1938, p.406)

[6] *Für mich ist es so dass nur diese Nacht in Pappenheim und das Zusammensein mit Weizsäckers meinem Leben überhaupt einen Sinn gegeben hat.* A reference to a hiking tour 16-28 July 1920, when the Count of Pappenheim had offered WHs youth group to bivouac on the premises of his castle. (Rechenberg, 2010, Vol. 1, pp 49ff.).

[7] *Diese Welt ist mir in Karl-Friedrich ...ganz nahe... Es hat für mein Leben schon einen tiefen Sinn gehabt, dass ich mit Karl-Friedrich zusammen kam, und ein Irrtum war es eigentlich nicht. ... Also von mir zu verlangen dass ich diesen Teil meines Lebens als Irrtum oder Krankheit zu*

streichen versuche, wäre ähnlich wie wenn Du verlangst, ich solle Noten und Klavier verkaufen um besser zu essen zu haben...Es ist mir daher wichtig KF wenigstens einmal am Tag sehen zu können.

[8] *Nur die Freundschaft mit Karl-Friedrich, der sich mit dem ihm eigenen Ernst mit der Umwelt auseinandersetzt, lässt mir einen kleinen Zugang in das mir sonst fremde Gebiet offen.*

[9] *Carl Friedrich hat sich verlobt, wenn auch noch nicht offiziell. Du sollst nicht mit ihm darüber sprechen. Ich habe seit fast zehn Jahren keinen anderen Menschen für mich gehabt als ihn, und der geht jetzt fort, für immer. Es geht mir nicht gut, auch gesundheitlich nicht....Ich muss viel Glück haben, wenn aus meinem Leben noch etwas werden soll.*

[10] *Die Verbindung zur Familie Weizsäcker wird wohl ganz abgebrochen werden und dadurch wird alles völlig anders als bisher. Du musst entschuldigen, dass ich über diese Dinge mit Dir nicht gerne gesprochen habe. ... Einstweilen will ich mich der Arbeit widmen, um derentwillen ich auf diese Welt gekommen zu sein scheine; und die Erinnerung an die wesentlichen Dinge soll diese Arbeit nur wie eine feine Musik begleiten.*

[11] *Nicht Lehrsätze und Ideen seien die Regeln eures Seins. Der Führer selbst und allein ist die heutige und künftige deutsche Wirklichkeit und ihr Gesetz.*

[12] *..dann werden die obersten Autoritäten mit mir reden müssen, einschliesslich Adolf Hitler.*

[13] The stigma from the "Deutsche Physik"-affair had been attenuated already before the war and was virtually without importance when WH was made director of KWI-P in 1940. WH's comment in a letter to Li (5 June 1942; Hirsch-Heisenberg, 2011, p.201) seems to be somewhat delayed: "...Suddenly I no longer need to care about the whole Lenard-Stark clique, and I can have my own way in almost every issue that is important to me. WH seems enthusiastic after a presentation of projects to the "top figures of the Reich" in KWGs Harnack Haus: "It went better than expected. My own and Bothe's lectures evidently made a deep impression; in any case we were afterwards treated fabulously both personally and concerning the subject matter." Only few days after the dispute with CFvW, WH went on an official trip to the Netherlands (18-26 October 1943, Walker, 1989, p.112 ff), where he made rather contentious pro-German and anti-democratic assertions even in private conversation, as witnessed by his hosts. In mid-December 1943 he went to Krakow on personal invitation by the notorious leader of the *Generalgouvernement* (part of occupied Poland) Hans Frank (Walker, 1989, p.114, Bernstein, 2004).

[14] There had been obstacles. At the zenith of the *Deutsche Physik* affair (Cassidy, 1992, p.388), the influential NSDDB-official Wilhelm Führer had tried to obstruct WH's prospects in the Sommerfeld succession in Munich. A few years later (1941), now from a position in the Ministry of Education (REM) he had intervened against CFvW's candidature for a chair in Strasbourg (perhaps to embarrass WH?). In a letter to Li (19 July 1941 (Hirsch-Heisenberg, 2011, p.180), WH writes: "I indeed find it really instructive for Weizsäcker [sic] for once to experience the game of intrigues on his own body, yet I really wish that he can prevail." (*Ich finde es ja für Weizsäcker lehrreich, das Intrigenspiel mal am eigenen Leib auszuprobieren, aber wünschte doch sehr, das er sich durchsetzen kann.*) This comment appears to shed some light on the state of the relationship with CFvW. It should be noted, that among the Strasbourg-professors there were several who, with academic and political zeal, devoted themselves to

atrocious 'crimes against humanity', *inter alia* Eugen Haagen and August Hirt (see Wikipedia).

[15] Karl Wirtz was in Heisenberg's fission project, while Kurt Diebner was in a competing fission project run by Army Ordnance (HWA = Heereswaffenamt). Both were among the detainees at Farm Hall. A week after the date of this letter, Heisenberg and Diebner went to Copenhagen as advisors concerning the fate of the occupied Bohr Institute (Schwarz, 2011, p.417 ff.) Diebner's role in his matter remains obscure. The document is a translation of CFvW's letter of 16 January 1944 (National Archives and Records Services, Washington DC: "Translation of 'Exhibit H', ALSOS Strassburg Mission, 15 December '44"). Thanks to Mark Walker for providing this source. See also Walker, 1995, p. 173.

[16] Erich Bagge and Horst Korsching (both born in 1912 like CFvW) had worked with isotope separation in WHs fission program. They were among the ten German scientists who were detained at Farm Hall (England) from July to December 1945 (Hoffmann, 1993; Bernstein, 2001)

[17] *Weizsäcker arbeitet sicher über alles mögliche. [...] Unbegreifliche Auffassungs- und Verwendungsgabe.*

[18] *Ich stehe noch ganz unter dem Eindruck des Weizsäckerschen Vortrages. Der könnte den Hörer wirklich zu einem anderen Mensch machen, Ich erinnere mich nicht je etwas ähnliches erlebt zu haben, [...] Ob er ein grosser Physiker wird, mag dahinstehen, ein grosser Mensch ist er jedenfalls.*

[19] *Rückblickend empfinde ich meine damaligen Verhaltensweisen und Äusserungen als unausgereiften Ausdruck von Ahnungen oder Wahrnehmungen, die meine intellektuelle Verarbeitungsfähigkeit überstiegen. Ich hatte rationale Nüchternheit nachzulernen, ein Stück nicht vollzogener Aufklärung und Achtung vor der politischen Weisheit der Prinzipien von Legalität und Liberalität.*

[20] Cf. note [6]. An apposite association: *Daran erkenn' ich meine Pappenheimer* [I know my Pappenheimers] (Friedrich v. Schiller: *Wallensteins Tod* (1799) III.15). This has become a *bon mot* in German.

[21] In a letter to his mother (4 Nov. 1938, Hirsch-Heisenberg, 2003, p.282) WH comments on the effect of his appeal to *Reichsführer* H. Himmler - where Mrs. Heisenberg had played a crucial role (Cassidy 1992, p.385f., cf. note [13]: "Unfortunately I have ascertained that it stands very badly with my possibilities of going to Munich [the Sommerfeld succession]. It is true that my political reliability is no longer questioned [my emphasis], but the rapporteur on personnel matters in the Ministry [of Education] wants to transfer me to Vienna, probably bribed by the Stark clique." ([Ich habe] *leider festgestellt dass es mit der Möglichkeit nach München zu kommen sehr schlecht steht. Zwar wird nach dem Brief Himmlers meine politische Zuverlässigkeit nicht mehr bezweifelt, aber der Personalreferent im Ministerium will mich nach Wien setzen, wahrscheinlich durch die Partei Stark gekauft.*)

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Appendix [reproduced from Hirsch-Heisenberg 2011, pp. 224-225 with permission from the editor and the publisher]

Berlin 14.10.43

Meine liebe Li –

den Abend über hab ich versucht, Dich anzurufen, aber es ist nichts geworden. Ich bin etwas müde und abgespannt und hätte gern mit Dir ein paar Minuten geplaudert. Nun will ichs schriftlich tun – vielleicht kann ich Dich morgen sprechen. Ich lege diesem Brief Rechnungen und ähnliches bei; vielleicht kannst Du's gelegentlich einordnen. Am Sonntag abend werde ich nun doch nach Holland fahren; ich freue mich ein wenig auf das Zusammensein mit den alten Bekannten, hoffentlich wird es politisch nicht zu schwierig. In diesen Tagen finden hier laufend Besprechungen über die Kriegsarbeiten statt. Carl-Friedrich v. Weizsäcker ist hier und gestern abend hatte ich ein langes Gespräch mit ihm über die gleichen Fragen, die Du mit Frau Westphal damals besprachst. Ich verstehe mich im

Grunde überhaupt nicht mit ihm; diese Art, alles prinzipiell zu nehmen und überall die »letzte Entscheidung« zu erzwingen, ist mir so völlig fremd. Weizs. kann so Sätze sagen, wie etwa: er wäre in einer total zerstörten Stadt ganz zufrieden, denn dann wisse man sicher dass das nicht wiederkäme und dass die Menschen, aus dem Erlebnis von Schuld und Strafe reif würden zu einer anderen Art zu denken – womit dann der neue Glaube gemeint ist, zu dem er sich selbst bekennt. Dann sagt er weiter, dass dieser Glaube natürlich dem der alten Welt, d.h. der Angelsachsen, unversöhnlich feind sei und dass ja auch Christus gesagt habe, er sei nicht gekommen, den Frieden zu bringen, sondern das Schwert –, worauf man dann wieder so weit ist, wie am Anfang, d.h. wer nicht das Gleiche glaubt, wie ich, muss ausgerottet werden. Mir ist dieser ewige Zirkel vom Glauben an die heiligsten Güter, die mit Feuer u. Schwert verteidigt werden müssen, ganz unerträglich; offenbar bin ich darin ganz undeutsch, und ich gerate in einer solchen Diskussion entgegen sonstiger Gewohnheit in so heftige Opposition, das ich am Schluss nur noch das langweiligste Spiessertum vertreten kann. Du wärst wieder ganz unzufrieden mit mir gewesen; aber es ist gut, das ich Dir mein Herz ausschütten kann. – Nach der Rückkehr von Holland will ich noch ein bis zwei Wochen hier bleiben, dann via Urfeld nach Hechingen fahren. Aber morgen will ich Dich noch am Telefon sprechen. Leb wohl für heute! Dein Werner.