

KARL LÖWITH
A PROSPEROUS MIND IN A DESTITUTE TIME

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To

MY PARENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Karl Löwith is heralded by Richard Wolin in his work, *Heidegger's Children*, as being “one of the most significant figures of twentieth century German philosophy”¹ and was praised by Hans-Georg Gadamer² as being the best German writer of his time. Löwith’s philosophy has, however, not received due attention since his death in 1973. This is, in part, because of his particular style of critique and his independence from distinct philosophic schools of thought.

The current project attempts to show Löwith’s continued importance for modern philosophy by pulling his various critiques together and showing their proper role in his work as a whole. His philosophy and critiques centered on the ever increasing trend in metaphysics and epistemologies to concentrate solely on Humanity, in rejection of a Christian God and a Greek Cosmos or natural World, as being the only possible source of knowledge. This trend and the history of metaphysics as a whole are understood by Löwith with the help of three hermeneutic concepts; God, Humanity and World. These concepts are capitalized throughout the following work to emphasize their importance in depicting Löwith’s narrative of metaphysics and Western philosophy. The increasing independence of Humanity from both the Christian God and the Greek concept of World finds its focus in what Löwith calls the “revolution in nineteenth century thought” (*der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*). It is the background and subsequent consequences of this revolution that sets the stage for Löwith’s early works on both Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacob Burckhardt and it is one that has a central role in his history of nineteenth century German philosophy (*Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*) and his study on philosophies of history (*Meaning in History*). Löwith was far from optimistic about the results of this revolution as he fought for a philosophy that was capable of understanding Humanity naturally and as belonging to the World. To this extent he was critical of modern philosophy and its over-emphasis on Human history and Human creation.

The following project itself is to be read as a narrative wherein certain events in

¹ Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 70.

² “Er [Löwith] darf unter den heutigen deutschen Philosophen wohl als der beste Schriftsteller bezeichnet werden.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Karl Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag”, 455. In: *Natur und Geschichte*, 455-457.

Löwith's life are used to compliment his philosophy. The project begins with Löwith's youth, his first encounter with Nietzsche's natural philosophy in *Zarathustra*, and his having waded his life in the First World War. The next progression of the work finds Löwith struggling under the shadow of his mentor, Martin Heidegger, and desiring to find a teaching position in Marburg. Although Löwith is successful in Marburg thanks to the popularity of his *Habilitationsschrift*, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, he is forced into exile at the beginning of the Second World War because of his Jewish heritage. Being separated from his peers, Löwith's works in exile were an attempt to undermine philosophical discussions in Germany on both history and historicism.³

After spending time in Italy, Japan and the United States, Löwith returned to his homeland in 1952 but was less than pleased with Germany's progression after the end of the war. His hardships in reacclimating into German academia are voiced through his polemics against Heidegger and the wide influence Heideggerian philosophy had in Germany at the time. Instead of attempting to participate in popular philosophical dialogue in the 1950s and 60s he scanned history for like-minded thinkers with whom he could challenge his own ideas and found an affinity for, among others, the Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico.

This work also attempts to clear up a problem in the secondary literature on Löwith's philosophy; namely, the widely accepted misconception that claims Löwith had wished to recreate a natural ancient Greek worldview for modernity. Not only does returning to a past philosophy or worldview contradict Löwith's views of history and philosophy but such an attempt to return to past "truths" cannot be found in any of his written works. His affiliation and appreciation for the ancient Greek praise of World and Cosmos cannot properly bring one to the conclusion that Löwith wished to make this

³ This is best indicated by his omission of Wilhelm Dilthey's discussions of history in the philosophical lineages of both *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* and *Meaning in History* and his failure to address other popular works in historicism such as that of Ernst Troeltsch (1922), *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, Erich Rothacker (1934), *Geschichtsphilosophie* and Friedrich Meinecke (1936), *Die Entstehung des Historismus*. His treatment of philosophies of history in *Meaning in History* was not meant to be a contribution to but a circumvention of the German historicist tradition via an undermining of its roots in Christian eschatology. Annette Wittkau is criticized for leaving out Löwith in her study of historicism but is justified in doing so inasmuch as Löwith neither considered himself to have contributed to this movement nor to have extensively addressed it. His exile gave him space, rather, to address the subject outside of the direct influence of popular debate. See: Wittkau, *Historismus: Zur Geschichte des Begriffs und des Problems*, and Michael Ermarth's review of her work in: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (Oct. 1993), 1275-1276.

ancient reality a modern one. His attempt to make the World relevant for modern Humanity is also no mere attempt to transfer the ancient world into the new. Despite these difficulties in connecting Löwith's philosophy to ancient thought, his opponents have successfully pigeon-holed him as a Stoic. His philosophy, far from being utopic and disconnected, aptly diagnoses problems in modernity and offers a unique alternative.

Löwith deserves a second look because his critiques are astute, his presentation of individual historical philosophers masterful and his analysis of the state of the philosophical tradition since the early nineteenth century unsurmountable.

CHAPTER 1

“MY LIFE IN GERMANY BEFORE AND AFTER 1933”

Denn, glaubt es mir! – das Geheimniss, um die grösste Fruchtbarkeit und den grössten Genuss dem Dasein einzuernten, heisst: *gefährlich leben!* Baut eure Städte an den Vesuv! Schickt eure Schiffe in unerforschte Meere! Lebt im Krieg mit Euresgleichen und mit euch selber! (Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 283⁴).

1.1 A CONTEST OF AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Karl Löwith was born in 1897 and raised in Munich. His early years, the beginning of his professorship, his intimate relationship with Heidegger and the details of his forced exile are known to us because of his posthumously published autobiography, *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933*. The autobiography was written and submitted to a literary competition held by Harvard University in the year of 1940. The competition was “for everyone that knows the Germany before and after Hitler”⁵ and was described as follows:

Zum Zweck rein wissenschaftlicher Materialsammlung, die für eine Untersuchung der *gesellschaftlichen und seelischen Wirkungen des Nationalsozialismus auf die deutsche Gesellschaft und das deutsche Volk* verwendet werden soll, stellen wir eintausend Dollar Preis für die *besten unveröffentlichten Lebensbeschreibungen (Autobiographien)* mit dem Folgenden Thema zur Verfügung – “Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach dem 30. Januar 1933.”⁶

The three professors who were to judge these autobiographies and award the prizes came from the fields of psychology, Gordon Willard Allport, history, Sidney Bradshaw Fay and sociology, Edward Yarnall Hartshorne. In the description of the prize they were careful to make sure it was clear that the purpose of the study was to collect *empirical data* which could, in turn, be interpreted with respect to the “effects of National Socialism on German society and the German people”. Philosophical deliberations were specifically discouraged as it was, once again, data that the judges were looking for and

⁴ All Nietzsche quotations and section numbers are from the critical collected works: *Nietzsche Werke*, 1973.

⁵ See: Löwith, *Mein Leben*: the original description of the contest from which the quote is taken can be found amongst the pictures placed between pages 80 and 81.

⁶ *Ibid*, 81.

not the conclusions they themselves had hoped to draw from this period of German history.

Thanks to the efforts of one of the judges, Hartshorne, news of the competition reached many Jews in exile. In 1939 he made a trip to France, Holland and England and visited their respective offices for emigration advertising for the competition.⁷ Between September of 1939 and April of 1940 over two hundred and fifty autobiographies were submitted to the panel, ninety of which were analyzed in an article titled, “Personality Under Social Catastrophe: Ninety Life-Histories of the Nazi Revolution”.⁸ Hartshorne had planned to use the material in a book of his own but this goal went unrealized because of his early death in 1946.⁹ The first prize was shared by Carl Paeschke, a journalist from Upper Silesia, and Gertrud Wickerhauser Lederer.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Löwith’s autobiography failed to meet the criteria of the competition as it overshot the empirical goals of the judges – it was much too literary and much too critical. How exactly the autobiography was received by Hartshorne and the judges remains unclear but it is clear that Löwith’s entry was not used in the one study that had followed the contest.¹¹ One reason why it was overlooked is because it failed to fulfill

⁷ “[Hartshorne] dürfte nicht nur der Verfasser des deutschsprachigen Textes der Ausschreibung gewesen sein, er beteiligte sich auch als Einziger persönlich an der Einwerbung von Einsendungen für das Harvard-Projekt. Donald B. Watt, der Geschäftsführer des **Experiment in International Living**, hatte ihn Anfang 1939 gebeten, im Sommer noch einmal eine Gruppe Amerikaner nach Europa zu begleiten. Hartshornes Reise nach Frankreich, Holland und England Ende August mag diesem Zweck gedient haben, aber er nutzte den Aufenthalt, um für das Preisausschreiben zu werben. Jedenfalls heißt es zwei Jahre später in seinem Lebenslauf über das Jahr 1939: ‘Besuch von Emigrantenbüros in Paris, Holland und London vom 21. August bis 2. September im Zusammenhang mit diesem Projekt.’” *Nie mehr zurück in dieses Land*, 328f. The circumstances under which Löwith was made aware of the competition are unclear as Ada Löwith notes in her afterword to *Mein Leben*: “An die näheren Umstände, wie und wann das Preisausschreiben der Widener Library, Cambridge (Mass.), meinem Mann in die Hände kam, kann ich mich nicht erinnern.” *Mein Leben*, 158. Löwith’s entry was the only one to be sent from Japan. See: Harry Liebersohn, Dorothee Schneider, *My life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933: a Guide to a Manuscript Collection at Houghton Library, Harvard University*, 7.

⁸ G.W. Allport, J.S. Bruner, E.M. Jandorf, “Personality Under Social Catastrophe: Ninety Life-Histories of the Nazi Revolution”, *Character and Personality*, Bd. 10, 1941, 1-22.

⁹ See: *My life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933*, 5. The fate of the submitted manuscripts is well detailed in the chapter titled, “Origins of the Collection”, 3-5.

¹⁰ *Nie mehr zurück in dieses Land*, 329. For a history of this competition and its main supporter, Edward Yarnall Hartshorne, the work *Nie mehr zurück in dieses Land* edited by Uta Gerhardt and Thomas Karlauf is indispensable.

¹¹ “The contest sponsors made little further use of the memoirs. Only one published article by G.W. Allport, J.S. Bruner, E.M. Jandorf, ‘Personality Under Social Catastrophe: Ninety Life-Histories of the Nazi Revolution’ explicitly made use of the material. We have not discovered any other published statistical or historical study by the contest organizers that used the material as primary evidence.” *My life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933*, 5f.

Hartshorne's alleged¹² objectives in having partook in the competition. Hartshorne was an adamant opponent of the Nazi regime in Germany and fought against German propaganda in the United States. In 1941 Hartshorne left Harvard for Washington and began his short career as an intelligence officer for the *Research and Analysis Branch* of the *Bureau of the Coordinator of Information*. He acted as an expert on German propaganda and was later responsible for re-opening German universities in American occupied territories.¹³ The competition was to act as empirical evidence against German propaganda and against a different competition led by Theodor Abel, a professor from Columbia University, which sought out autobiographies from members of German National Socialism (“*Gesucht wurde die ‘beste persönliche Lebensgeschichte eines Anhängers der NS-Bewegung’*”).¹⁴ The unfortunate results of Abel's competition helped justify the Nazi Regime and downplayed the atrocities occurring within German borders.¹⁵ It can be safely assumed that the goals of Hartshorne's competition was to counter such propaganda with eye-witness accounts of the policies of the Nazi Regime from Jewish perspectives. Most of Löwith's autobiography takes place before 1933 and during his exile, thus leaving out the much wanted eye-witness accounts of life in Germany during the National Socialist period. It seems to be that this is the reason Löwith's autobiography failed to catch the eye of Hartshorne and the other judges and was subsequently filed away by Löwith amongst his many documents.

After Löwith's death, however, a copy of the autobiography was found by his wife, Ada, as she was cleaning up his paperwork. She shared the report with friends and, with their support, moved to get the work published – a goal reached in 1986, thirteen years after Löwith's passing in 1973.¹⁶

1.2 WORLD WAR I AND THE TIGHTROPE WALKER

In investigating Löwith's philosophy and in investigating him as a philosopher this early

¹² Who exactly is responsible for the idea behind the competition is not entirely clear and it follows that the intended goals of the competition are also left to conjecture. See: *Nie mehr zurück in dieses Land*, 324.

¹³ For the biographical information on Hartshorne I am in debt to Uta Gerhardt's afterword in *Nie mehr zurück in dieses Land*, 319-349.

¹⁴ See: *Ibid*, 324.

¹⁵ See Hartshorne's review of the book, *Why Hitler Came Into Power*, that was the result of this competition. In: *The Journal of Social Philosophy*, April 1939, 277-280.

¹⁶ See: Ada Löwith's afterword in *Mein Leben*: 158-160.

autobiography that was inspired by this competition is invaluable. It is important to note that Löwith did not, after the rejection of the prize committee, move to get this work published and that it was written with the direct intention of receiving the prize money.¹⁷ Löwith was writing for his American audience and this had without a doubt an influence on the stories he chose to tell. One can expect that Löwith over-dramatized and roman-tized his memories to woo his readers and the judges. The autobiography, however, functions no less as an important document in understanding Löwith's experiences in Germany before 1933 and shortly after.

He mentions that he was interested at the age of 13 in the writings of Schopenhauer and Kant and having been enveloped in Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher's groundbreaking German translations of Plato. It is, however, undeniable that there is one philosopher that, above all others, influenced not only his philosophy but affected his life – Friedrich Nietzsche. In § 283 of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche gives the call to live dangerously, to build one's house on Mount Vesuvius and to thus reap the benefits of putting oneself in situations of conflict. Löwith, and those of his generation, heard this call and heeded it as if it were the one guideline for acquiring cultivation. The young generation in Germany before the First World War worshipped Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* and its prophetic style.¹⁸ In a letter written in 1944 to the political philosopher Eric Voegelin Löwith admits that Nietzsche was for him *the* largest modern event and that his philosophy had preoccupied him since his schooldays.¹⁹ He read *Also sprach Zarathustra* with a school friend before having graduated from his *Gymnasium* and speaks of the excitement and fervor the book induced on their young minds:

Wir waren damals ein Herz und eine Seele gewesen und auf dem Weg

¹⁷ "Im Hinblick auf die Übersiedlung nach Amerika hatte die Aussicht auf einen Preis, der in Dollars ausbezahlt wurde, eine beträchtliche Anziehungskraft für uns", Ada Löwith, *Ibid*, 158.

¹⁸ Löwith himself mentions the veneration of Nietzsche by the generation of the First World War in his Nietzsche book: "Vergegenwärtigt man sich den Bedeutungswandel, den Nietzsches Bild und Werk erfahren hat, so zeigt sich eine Verlagerung des Schwergewichts in der Beurteilung und Einschätzung. Sie begann mit der Anerkennung des glänzenden Moralisten und Psychologen; sie gipfelte in der Zarathustra-Verehrung der jungen Generation des ersten Weltkriegs; sie überschlug sich in der Nietzsche-Karikatur des Dritten Reichs, das in der Tat "mit dem Hammer" philosophierte; sie endet mit der endgeschichtlichen These, daß sich in Nietzsche die gesamte Metaphysik des Abendlandes folgerichtig vollende". VI, *Nietzsches Philosophie* (1935), 106.

¹⁹ See: Löwith. Letter to Eric Voegelin dated Nov. 14, 1944, 766. In: *Karl Löwith, Eric Voegelin; Briefwechsel*.

über Nietzsche auf dem Weg zu uns selbst.²⁰

Being true to Nietzsche's call²¹ with the precision of a serious philosopher, Löwith did one of the most dangerous things available to the thrill seekers of the twentieth century; he volunteered for the German army in October of 1914, placing him in the middle of the first of the World Wars.

After volunteering, Löwith underwent three short months of training after which he was sent with a battalion to the trenches of the French front in Péronne. Fueled with the allurements of living a "dangerous life", Löwith interpreted this war experience as being a chance to affirm life and death, a chance that did not lie far away as he was shot in the chest and dependent on the opposing side for medical treatment.

Der Drang zur Emancipation von der bürgerlichen Enge der Schule und des Zuhauses, ein inneres Zerwürfnis mit mir selbst nach dem Bruch meiner ersten Freundschaft, der Reiz des "gefährlich Lebens", für das uns Nietzsche begeistert hatte, die Lust, sich ins Abenteuer zu stürzen und sich zu erproben und nicht zuletzt die Erleichterung des eigenen, durch Schopenhauer bewußt gewordenen Daseins in der Teilnahme an einem es umfassenden Allgemeinen – solche und ähnliche Motive bestimmten mich, den Krieg als eine Chance des Lebens und Sterbens willkommen zu heißen.²²

Although Löwith emphasizes Nietzsche's importance to him as an adolescent, he mentions Schopenhauer as also having a role in his enthusiasm for enlisting in the military. Schopenhauer's role in Löwith's philosophical education is, however, dubious and unclear.²³ One could risk the thought that Löwith belonged to the generation of intellectuals who consumed Schopenhauerian "mystical pessimism" as a "kind of morphine".²⁴ The positive aspiration of drawing positive results from a dangerous life would have been balanced against a pessimistic desire for death which Sabine Appel, in her book *Arthur Schopenhauer*, claims had influenced many German intellectuals – most notably,

²⁰ *Mein Leben*, 5.

²¹ "Man hat nun ... die Maxime "lebt gefährlich" gehorsam befolgt." Ibid, 5.

²² Ibid, 1.

²³ Although he claims to have read Schopenhauer in his youth, he pays little attention to Schopenhauer's influence within nineteenth century German philosophy. In *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* the omission of Schopenhauer is conspicuous and in *Nietzsches Philosophie* one is merely told that Nietzsche was a student of Schopenhauer and not Hegel but Löwith does not continue to discuss this significance. See Paul Gottfried's essay, "Arthur Schopenhauer as a Critic of History" (70f) for a short critique of Löwith's failure to acknowledge the importance of Schopenhauer in nineteenth century German philosophy.

²⁴ See: Appel, Sabine, *Arthur Schopenhauer*, 272.

Thomas Mann.²⁵ To what extent this could be the case is made clear when looking at Löwith's other biographical work written before *Mein Leben* and under the pseudonym Fiala, titled, *Fiala, die Geschichte einer Versuchung*.²⁶ The tone of this work is much different than that of *Mein Leben*; it is much darker, much more self-reflective and self-critical. The title of the work speaks of a temptation (*Versuchung*) and, as Dominic Kaegi in his preface to the publication of the first four chapters notes,²⁷ Löwith was fighting the temptation to commit suicide. This first biographical work tells a much different story as to why he put himself on the front lines of a World War than *Mein Leben*. Instead of wishing to cultivate himself and learn from a dangerous life Löwith writes that he had wished to die an honorable death.

In diesem entscheidenden Augenblick [as Löwith was under attack] wurde es Fiala vollkommen klar, daß die treibende Kraft seines Wagnisses einzig und allein der Wunsch nach dem kettenlösenden Engel war und sei er auch nur ein Würgengel. Ohne deshalb die militärische Sachlage auch nur im geringsten aus dem Blick zu verlieren, war die geheime Tendenz seiner "Heldentat" (sie trug ihm nachträglich eine Auszeichnung und Beförderung ein) die unkriegerische Hoffnung, bei dieser Gelegenheit auf anständige Weise ums Leben zu kommen, was im Kriege bekanntlich leichter ist als im Frieden. Ein derartiges Endergebnis bezeichnete man damals in öffentlichen Anzeigen und Reden als "den Heldentod sterben" und als einer, der vermutlich einen solch heldenhaften Tod fürs Vaterland gestorben ist, lebte Fiala noch einige Tage darauf im Gedächtnis seiner Kompagnie und einen ganzen Monat lang im Herzen seiner Eltern fort – bis sich herausstellte, daß er, wenn auch schwer verwundet, doch am Leben geblieben und in Gefangenschaft geraten war.²⁸

In this first biography Schopenhauer, again, is mentioned only once. This time, however, he is named as being Löwith's unfortunate teacher in a time of depression and in a time made heavy with thoughts of suicide.

Denn Fialas geheimste Idee, mit der er seit seinem 13. Jahr wie Jakob mit dem Engel rang, war einzig und allein die zur klassischen Phrase gewordene Frage: "to be or not to be" und zu seinem Unglück wurde ge-

²⁵ See: Ibid, 273.

²⁶ Many details outlined in *Fiala* of his time in Freiburg and Marburg were later reused in *Mein Leben*. This autobiography has not been published in its entirety and can be found in the German Literature Archive in Marbach. The first four chapters, however, have been published in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 1 (1997): 136-67.

²⁷ "Aus diesem geheimen Leitmotiv der Flucht vor den Anforderungen des Lebens resultiert Fialas *Versuchung: die Versuchung zum Selbstmord*." Kaegi, *Fiala, Geschichte einer Versuchung*, 137.

²⁸ Ibid, 143f.

rade damals Schopenhauer sein Lehrer.²⁹

Looking back on his war experience while writing *Mein Leben*, Löwith decided to leave out his despression and wish for a heroic death. Instead he emphasized Nietzsche's praise of a life of danger and, in doing so, is drawing attention to different passages from Nietzsche's *Fröhliche Wissenschaft* and *Zarathustra*.

In *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche criticizes not only the idea that an easy life is an ideal life but also the then accepted goal of science; namely, to create the highest possibility for the experience of pleasure and the lowest possibility for the experience of pain. Nietzsche sees these two aspects, pleasure and pain, as inter-connected and that, to reach the highest of pleasures, one must be willing to endure the highest of unpleasantries. It follows that Nietzsche's judgment is that those who are concerned with avoiding the difficulties of life are also those who are concerned with avoiding the pleasures of life, keeping them dull:

Auch heute noch habt ihr die Wahl: entweder *möglichst wenig Unlust*, kurz Schmerzlosigkeit (...) oder *möglichst viel Unlust* als Preis für das Wachsthum einer Fülle von feinen und bisher selten gekosteten Lüsten und Freuden! Entschliesst ihr euch für das Erstere, wollte ihr also die Schmerzhaftigkeit der Menschen herabdrücken und vermindern, nun, so müsst ihr auch ihre *Fähigkeit zur Freude* herabdrücken und vermindern.³⁰

A dangerous life or, at the very least, a dangerous occupation is mentioned once again in *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Zarathustra in preparation of his opening speech positions himself at the marketplace, trying to be heard by as many as possible. People gather and Zarathustra assumes that they are there to hear him speak. Unbeknownst to him a tightrope walker has begun his show behind his back and the gathering crowd thinks Zarathustra is there to announce the performance. Zarathustra declares that humans are a rope, tied between animals and the *Übermensch*, and thus in accordance the tightrope walker stretches his line. The audience is warned that the crossing between animals and the *Übermensch* is a dangerous crossing-over, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and a standing still – thus the tightrope walker trembles after his first step, shuddering before the crowd. Zarathustra becomes aware of the tightrope walker's presence and watches with the audience. Doubting his footing and

²⁹ Ibid, 142.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, §12.

his ability, the tightrope walker moves forward slowly – much to the disliking of a jester. Being mocked and jeered at, the man is jumped over by the jester, causing him to fall from the line. Zarathustra is the only one to tend to the injured and dying man. In consoling the man, who suspects that the devil is coming to carry him off to hell, Zarathustra praises him for making danger his occupation.

Nietzsche's metaphor of the tightrope walker depicts a much larger problem in the philosophy of the twentieth century; namely, the need for Humanity to redefine and overcome itself. With the disappearance of God in a secularized philosophical tradition, Humanity loses its identity as an essence placed between the godly and the animal. Dependent on itself, Humanity, like the tightrope walker, is on a line that is drawn across an abyss, in danger of being enveloped by complete meaninglessness. The courage to confront this danger, to step out onto the line and thus redefine oneself, is the courage that leads to the *amor fati* of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*; it is the courage to accept this modern fate. The extent to which this consciousness of confrontation with conceptual nihilism played a role in Löwith's excitement over the dangerous life is difficult if not impossible to determine. Löwith did, however, play out the role of the tightrope walker by confronting danger, experiencing the boundaries of life and death through war and falling to the ground, shot in the chest. Unlike the tightrope walker, Löwith was to rise again, jailed but having learned the discipline of *amor fati*.

Die erste Ahnung von der vollkommenen Schönheit des Südens hatte mir aber die Gefangenschaft in Finalmarina und in den alten Festungen oberhalb Genuas gegeben, von wo aus ich durch eisenvergitterte Fenster die Sonne aus dem Meer hervorsteigen sah und einige der glücklichsten Augenblicke des Bei-mir-selbst-Seins durchlebte.³¹

After Italy's declaration of war with Austria, Löwith's regiment was sent from the trenches in Péronne to the Austrian-Italian border in May of 1915. For Löwith, bonding with the soldiers was not difficult and he was assigned a platoon of thirty men. One morning Löwith volunteered to lead a three-man team with the goal of taking Italian prisoners. He was able to describe the happenings of that morning twenty-five years later in 1940 with clarity:

Wir stiegen nachts das steile Tal hinab und überquerten den Bach. Gegen 4 Uhr morgens lösten sich die dichten Nebel des Waldes plötzlich auf,

³¹ *Mein Leben*, 6.

und wir befanden uns unversehens direkt gegenüber einer etwas zwanzig Mann starken Abteilung Alpini. Ein unbemerktes Zurück über den Bach war nicht möglich, ich ging hinter einen Baum in Anschlag, verständigte durch Zeichen meine Leute, zielte und feuerte. Im nächsten Augenblick war ich wie von einem atemberaubenden Schlag auf die Brust getroffen. Der Anprall hatte mich mit dem Gesicht zur Erde platt auf den Boden geworfen.³²

Another soldier from the four was shot in the stomach during this short battle and was killed, the other two managed to escape but lost their lives in their next mission and Löwith's life was in the hands of the Italian troops. It took hours for his enemy captors to carry his wounded body to the next camp and, according to his own description, he arrived more dead than alive. He received medical attention and was constrained to his bed for two months fighting to keep his life. He could not understand or speak Italian but was able to communicate, although poorly, with a Catholic Priest through his knowledge of Latin. Because Italy was not officially declared to be in a state of war with Germany, Löwith's father was able to visit him, if only for a couple of hours. After eight months of hospitalization he was brought to a prison camp for captured Austrian soldiers located on the beaches of Finale Marina which itself is a borough of Finale Ligure. This location had two significances for Löwith. The friend with whom he had read *Also sprach Zarathustra* had lived in the district of Porto Maurizio, around 60 kilometers southwest of Finale Marina. As the friend had lived there he wrote to Löwith and described the scenery and landscape that he had taken in from the mountaintops. Drunken with the mood of Nietzsche's Zarathustra his friend would spend his evenings on the moonlit mountains until the sun rose and would draw for Löwith.³³ Löwith too was looking for his opportunity to take in the spirit of Zarathustra through the experience of Italian nature and he attempted to recreate his friend's appreciation of the Italian landscape through iron prison bars by often watching the sun rise out over the sea. It was at this window where Löwith experienced some of his most satisfying moments of self-reflection.³⁴

³² Ibid, 3.

³³ "Seinen allwöchentlichen Briefen lagen liebenswürdige Zeichnungen bei, welche die zarten und strengen Umrisse der ligurischen Berge festhielten, auf deren Höhen mein Freund in mond hellen Nächten bis zum Aufgang der Sonne die Stimmungen Zarathustras mit dem reinen Ernst des erwachenden deutschen Jünglings durchlebte". Ibid, 5.

³⁴ See: Ibid, 6. "...von wo aus ich durch eisenvergitterte Fenster die Sonne aus dem Meer hervorsteigen sah und einige der glücklichsten Augenblicke des Bei-mir-selbst-Seins durchlebte".

This period of Löwith's life before his studies had a substantial influence on his adulthood and gave him, as he mentions in *Fiala*, his "actual education".³⁵ His close friend and colleague, Hans-Georg Gadamer, writes of his own conviction that Löwith's time in Italy during the First World War had influenced his philosophic temperament:

The whole of European philosophy must have seemed to him – particularly in view of his love of Italy and of the art of life of the Italians – an ultimate hypocrisy which never overcame its Christian remnants and denied itself total inherence of this world.³⁶

The kinship he developed with his Italian captors and the growing distance he felt towards his fellow Germans was not based on race. With respect to his Jewish heritage Löwith notes that at no point during the First World War did he experience any sort of discrimination from either his officers or from his comrades.³⁷ The differences between him and the other German prisoners were rather differences of mentality. This atypical mentality of Löwith's stayed with him throughout his philosophical career. In a wayward attempt to describe Löwith's unique character and style, Gadamer related him not to the German philosophical tradition but to Egyptian fatalism.³⁸

His participation in the war later helped him temporarily keep his post as a Professor in Marburg in spite of newly instated racial laws and in spite of his Jewish heritage. His volunteering for the war won him the respect of early National Socialists and it would become one of the only reasons why his old colleagues and friends felt badly that he was forced to flee Germany.³⁹

Without a doubt Löwith belonged to a generation of young men who romanticized their reasons for entering war and their following war experiences in an attempt to mask the naiveté of putting oneself in immediate danger. Having been in immediate danger

³⁵ "Die drei Jahre, welche Fiala inmitten seiner Kompagnie in Schützgraben und auf hohen Bergen gelegen war, bis er zuletzt verwundet in Gefangenschaft geriet, gaben ihm seine eigentliche Erziehung, die Ausbildung seines Charakters." *Fiala, die Geschichte einer Versuchung*, 141.

³⁶ Gadamer, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. By Karl Löwith, xii.

³⁷ "Einen Unterschied der Rasse habe ich während meins ganzen Frontlebens weder von der Mannschaft noch vom Offizierkorps jemals zu spüren bekommen." *Mein Leben*, 3.

³⁸ "It was not accidental that the sober skepticism and the virtually Egyptian fatalism of his view of life could find a real model in any philosopher..." Gadamer, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, xii.

³⁹ "Ehrlich erstaunte es ihn (a good friend of Löwith's from Freiburg), von mir mit Bezug auf den Frontparagrafen zu hören, daß ich es niemals als eine Ehre, sondern als eine Schande empfand, meine menschliche und bürgerliche Berechtigung mit der Kriegsteilnahme erkaufen zu sollen, und daß meine Eignung als Dozent für mich selber gar nichts zu tun habe mit dem Tragen der Uniform; er konnte gar nicht begreifen, warum ich es als absurd empfand, nur deshalb an der Universität geduldet zu werden". *Mein Leben*, 11f.

and having tested Nietzsche's challenge, Löwith summarizes the lessons concerning life and death taught to him by war and imprisonment in *Fiala, die Geschichte einer Versuchung*.

Während seiner italienischen Gefangenschaft machte er drei grundlegende Erfahrungen, aus denen ihm, seiner philosophischen Natur gemäß, drei entsprechende Einsichten erwachsen. Erstens: daß es schwerer sei zu leben als zu sterben. Daß auch das Sterben schwierig sein kann, zeigte ihm der tragikomische Ausgang zweier Selbstmordversuche im Gefangenenlager. Seine zweite Erfahrung: daß es sich im Süden leichter leben als im Norden, gab der ersten eine positive Richtung. Und seine dritte Einsicht, welche sich ihm in dem Ideal eines "voraussetzungslosen Lebens" darstellte, entsprang der Erfahrung, daß der radikale Zusammenbruch aller gewohnten "Einrichtungen" des bürgerlichen Daseins etwas Befreiendes und Fruchtbare haben könne.⁴⁰

A soldier in Löwith's old regiment had one in fifteen chances to survive.⁴¹ Although having balanced on the edge of life and death and subsequently losing a lung, Löwith could consider himself to be lucky to have walked away from the war. Looking back at this experience Löwith could not echo Nietzsche in praise and in affirmation of life, instead he concluded that it is "harder to live than to die" ("*daß es schwerer sei zu leben als zu sterben*"). Löwith had sought out this strenuous experience and drew out one positive result of having done so; namely, the "liberating and fruitful" loss of the structure and meaning of his bourgeois life. After his imprisonment, however, Löwith returned to his bourgeois life in Munich and enrolled himself at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität to study biology and philosophy.⁴²

1.3 STUDIES

In Munich Löwith was involved with a small circle of students who met weekly for various academic and philosophical discussions. In the winter semester of 1918/19 the group hosted a now famous lecture by Max Weber titled, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*. Weber was for Löwith not so much a philosophical inspiration as he was a role-model for the aspiring academic; his knowledge, his composure and the sureness of his speech all held

⁴⁰ *Fiala, die Geschichte einer Versuchung*, 144.

⁴¹ See: *Mein Leben*, 13.

⁴² Wiebrecht Ries notes that Löwith was drawn to biology and philosophy thanks to the influence of two of his teachers from his Gymnasium: "*Am Münchner Realgymnasium fördern der Lateinlehrer H. Poschel und der Zeichenlehrer E. Esenbeck das Interesse des jungen Löwith an Philosophie, der Biologielehrer P. Wimmer erschließt ihm 'die Wunder der lebendigen Welt'*". Ries, *Karl Löwith*, 16.

Löwith's attention for many years to come.⁴³ Löwith studied philosophy under Alexander Pfänder and Moritz Geiger⁴⁴ and biology under the botanist Karl Ritter von Goebel. On the recommendation of Pfänder and Geiger, Löwith transferred in the spring of 1919 to the Albert Ludwigs University of Freiburg to study under Edmund Husserl. Geiger, Löwith's philosophical mentor in Munich, belonged to the phenomenological movement in Germany, was a follower of Husserl and helped in the publishing of the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* where Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* was later to be published in 1927.⁴⁵

In 1915 the neo-Kantian, Heinrich Rickert, was offered a position at the University of Heidelberg, which he subsequently accepted and which subsequently left open a professorship at the University of Freiburg. It was this position in Freiburg that Husserl had acquired and had used to develop a philosophical movement that was to eventually become the center of German philosophy. Löwith, in his autobiography, comments on Husserl's philosophical earnestness and conviction of the timeless essence of phenomena in the face of the political unrest and military threat of the end of the First World War:

Unvergeßlich ist mir, wie dieser große Erforscher des Kleinsten in den Tagen, als man Freiburgs Besetzung durch französische Truppen befürchtete und die Hörsäle leer wurden, mit einer erhöhten Ruhe und Sicherheit in seinen Darlegungen fortfuhr, als könne der reine Ernst des wissenschaftlichen Forschens durch nichts in der Welt gestört werden.⁴⁶

Husserl's first assistant, Edith Stein, was replaced by Martin Heidegger in the same year Löwith decided to transfer universities. Löwith describes Heidegger's personality as

⁴³ Löwith's description of Weber's lecture in *Mein Leben* (16-18) shows the extent of which Löwith was utterly impressed with Weber as an academic: "Der Eindruck (of the lecture) war erschütternd. In seinen Sätzen war die Erfahrung und das Wissen eines ganzen Lebens verdichtet, alles war unmittelbar aus dem Innern hervorgeholt und mit dem kritischen Verstande durchdacht, gewaltsam eindringlich durch das menschliche Schwergewicht, welches ihm seine Persönlichkeit gab." *Mein Leben*, 16f. Löwith later dedicated an essay on Weber fourteen years later in 1932 under the title, "Max Weber und Karl Marx."

⁴⁴ Geiger fled Germany in 1933 because of his Jewish heritage and was a professor at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York until his death in 1937. Both Geiger and Pfänder were students of the philosopher and psychologist Theodor Lipps in Munich: Pfänder wrote his dissertation under Lipps' in 1897 and Geiger ten years later in 1907. See: *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, Ed. Jürgen Mittelstraß, Metzler; Stuttgart, 1995. 719 and Avé-Lallemant, Eberhard, "Pfänder, Alexander Carl Heinrich", in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 20 (2001), 289f.

⁴⁵ See: Sepp, Hans Rainer, *Edmund Husserl und die Phänomenologische Bewegung: Zeugnisse in Text und Bild*, 70 and 187.

⁴⁶ *Mein Leben*, 26.

being in opposition to the rather “childish”⁴⁷ Husserl. Many of the young students who had come to Freiburg to study under Husserl fell under the spell of the younger Heidegger. Through intimidation and a powerful presence, Heidegger won an audience:

Er war wie Fichte nur zur Hälfte ein Mann der Wissenschaft, zur anderen und vielleicht größeren ein opponierender Charakter und Prediger...⁴⁸

In the end Löwith attributed his spiritual development to Heidegger and not Husserl.⁴⁹

Löwith returned to Munich in 1922 to finish a dissertation on Nietzsche under the supervision of his old mentor, Geiger. Löwith’s roots are in the tradition of phenomenology and all of his philosophical mentors both in Munich and in Freiburg took part in this new trend. Löwith, however, was to follow Heidegger in moving away from Husserl’s original vision of phenomenology and, later, move away from Heidegger as well.

1.4 REMEMBERING HUSSERL

The hopes of Löwith’s mentors in Munich, Geiger and Pfänder – that Löwith himself would become involved in and help continue the phenomenological tradition – were not fulfilled. In his article, *Eine Erinnerung an E. Husserl* (1959), Löwith writes that neither he nor Husserl would be too interested in hearing how little he had learned from this philosophic great.⁵⁰ The three years the two spent together were relatively unfruitful as the young Löwith was drawn to Heidegger’s enigmatic character and philosophical style.

In a letter written in 1937 to Löwith, Husserl expresses his hope that out of all of his students (including Scheler and Heidegger) who had missed the actual and deep

⁴⁷ “Gemeinsam mit Husserl und auch schon gegen ihn wirkte ein junger Mann, der damals über Freiburg hinaus noch gänzlich unbekannt war: Martin Heidegger. Er war persönlich das Gegenteil seines im Grunde kindlichen Meisters, und intensiver als dieser zog uns der Jüngere an.” Ibid, 27.

⁴⁸ *Mein Leben*, 27.

⁴⁹ “Er [Heidegger] ist mein eigentlicher Lehrer geworden, dem ich meine geistige Entwicklung verdanke.” *Mein Leben*, 27. Löwith belonged to a small circle of friends and students (including Löwith’s friend Marseille, Oskar Becker and Walter Bröcker) that followed Heidegger to Marburg. See: Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 91 and Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 35.

⁵⁰ “Wenn ich mich jetzt, nach vier Jahrzehnten, frage, was ich von Husserl während dieser drei Freiburger Jahre gelernt habe, so würde ihn die Antwort noch weniger als mich selber befriedigen. Ich erinnere mich, daß er mich schon damals eines Tages enttäuscht zur Rede stellte, weil ich in den ersten Semestern so rasche ‘Fortschritte’ gemacht hätte, die nun auf einmal zum Stillstand gekommen seien. Der seinem naiven Gemüt unerrätbare Grund des Ausbleibens weiterer Fortschritte war, daß ich mich, wie so viele meiner Altersgenossen, ungleich stärker von dem jungen Heidegger angesprochen fühlte.” Löwith, “Eine Erinnerung an E. Husserl”, 268. In: *Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung*.

meaning of phenomenology, he could understand him. In the letter Husserl expresses his concern that Löwith had already given up on phenomenology; that he had given up his “inner freedom” (*innere Freiheit*) such that he could not be swayed by what Husserl calls his most mature work, *Die Krise der europäischen Wissenschaft und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. Understanding Husserl and his work would be to understand why he found philosophical anthropology naïve, existentialism a failure and historicism the product of a burnt-out humanity:

Hoffentlich gehören Sie nicht zu den “Frühvollendeten”, zu einer *fertigen* Position Gekommenen, so daß Sie noch die innere Freiheit haben, Ihre eigene Anthropologie “einzuklammern” und auf Grund meiner neuen, gereiftesten Darstellung zu verstehen, warum ich alle Anthropologie zur philosophisch naiven Positivität rechne und warum ich die Methode der phänomenologischen Reduktion als die allein philosophische anerkenne... und warum ich die tief sinnige Mystik der modischen Existenzphilosophie und des sich so überlegen dünkenden Historischen Relativismus für ein schwächliches Versagen einer kraftlos gewordenen Menschheit einschätzen mußte...⁵¹

To an extent, Löwith shared Husserl’s concerns and found the basis of the philosophic schools of his time questionable. He did not, however, embrace the “deep meaning” of phenomenology as Husserl had wished. Instead, around a year after Husserl had written this letter, Löwith began to contextualize these philosophical movements with respect to the nineteenth century – from Hegel to Nietzsche.

Löwith left Rome and Europe in the fall of 1936 and was sent upon his arrival in Sendai, Japan the first part of Husserl’s essay, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*. In it Husserl discusses to what extent philosophy itself had become problematic and one recognizes Husserl’s discussion of the fall in the belief of reason and the crisis of philosophy as being similar to Löwith’s later discussion of the crisis of Humanity via the loss of God in its philosophizing. For Husserl as for Löwith when Humanity loses this belief it stops believing in itself. Husserl writes:

Verliert der Mensch diesen Glauben [in reason], so heißt das nichts anderes als: er verliert den Glauben “an sich selbst”, an das ihm eigene wahre Sein, das er nicht immer schon hat, nicht schon mit der Evidenz des “Ich bin”, sondern nur hat und haben kann in Form des Ringens um seine Wahrheit, darum, sich selbst wahr zu machen.⁵²

⁵¹ The letter was published by Löwith in: “*Eine Erinnerung an E. Husserl*,” 269.

⁵² Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendental Phänomenologie*, 13.

And, when Husserl addresses the prevailing skepticism as to the possibility of a metaphysic⁵³ one sees Löwith's own later awareness of collapse. What Husserl had hoped to rebuild, however, Löwith saw as forever lost. This difference arises out of differing understandings of the role of the history of philosophy for modernity. Whereas Husserl considered the influence of Schelling and Hegel to be a misleading one, one that led to worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*) and strayed from being strict science⁵⁴, Löwith accepted the bulk of nineteenth century German philosophy as being cemented in the German tradition and as determining modern philosophical consciousness. Whereas Husserl demands that one philosophize not from tradition but from the objects of experience and problems of science⁵⁵ Löwith counters by emphasizing the timelessness of the questions of tradition.⁵⁶ Löwith could agree with Husserl that the philosophical trends that were birthed from Hegel's philosophy of history were dubious; he did, however, find them valuable. Not valuing Hegel's influence on philosophy, Husserl's intellectual honesty was a drive to create a rigorous philosophical system anew. In his essay, *Philosophie und protestantische Theologie*, Löwith describes phenomenology and its placement within the history of philosophy:

Während es zunächst so schien, als wolle die Phänomenologie ihrer Tendenz nach ganz von vorne anfangen, in völliger Freiheit von der philosophischen Historie und ihrem "Nachteil für das Leben" und rein an Hand der sog. Sachen oder Phänomene philosophieren, sieht es nun umgekehrt so aus, als fange die eigentliche Phänomenologie mit Aristoteles an und als höre sie mit Hegels *Phänomenologie des Geistes* auch schon auf und als sei die Geschichte der unklassischen Philosophie des 19. Jahrhunderts philosophisch und *folglich* auch phänomenologisch bedeutungslos.⁵⁷

Löwith's own understanding of the philosophical tradition and its role in modern philosophies was, however, quite different. Löwith concentrated on the hermeneutic concepts

⁵³ See: Ibid, 11: "Das Ideal der universalen Philosophie und der Prozeß seiner inneren Auflösung."

⁵⁴ Löwith writes: "Diese Intention auf wissenschaftliche Methode sieht Husserl von der griechischen Philosophie an bis zu Kant lebendig; geschwächt und verfälscht wurde sie in verhängnisvoller Weise von der romantischen Philosophie, vor allem durch Schelling and Hegel, dessen Auswirkung die 'Weltanschauungsphilosophie' des Historismus ist." "Eine Erinnerung an E. Husserl", 271.

⁵⁵ "Nicht von den Philosophien, sondern von den Sachen und Problemen muß der Antrieb zur Forschung ausgehen". As quoted in Ibid, 273.

⁵⁶ "Die einfache Wahrheit dieser Sätze [i.e.; the above quoted claim of Husserl] bezeugt aber nicht zuletzt auch die Geschichte der Philosophie; denn was sollte die Erinnerung der großen Namen rechtfertigen, wenn nicht dies, daß sie von den sachlichen Problemen angetrieben waren, die uns noch heute als solche, und nicht bloß historisch oder geschichtlich, angehen." Ibid.

⁵⁷ "Grundzüge der Entwicklung der Phänomenologie zur Philosophie und ihr Verhältnis zur protestantischen Theologie" (1930), III, 34.

of Humanity, God and World, and their development and interrelationships within the history of philosophy.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVOLUTION IN METAPHYSICS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND PHILOSOPHICAL CRISIS

2.1 THE BASIC HERMENEUTIC STRUCTURE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF METAPHYSICS: A TRINITY AND TWO METAMORPHOSES

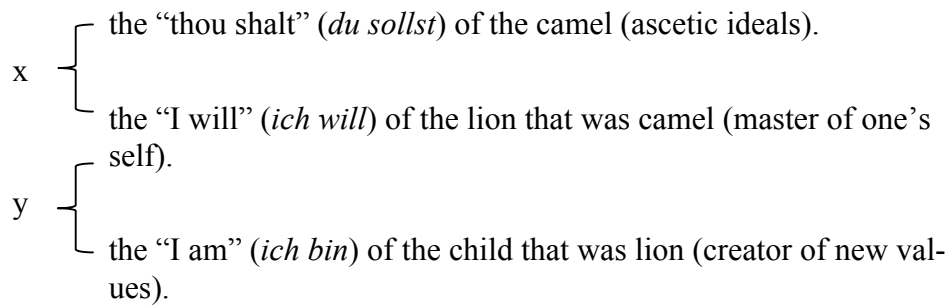
Löwith's understanding of modern philosophy revolves around his understanding of the development and history of metaphysics. Löwith saw philosophy and theology as being an interwoven movement, not one progressing towards a goal but a development and progression nonetheless. Although Löwith's work on Western metaphysics came late in his career (*Gott, Mensch und Welt*, 1967) the ideas espoused therein can be found scattered across many of his earlier works and have their origin in his early Nietzsche studies.

Löwith used three concepts, God, Humanity, and World, as hermeneutic tools for understanding the history of metaphysics. Tracing the history of metaphysics meant for him to trace the development of the relationships between these concepts and their role in historical epistemologies. He informs the reader in his foreword to *Gott, Mensch und Welt* that these concepts were borrowed from Christian Wolff and his categorization of philosophy into three parts; the first of which concerns itself with God, the second with the Human soul (*Geist*) and the third with the corporeal objects of the World. Following Wolff, the concept "God" is described in the introduction as being an *autor rerum* but its function is not only that of a creator but denotes, for Löwith's purposes, the other-worldly as well. "Humanity", also called *Geist*, denotes the products of Humanity, its thought and history. Lastly, "World" is understood simultaneously as phenomenon and an all-encompassing Cosmos. The goal of *Gott, Mensch und Welt* is, namely, to trace the development in metaphysics away from a close relationship between God and Humanity and towards an over-emphasis on Humanity alone;⁵⁸ resulting in a tradition

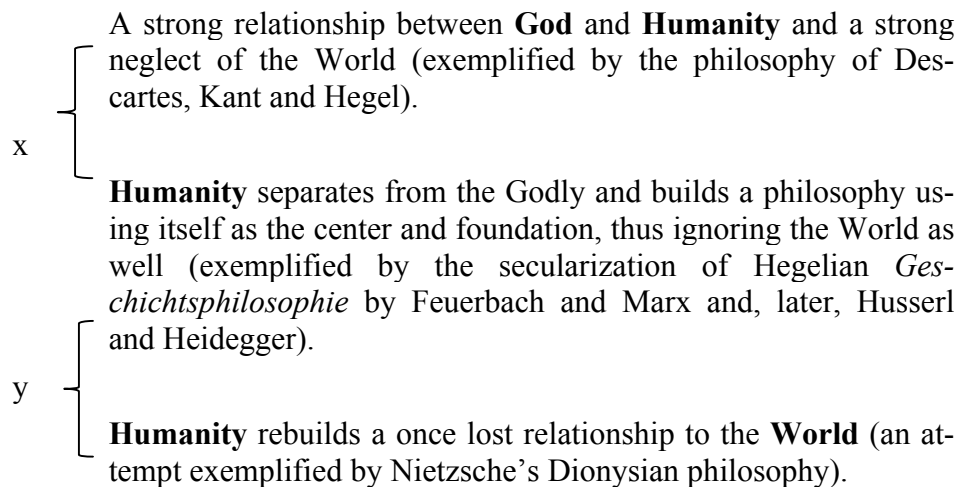
⁵⁸ Löwith explicitly claims that he is describing a development away from God and Humanity and towards Humanity and World (See: *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 4.) and the chapter on Nietzsche describes the attempt to regain the World for Humanity ("*der Versuch zur Wiedergewinnung der Welt*") but this attempt does not describe a development within the tradition as much as it describes an abandonment. In the end, one is not told by Löwith how or why the relationship between Humanity and God *developed* into a relationship between Humanity and World; one is merely told that such a devel-

whose truth claims were founded independent of the Godly and the Worldly.

Another borrowed structure that is essential to this work comes from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. The section titled, *Von den drei Verwandlungen*, in which the three stages of *Geist* are introduced, is used by Löwith in tandem with Wolff's categorization of philosophy. The three stages of the metamorphoses of *Geist* are personified by the camel, the lion and the child and the first two stages are capable of developing (x,y) or transforming to the next.



Each stage is depicted by Löwith via a distinct relationship in Wolff's hermeneutic trinity.



The first stage, that of the camel, stands for ascetic ideals and for a metaphysic that dictates action and thus the camel rejoices at being told "thou shalt" (*du sollst*). Löwith, in summarizing Nietzsche, describes this stage as follows:

Der gehorsame Geist, der nicht seinen Eigenwillen, sondern den Willen

opment was attempted by Nietzsche. A Human-World relationship is, rather, the "positive" result Löwith and Nietzsche hoped for in future philosophies and not part of Löwith's presentation of a uniform movement in the history of philosophy. The importance of the book lies in Löwith's emphasis on the disappearance of God in metaphysics and its consequences for a purely Human-centric philosophy.

Gottes will, verehrt das Fremde und erträgt geduldig das Schwerste. Zum Schwersten gehört es sich zu erniedrigen, um seinem Hochmut wehe zu tun und seine Torheit leuchten zu lassen, um seiner Weisheit zu spotten.⁵⁹

The second stage of *Geist*, according to Nietzsche, is achieved through a yearning to be the master of oneself and is thus a shunning of reverence, God and declaring, “I want” (*ich will*). The lion, even with its new found freedom, is not able to create new values and is no new beginning. Thus, the last metamorphosis of the *Geist* is that of the child (*ich bin*). Nietzsche describes the child as follows:

Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen.⁶⁰

The child does not want *anything* in contrast to the lion; instead, it lives in the freedom of the playfulness of creating. The last stage is one that has yet to be reached and is not a hermeneutic tool for depicting the historical but for depicting what Nietzsche had hoped for in future philosophies. In this last stage the philosopher will have successfully removed the Godly from the trinity of metaphysics and will have rediscovered a relationship between Humanity and World.

Löwith concentrated, however, much of his life work to critiquing the first transformation of *Geist* and it is this style of critique that separates Löwith from both Wolff and, more importantly, Nietzsche. Löwith borrows both Wolff’s and Nietzsche’s hermeneutic structures to elucidate his interpretation of the development of metaphysics since Descartes. The philosophers Löwith analyzes in *Gott, Mensch und Welt* are interpreted in such a way that they fit nicely in this Wolff-Nietzschean schemata. A consequence of analyzing the philosophic greats against a predetermined formula, however, is to present them as being direct consequences of each other and is to present the philosophical tradition as being congruous and consequential. In this sense, Löwith’s task in *Gott, Mensch und Welt* is easy to understand. Every philosopher dealt with by Löwith is whittled down to a metaphysical idea or doctrine that places them in a straight line with their philosophic predecessors and successors. *Gott, Mensch und Welt* is not a book which thoroughly analyzes the development of Western metaphysics in detail,⁶¹ rather it

⁵⁹ *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 162.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, “*Von den drei Verwandlungen*”.

⁶¹ When comparing the detailed analysis of nineteenth century German philosophy in *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* to the history of metaphysics from Descartes to Nietzsche in *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, one notic-

works towards a very specific goal; supporting Nietzsche's interpretation of metaphysics via the three stages of *Geist*.

This first stage Löwith feels is best accentuated by the philosophies of Descartes, Kant and Hegel and is one in which a given metaphysic depicts a strong relationship between God and Humanity and a strong neglect of the World. This relationship between Humanity and God, or, between the Human *Geist* and the *other-worldly*, has its roots deep in the Christian tradition and philosophy's ties thereto. Löwith's goal in *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, however, is not only to describe the first stage of *Geist* but to show the development (depicted in the last section as, "x") in philosophy that led Humanity to become the master of itself and the foundation of knowledge.

2.2 THE FIRST TRANSFORMATION OF *GEIST*

Descartes' scientific thinking, along with that of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Leibniz and Kant, proceeded with the assumption that there was a transcendental creator who had determined the laws of the World. His *Meditations* were oriented towards freeing himself from uncertainty in the hope of being able to recognize these laws, or, to be able to clearly and distinctly perceive his ostensible surroundings. Descartes' methodology was one that built its foundations in the Human self-consciousness and its ties to its Creator. This introduction of a metaphysic of subjectivity – i.e. a metaphysic of the self-consciousness –, however, pinpointed for Löwith a movement in the history of philosophy that shifted the emphasis in the relationship between God and Humanity to the Human – to the "I" in "I think, therefore I am". Descartes' philosophy is fascinating for Löwith in that it is a development away from objectivity to a transcendental subjectivity in which truth can be determined by and through the consciousness of an individual. For, although Descartes emphasizes a strong relationship between God and Humanity, his subjectivity sets the stage for the first metamorphosis (x) – where the other-worldly fades away and the subject determines truth alone. Löwith sees exactly this development much later in Husserl's treatment of Descartes' *Meditations*:

es a drastic change in style. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* serves the purpose of *describing* the different shifts of philosophical trends since Hegel and the various philosophical problems that arose from these trends. *Gott, Mensch und Welt* does not let the history of metaphysics speak for itself or merely describe, rather, this development is interpreted with the primary goal in mind of showing the progression in metaphysics that led to Humanity being independent of both God and World.

Bei Husserl ist von Gott kein Gedanke und die Innerlichkeit des Selbst ist auf eine “Egologie” reduziert als dem Grund und Boden wissenschaftlicher Begründung unserer Welterfahrung und –erkenntnis.⁶²

Husserl’s ego-centric philosophy (“*Egologie*”) takes as its motivation and inspiration the Augustinian and Cartesian emphasis of the ego and ignores the dependence of the ego, or immortal soul, to God. In making this claim, Löwith points to Husserl’s description in the *Cartesianische Meditationen* in which he describes his ego-centric philosophy as being solipsistic – i.e. reduced to itself and not to a God.

Ihre Stufe: die solipsistisch beschränkte Egologie; diese Ontologie als apriorisches Fundament für die radikalste Begründung einer universalen Tatsachenwissenschaft, einer Philosophie des faktischen Seins. Die echten metaphysischen Probleme als die höchststufigen innerhalb einer Phänomenologie. Kontrastierung der Cartesianischen und der phänomenologischen Ausführung der Idee einer Philosophie. Die phänomenologische Philosophie als universalste und konsequenste Durchführung der Idee der Selbsterkenntnis, die nicht nur die Urquelle aller echten Erkenntnis ist, sondern auch alle echte Erkenntnis in sich befaßt.⁶³

Löwith sees this secularization of Descartes’ *Meditations* as being a natural movement, if not being a direct consequence, of the development of metaphysics that occurred in the time period separating Descartes from Husserl. It is for this reason that Löwith continues his investigation in *Gott, Mensch und Welt* to the philosophy of Kant and continues his tracing of the first development of *Geist* (x) which led to the possibility of Husserl’s secularized Cartesian philosophy.

For Kant, as for Descartes, God and the immortal played key roles in his philosophical oeuvre. He separates, however, the World in two – the phenomenal world, or things as they appear, and the noumenal world which cannot be experienced. Löwith interprets Kant’s metaphysic as being one in which the phenomenal world is excluded from being a source of true knowledge. The main goal of philosophical investigation for Kant was God and the noumenal world – an investigation possible because of Humanity’s connection to God via *Geist*.⁶⁴ Löwith’s main goal in his short investigation of Kant in *Gott, Mensch und Welt* is, however, to show to what extent World and God are ideas

⁶² *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 31.

⁶³ Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, 193.

⁶⁴ Löwith quotes from Kant’s *Vorlesung über die Metaphysik* to support this claim: “Alle metaphysischen Spekulationen gehen darauf hinaus. Gott und die andere Welt ist das einzige Ziel aller unserer philosophischen Untersuchungen, und wenn die Begriffe von Gott und von der anderen Welt nicht mit der Moralität zusammenhängen, so wären sie nichts nütze”. See: *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 52.

or postulates rooted in Human subjectivity. World is, namely, the idea of the embodiment of all objects of experience (*Inbegriff aller Sinnendinge*)⁶⁵ and God the *summum summa Intelligentia* or the highest ideal of a person. As a thinking and moral being Humanity is able to link the World, as the idea of a never completed totality of appearances, with God, as the idea of a perfectly moral person, in a system.⁶⁶ Humanity thus acts as a mediator between the *ideas* of World and God.

Beide sind ein *maximum*: Gott als *summum summa Intelligentia*, die Welt als *Inbegriff aller Sinnendinge*. Sie sind aber keine empirischen *Correlata*, sondern heterogen. Als zwei heterogene *maxima* können sie sich nicht zu einem System vereinigen. Es bedarf dazu eines sie verbindenden “Mittelbegriffs” und dieser kann kein anderer als der Mensch sein, der diese beiden an sich heterogenen Maximalideen denkt... Gott und Welt machen im Menschen, und nur in ihm, ein “System” aus, weil sie beide in ihm “subjektiv systematisch” verknüpft sind.⁶⁷

The God of Kant’s philosophy, however, is difficult to compare with the classical Christian idea of God.

Dieser Gott ist aber weder ein biblischer Schöpfergott, noch ein Gott, der sich offenbart hat. Es ist unsere eigene praktische Vernunft, die uns nötigt, unsere Pflichten, zusammengefaßt im Kategorischen Imperativ, so aufzufassen, “als ob” sie Gottes Gebote wären.⁶⁸

This shift in metaphysics, although slight was not without its consequences.

⁶⁵ “Zwar bezeichnet Kant auch noch in den Kritischen Schriften die Welt als das Ganze, aber nicht mehr im Sinne des Weltalls, sondern als ein ‘synthetisches’ Ganzes, d.h. sie ist eine schöpferische Leistung der menschlichen Vernunft, die alle Naturerscheinungen im Begriff ‘Welt’ ideell zu Einheit zusammenfaßt.” Ibid, 53.

⁶⁶ Löwith is referring to Kant’s *Opus postumum*, (Band I, 46) when he makes the following claim: “Der Wille Gottes, daß eine Welt sei und nur der Mensch Gott ähnlich, dieser Glaubensartikel ist auch noch der Standpunkt, mit dem die Transzendentalphilosophie steht und fällt, wengleich Gott, dergleichen Freiheit und Unsterblichkeit, für die kritische Reflexion zu Ideen geworden sind, die zwar keine Glaubensartikel, wohl aber ‘Glaubenssachen’ der reinen praktischen Vernunft sind. Die Idee der Freiheit steht aber an erster Stelle, weil sie ‘das Verband des Übergangs macht’, d.h. die Verbindung von Gott und Welt mit uns herstellt.” *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 64f. That Löwith refers to Kant’s *Opus postumum* is interesting because in this work Kant interprets his own philosophical system in terms of Wolff’s categorization of philosophy. See: Johann Rheindorf, *Kants Opus postumum und das Ganze der Philosophie*, 114f: “Ein neuer Gedanke ist das **Gott und Welt verknüpfende** oder **zu einem System vereinigende Subjekt, das denkende Wesen**. Der Dualismus von **Mundus sensibilis und intelligibilis, Homo noumenon und phänomenon** ist im Fortschreiben und –schreiten **aufgehoben**; auf nur zwei Bogen zeigt sich eine Entwicklung, die in der Qualifizierung des **denkenden Menschen** als **Gott und Welt verbindend dem Vernunft-Anspruch auf Einheit** und das **Ganze** antwortet. Mit dieser, eher romantisch – oder wolffianisch-barock – als **kritisch** anmutenden Fassung hatte Kant einen ähnlichen Entwurf entsetzt, er variierte als nicht einfach die Worstellung, sondern erprobte Akzentuierungen, die Eigenart und Schwerpunkt seines Programms hervorheben sollten...”

⁶⁷ Ibid, 61f.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 85.

Again, with Descartes the method for obtaining certainty and truth was independent of biblical revelation and the investigation of corporeal objects – it was the subject and its consciousness in which philosophical truths could be achieved.

x_i

God	}
Humanity	

 The *existence* of God lies in subjective consciousness

The actual *existence* of God for Descartes, however, could be proven whereas for Kant, thinking about God leads only to a postulate of God (*Gottesidee*).⁶⁹

x_{ii}

God	}
Humanity	

 An *idea* of God lies in subjective consciousness

It is exactly this strain of thought that Löwith emphasizes in his work; namely the degradation of God in metaphysics to an *idea*.⁷⁰ Löwith explains this movement as follows:

Damit hat Kant alle bisherigen Gottesbeweise destruiert und an deren Stelle einen moralischen postuliert, der die Gottesidee auf die Subjektivität reduziert.⁷¹

What Löwith hopes to show, however, is not a causal relationship in the history of philosophy. It is in no way his opinion that Descartes' *Meditations* led to the idea of God as moral postulate in Kant's philosophy. The metamorphoses and the stages of the

⁶⁹ An interesting corollary to this idea can be found in Charles Taylor's book, *Hegel*, where he describes this trend in the Enlightenment (and not just in Kant's philosophy) as follows: "From this notion of the Enlightenment as the insight into reality which cuts it down to size as a world of sensible material things, we can understand two basic features of its ideology which Hegel singles out. First, the absolute or God is reduced to the empty notion of a supreme being (Hegel uses the French expression 'être suprême') to which no further description can be applied. For all particular reality is now seen as merely material and sensible, and all particular descriptions can only be given meaning as interpreted in the light of this reality. So that any attempt to fill out the notion of God by describing him as father, creator, ascribing to him acts in history, etc. are bound to appear totally incongruous, for they depend on our seeing the relationships or acts in question as embodying some spiritual significance. ... But the Enlightenment consciousness sees the world as an assemblage of purely material sensible things; it therefore cannot find a language to speak of God nor conceive of God as intervening in history." Charles Taylor. *Hegel*, 180.

⁷⁰ "Gott, sagt Kant geradezu, ist 'mein eigener Gedanke', eine Idee, die sich auf uns selbst bezieht – lutherisch gesagt: ein deus pro nobis – die wir 'selbstschöpferisch' solche maximalen Gedanken wie Gott und Welt entwerfen". *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 63.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 63.

trinity of metaphysics are guidelines which roughly apply to different philosophers within the Western canon. The movement towards the independence of Humanity within metaphysics, as can be seen developing not only in the philosophy of Descartes and Kant but, as will be seen, in Hegel as well, is nothing less than a mere trend and not a progression or “revealing”.

The role Hegel and his students played in this trend towards secularizing metaphysics and bringing the first metamorphosis to fruition is not only dealt with by Löwith in *Gott, Mensch und Welt* but elaborated in detail in *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*.⁷² The subtitle of the work, *der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, is a reference to this first metamorphosis as the shift in metaphysics from the relationship between God and Humanity, to a self-sufficient Humanity was a revolution (*revolutionäre Bruch*) of sorts within the philosophical tradition. Hegel is an interesting philosophic subject for Löwith because of his having conjoined philosophy and history. Much more than Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon,⁷³ Hegel possessed a historical sense, turning the history of philosophy into the heart of world history, giving birth to the *Weltgeist* and tying epistemology to the passage of time. Whereas the subject was gaining preeminence in philosophy before Hegel, Hegel himself emphasized the *subjective*, or Human action and its historical manifestations. Löwith’s discussion thereof can be found in the section of *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* titled, “*die endgeschichtliche Konstruktion der Geschichte der Welt*”.

Die Geschichte der Philosophie ist für Hegel kein Geschehen neben oder über der Welt, sondern “das Innerste der Weltgeschichte” selbst. Was beide gleichermaßen beherrscht, ist das Absolute als Weltgeist, zu dessen

⁷² Löwith’s attitude towards the development in philosophy led by Hegel and his students echoes that of Richard Kroner and his enthusiasm towards the history of philosophy between Kant and Hegel in his book (whose title might very well have inspired Löwith), *Von Kant bis Hegel* (1921). In the preface to the second edition Kroner writes: “*Ich bin nach wie vor überzeugt, daß die Entwicklung von Kant bis Hegel einer inneren, sachlichen, logischen Notwendigkeit folgte, und daß sie daher auf keinen Fall unberücksichtigt bleiben oder als ein Irrweg abgetan werden darf*”, vii. Löwith does not claim that his history follows a necessary development in the history of philosophy, he does, however, claim that both Hegel and Nietzsche are philosophers that must not be ignored by modernity: “*Hegel und Nietzsche sind die beiden Enden, zwischen denen sich das eigentliche Geschehen der Geschichte des deutschen Geistes im 19. Jahrhundert bewegt. Weil man aber in Hegels Werk zumeist den glanzvollen Abschluß der Systeme des Idealismus sah und aus Nietzsches Schriften beliebige Teile zu einer zeitgemäßen Verwendung entnahm, mußte man sich mit Rücksicht auf beide versehen*”. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, 3.

⁷³ See: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 46. “*Sein Philosophieren setzt ein mit historisch-theologischen Abhandlungen über den Geist des Christentums, die den historischen Sinn von Voltaire, Hume und Gibbon weit übertreffen*”.

Wesen die Bewegung und also auch die Geschichte gehört. Hegels Werk enthält nicht nur eine Philosophie der Geschichte und eine Geschichte der Philosophie, sondern sein ganzes System ist in so grundlegender Weise geschichtlich gedacht wie keine Philosophie zuvor.⁷⁴

What follows from Hegel's historical sense is a phenomenology as an investigation into the unfolding of the Human *Geist* in history. This unfolding, this development of *Geist* in history has a goal – Absolute Knowledge. Absolute Knowledge is achieved through a remembering of the different stages of the unfolding of *Geist*⁷⁵ in history and this remembering is simultaneously the consummation of past knowledge. Absolute Knowledge does not exist as a present, it cannot be known outside of history. Rather it is through the movement of history that Absolute Knowledge reveals itself. This is a “revolution” in philosophical thought because of the historical element (i.e. *Human* element) it brings to the tradition of metaphysics. For idealists, truth is and always was independent of history, it did not unveil itself in the movement of time – it always *is*, whereas for Hegel, truth, or Absolute Knowledge, is a *becoming*. With the impact of Hegel's philosophy on nineteenth century German philosophy, Löwith saw an end to a particular type of philosophizing tied to idealism.⁷⁶ In response to this *end*, along with its many treatments by Hegel's students, a new *beginning* was to be attempted in the late nineteenth century by Nietzsche.

According to Löwith, Hegel's philosophy built a picture in which God and Humanity were bound together and separate from the World. For Hegel both God and Humanity share in *Geist* and the truth of God must be understood via this connection.

Gott ist Geist und seine Wahrheit kann nur im Geist begriffen werden; der Mensch ist seinem Wesen nach ebenfalls Geist und hat daher einen wesentlichen Bezug auf Gott. *Mensch und Gott gehören zusammen, wogegen die Natur kein eigenes Verhältnis zum Geist als dem Absoluten*

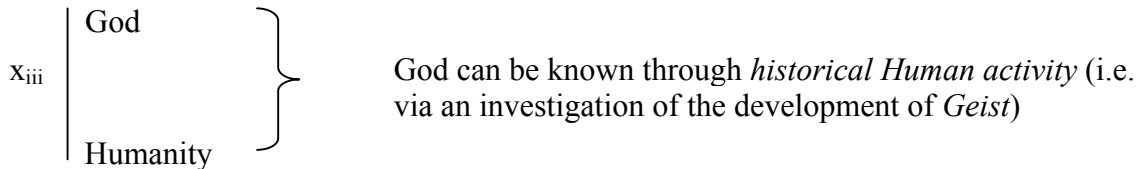
⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Das Ziel dieser im Element der Geschichte lebenden Konstruktion der dialektischen Bewegung des Geistes ist das ‘absolute Wissen’. Es wird erreicht auf dem Weg über die ‘Erinnerung’ aller schon dagewesenen Geister. Dieser Weg über das gewesene Wesen der Geschichte des immer gegenwärtigen Geistes ist kein Umweg, den man umgehen könnte, sondern der einzig gangbare Weg zur Vollendung des Wissens”. Ibid, 47.

⁷⁶ Löwith often talks about Hegel's philosophy as marking the end of classical philosophy or idealism. See: *Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen Philosophie* (1928) (V, 1-26) and the second chapter of *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, “Der endgeschichtliche Sinn von Hegels Vollendung der Geschichte der Welt und des Geistes” (IV, 46-69).

hat.⁷⁷

To understand *Geist*, however, was to understand its manifestations in Human historical activity.



The strain of metaphysics that Löwith hopes to show is one that moved from proving the existence of God, to making God an idea in Human self-consciousness, to searching for the Human connection to God through *Human* activity. It was then no surprise for Löwith that most of Hegel's students removed God from their own philosophies and concentrated solely on Human action.

Hegel's students could not completely grasp his concept of *Geist* and the guidelines for being able to scientifically investigate its manifestations in history. To be able to claim, for example, that the French Revolution was a particular expression of *Geist* is to first have criterion for recognizing *Geist* in history. The limitations of the possibility of finding such a criterion is what made Hegel's philosophy problematic. Whereas nobody was to doubt the importance of the French Revolution for the West, nobody was willing to attempt to prove its significance for the history of Humanity as a whole. Philosophers such as Feuerbach and Marx were more than aware of this difficulty and thus restricted the possibility for such investigations of *Geist* to the *present*. This step, away from Absolute *Geist* to a contemporary *Zeitgeist*, extracts *Geist* from the beyond, demystifies it, makes it this-worldly and Human – in short, via a process of secularization.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 89. Löwith is referring to Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of religion (*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*) where he discusses the incarnation of God as being proof of the unity of Human and Godly nature: "**Daß es dem Menschen gewiß werde** [that Human and Godly nature are a unity], **mußte Gott im Fleisch auf der Welt erscheinen**," and shortly after: "**Zugleich ist hinzuzufügen, daß die Einheit der göttlichen und menschlichen Natur in einem Menschen erscheinen mußte**". Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, zweiter Band, III. Teil, 141.

⁷⁸ Löwith emphasizes the "secularization" of the Hegelian philosophy of *Geist* by Feuerbach and Marx as being the product of their respective philosophical anthropologies. See: *Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen Philosophie*, (V, 1) *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, (IX, 105) *Marxismus und Geschichte*, (II,

In this history of metaphysics, Hegel draws the curtain on the first development of *Geist* in which the strong relationship between God and Humanity deteriorates into the sovereignty of Human understanding. Löwith continues, however, his investigation of the students of Hegel as an investigation of the second stage of *Geist*, which Nietzsche depicts as the lion wanting to be independent and the master of himself. The perpetuation of Hegel's philosophy, namely, finds itself in the historization of philosophy and in its byproduct, historicism, which Löwith calls "the last religion of the educated".⁷⁹ Hegel's teaching of *Geist* as becoming Absolute and as being the subject and substance of history was transformed into a mere mirror in which the present, via *Zeitgeist*, was to be depicted.

Humanity } Independently determines truth via an investigation of *Zeitgeist*.

For Feuerbach this meant that the mortal and finite Humanity was to be made the subject of philosophy (anthropology) and philosophy the subject of Humanity. For him the task became to postulate a philosophy in which one turned away from the Absolute and the infinite *Geist* with the goal of centering on Humanity and not, for example, proofs of God, in the goals of philosophy.⁸⁰

...aus der Philosophie des Absoluten, d.i. der (philosophischen) *Theologie*, die Notwendigkeit der Philosophie des Menschen, d.i. der *Anthropologie*, abzuleiten und durch die Kritik der göttlichen Philosophie die Kritik der menschlichen zu begründen.⁸¹

He thus partook in the beginning of a philosophy that was founded in the finite, the determined and the actual (*das Endliche, das Bestimmte, das Wirkliche*). This resulted in Feuerbach's emphasizing the only one remaining credible starting point for philosophy

330) *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, (IV, 95). In making these claims Löwith is referring to Feuerbach's *Vorlesungen über Religion* (See the seventeenth lecture and the discussion of Human *Geist* – Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 6, 172-176.) and Marx's prophetic remarks in the *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*.

⁷⁹ See: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 83: "Der Historismus, der aus Hegels Metaphysik der Geschichte des Geistes entsprang, wurde zur "letzten Religion" der Gebildeten, die noch an Bildung und Wissen glaubten."

⁸⁰ Something foreseen by Johann Gottfried Herder whom Löwith quotes in his essay, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche": "Soll die Philosophie den Menschen nützlich werden, so macht sie den Menschen zu ihrem Mittelpunkt; sie, die sich durch gar zu ungeheure Ausdehnungen geschwächt hat, wird stark werden, wenn sie sich auf ihren Mittelpunkt zusammenzieht." "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche" VI, 76.

⁸¹ As quoted by Löwith in: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 391.

– the *anthropological*. Without God or the other-worldly determining Humanity and the individual, Humanity was thrown back on itself to determine its being; i.e. the “thou” determined the “I” and being (*Sein*) became a being-together (*Miteinandersein*). It was important for Feuerbach to pull Humanity out of the “idealistic mire”⁸² and to transform a philosophy predominated by theories of *Geist* into a philosophy predominated with the concerns of Humanity.

When Humanity, however, is left to determine metaphysics independent of God and World a problem of meaning arises – as Löwith writes:

Erst mit diesem *auf sich selber* bezogenen Menschen entsteht die eigentliche Problematik des Menschen.⁸³

The philosophers of the nineteenth century rid themselves of their God and, in turn, made Humanity, its history and the person the one possible meaning-giving structure. A *Problematik* of Humanity arises when a very Christian influenced philosophy rids itself of its Christ; when it rids itself of the fundamental meaning-giving tool of Human existence from the past two thousand years and concentrates on the Human-historical. The first transformation of *Geist* in the history of philosophy was not without its consequences. It set the stage, rather, for a crisis in philosophy centering on the concepts of *Humanity, history* and *nihilism*.

2.3 A PROBLEM OF MEANING: HUMANITY, HISTORY AND NIHILISM

Modern man overestimates the significance of history within the totality of reality because he has lost the sense of human nature within nature at large (“History and Christianity” (1956), III, 187).

Influenced by the secularization of the Hegelian historicizing of philosophy, Löwith writes that the essence of Humanity is no longer static but something undergoing development over time.⁸⁴ Being the sole provider of meaning, Humanity is not bound to a religious interpretation of itself (God – Human) or a natural interpretation (World – Human). What results is a negative interpretation of Humanity as being neither Godly nor Natural.

⁸² “*Man’s Self-Alienation in the Early Writings of Marx*” (1954), V, 73.

⁸³ *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 389.

⁸⁴ See: *Die Einheit und Verschiedenheit der Menschen*, I, 243-258. This problem is also contextualized within the nineteenth century in *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* in the chapter, “*Das Problem der Humanität*”.

Die Frage ist aber: Genügt es schon, kein untermenschliches Tier und kein übermenschlicher Gott zu sein, um positiv so etwas wie ein "Mensch" zu sein?⁸⁵

The attempt of Humanity to ground its existence independently, however, is problematic. A singular concept of Humanity became lost such that it could be maintained that the term "Human" is not as adequate a description of a person as "dog" is that of a canine. It could further be maintained that personhood, unlike the quality of being a dog, is in itself already a Human-historical phenomenon. The awareness of a dog living in the twelfth century and its understanding of its surroundings can likely be said to not be very different than that of a dog living in the twenty-first century. A person, however, is thought to be a spatiotemporal phenomenon and relates itself to its surroundings differently at different times. That the term "Human" is not as adequate a description of a person as "dog" is that of a canine is dependent, for Löwith, on modern historical consciousness.

Die Menschheit und ihre Menschlichkeit scheinen somit überhaupt kein fragloses, natürliches Merkmal, sondern eine fragwürdige Bestimmung zu sein, eine zur *Geschichte* der Menschheit gehörige *Idee*, aber kein *naturgeschichtliche Tatsache*. Das was den Menschen geschichtlich zum Menschen macht, überschreitet das Faktum, daß immer nur ein Mensch einen Menschen macht.⁸⁶

The view that Humanity is a historical phenomenon brings the essence of Humanity into question, making it problematic and bringing the question of how it has changed over time to the forefront.⁸⁷ On the other hand, a dog is considered to be completely and unquestionably a natural phenomenon and is, therefore, in its totality, identifiable. The development of Humanity over time, in the hope of answering these questions, was to be studied in philosophy by the movement known as historicism.

Philosophies of history interpret history under the guidelines of a principle and this principle is meant to unify distinct historical events and successions with the pur-

⁸⁵ Ibid, 244.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 245.

⁸⁷ Löwith sees exactly this problem arising in Heidegger's philosophy via the absolutizing of a particular historical existence: "*Der Ausgangspunkt von Heideggers Existenzialontologie war zunächst auch noch das durch Dilthey geschärfte historische Bewußtsein und damit das Bewußtsein von der Verschiedenheit der möglichen Stellungnahmen und Anschauungsweisen der Menschen. Die Konsequenz davon ist bei ihm aber nicht mehr die historische Relativität, sondern im Gegenteil: die Verabsolutierung der je eigenen geschichtlichen Existenz und – in historischer Rücksicht – die Verabsolutierung des 'Ursprungs' der europäischen Philosophie bei den Griechen*". Ibid, 252.

pose of showing their directedness towards a distinct goal. The most obvious and straightforward example of a philosophy of history in which history is interpreted under a binding principle can be found in the rather prophetic document of Marx, *Manifest der kommunistischen Partei*. Löwith names the Manifesto a “prophetic document”⁸⁸ for two reasons: first, it does not contain “purely scientific statement[s] based on empirical evidence and tangible facts” and second, it anticipates “the future philosophy which realizes the unity of reason and reality, of essence and existence, as postulated by Hegel”.⁸⁹ The principle, however, under which historical events are subsumed is that of class-struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed. The oppression is an enslavement to an alien power, to capital and to the capitalist mode of production. The goal of history is then the liberation of the oppressed via revolution akin, says Löwith, to the Jewish-Christian belief in a final fight between Christ and Antichrist – in this case, between proletariat and bourgeoisie. For Marx, the proletariat represents the chosen people whose existence will be fulfilled through the course of history. Löwith feels the need to warn his reader of the apparent connection between philosophies of history and eschatology. Eschatology aims toward the fulfillment and salvation of humankind through the return of Christ – philosophies of history, although their protagonist differs – be it the non-self-alienated proletariat, the positivistic scientist or the *Übermensch* –, also speak of Human fulfillment. Marx’s philosophy interpreted history for practical purposes, thus developing the historical truth of the class conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The proletariats are not valued as “gods” or as higher forms of beings by Marx, they do, however, hold the potential of universal Humanity, a potential of common existence based on natural worth.

Not all nineteenth century philosophers attempted to define Humanity in terms of the process of history. Kierkegaard’s response to the crisis of meaning in the second

⁸⁸ Löwith, *Meaning in History* (1949), 43. The connection between the *Manifesto* and prophecy was widely accepted in the middle of the twentieth century. See: Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen*, 639: “Aber sie [philosophers of history] vergessen, daß es mindestens zum großen Teil, Pseudoreligion ist, säkularisierte Eschatologie”. Leonhard Ragaz, *Die Geschichte der Sache Christi*: “Angeregt durch die Menschenrechte der französischen Revolution und die Hegelsche Philosophie, erscheint der Marxismus im letzten Grunde als säkularisierter Messianismus, als Botschaft der Weltumwälzung der Gerechtigkeit, welche die Schwachen und Geringen; in concreto: das Proletariat, zu einer ‘neuen Erde’ aufruft”. Theodor Steinbüchel, *Sozialismus*, 34: “Daß Marx diese Tiefe des Welt-sinnes nicht sah – das erst ist die große Schwäche seiner säkularisierten Eschatologie”. Walter Kühneth, *Politik zwischen Dämon und Gott*, and his section on “Der säkularisierte Messianismus”, 250.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 35.

stage of *Geist*, as well as that of Nietzsche, was of high interest for Löwith. Kierkegaard aimed to reform Humanity and return to a primordial Christianity and Nietzsche wished to discover the possibilities of ancient Greek culture for a future:

Wer jedoch Ernst macht mit der Einsicht in den Verfall der Humanität, muß dazu kommen, entweder – wie Kierkegaard – das ursprüngliche Christentum – vor seiner Deformation in eine sanktionslose Moral und Humanität – reformieren oder – wie Nietzsche – im Rückgriff auf die antike Humanität mit dem modernen Menschen im Hinblick auf seine künftigen Möglichkeiten experimentieren zu wollen. Am Ende dieser beiden Versuche steht bei dem einen der “Gottmensch“ und bei dem andern ein aus dem Tod Gottes hervorgegangener “Übermensch”.⁹⁰

Both Kierkegaard (1840) and Nietzsche (1870) understood their respective times to be that of the annulment (*Auflösung*) of idealism and of a pure philosophy of spirit. Nietzsche’s own response to this change is expressed through his declaration in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* that “God is dead”. In both cases the transition in philosophy from centering on a relationship between Humanity and God, to Humanity itself, was recognized as being problematic and nihilistic. Whereas Kierkegaard strove to recreate an original relationship between Humanity and God, returning to an earlier Christianity and wiping away 1800 years of Christian history,⁹¹ Nietzsche strove to reconnect Humanity and World via a return to a pre-Christian Greek understanding.

Löwith notes in his essay titled, *Kierkegaard und Nietzsche*,⁹² that the philosophies of both are centered on Humanity, the human life and what it has become. The driving question of “what is Humanity?” of both philosophies leads Löwith to call them philosophical anthropologies; i.e. philosophies that react to the anthropological predicament of Humanity’s sovereignty within the trinity of metaphysics. Kierkegaard emphasizes the inwardness of an individual existence, thus complimenting Marx’s emphasis on a public and outward-existence and Feuerbach’s designation of the individual as being moderated through a particular “thou” – each emphasizing different anthropological aspects of Humanity. More so for Kierkegaard than either Feuerbach or Marx, however, the displacement of Humanity within philosophy was one with negative consequences,

⁹⁰ Löwith, “Zur Problematik der Humanität in der Philosophie nach Hegel,” 52.

⁹¹ “Infolgedessen wollten zwar beide [Kierkegaard and Nietzsche] eine “Revision” des Christentums herbeiführen, aber so, daß Kierkegaard meinte, man müsse durch “Aneignung” und Gleichzeitigwerden die “1800 Jahre wegschaffen”, welche zwischen uns und dem ursprünglichen Christentum liegen, ‘als hätte es sie gar nicht gegeben.’ “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche oder philosophische und theologische Überwindung des Nihilismus” (1933), VI, 55.

⁹² See: “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche” (1933), VI, 75.

one that required a conscious decision.

Being negatively free, or free from, is for Kierkegaard the basis of his discussion of irony. The individual lives ironically by negating all other existences and the retreat into *inwardness* is accomplished through the negation of the *outer*. Kierkegaard concentrated on the inwardness of the individual because, with the annulment of idealism, he found it important not to change society and its order as Marx, but to return to the totality and completeness of being Human, possible only through an inward-directedness. Löwith quotes Kierkegaard's *Wiederholung* in evidencing his general confusion of his Human predicament.

Mein Leben ist bis zum Äußersten gebracht; es ekelt mich des Daseins, welches unschmackhaft ist, ohne Salz und Sinn. Wäre ich gleich hungriger als Pierrot, ich möchte dennoch nicht die Erklärung fressen, welche die Menschen anbieten. Man steck den Finger in die Erde, um zu riechen, in welchem Lande man ist, ich stecke den Finger ins Dasein – es riecht nach nichts. Wo bin ich? Was heißt denn das: die Welt? Was bedeutet dies Wort? Wer hat mich in das Ganze hineinbetrogen, und läßt mich nun dastehen? Wer bin ich? Wie bin ich in die Welt hineingekommen; warum hat man mich nicht vorher gefragt, warum hat man mich nicht erst bekannt gemacht mit Sitten und Gewohnheiten, sondern mich hineingesteckt in Reih und Glied als wäre ich gekauft von einem Menschenhändler?⁹³

Not being able to answer these questions of existence, Kierkegaard draws into himself by ironically negating all other existences – thus confronting nihilism. This confrontation with nothingness, however, allows one to make a decision: either to despair as a 'sickness unto death' or to wager to make a leap of faith. The leap of faith is the belief that only God could create and exist out of nothing and that the finite Human, standing before this nothingness, is only experiencing its finitude but not the total horizon of being. For Kierkegaard, nihilism is an *essential* experience that Humanity cannot avoid but one that can bring Humanity back to God through a decision to make a leap of faith.

Like irony and its negation of the outer-world, Kierkegaard sees sheer boredom as leading to decision and productive results. One can either despair in boredom or make the decision to do something with the belief that the action is not completely meaningless. Löwith refers to one of Kierkegaard's tales; namely, that the Babylonian towers were constructed not out of the need for artistic expression but out of boredom. The

⁹³ Kierkegaard, *Wiederholung*, *GW*, 5. und 6. Abteilung, 70-71.

emptiness of being that one is confronted with in boredom, as in irony, is a possible beginning of existence – a possibility that is actualized through the leap of faith that one’s actions can be constructive.

Whereas Kierkegaard finds meaning in nihilism by taking a leap of faith in believing in a creator God, Nietzsche gives up the impulse to reconcile with tradition. Kierkegaard’s faith is a turning away from nihilism; Nietzsche, however, saw nihilism as offering possibilities to move forward to new horizons. A consequence of nihilism for Nietzsche is rather the revaluation of all preexisting values. All values from the first stage of *Geist* need to be revaluated because of their nullification through the disappearance of a strong relationship in metaphysics between Humanity and God. Humanity’s sovereignty demands new values, which, for Nietzsche, were to be healthier and more natural values in an attempt to return to a more natural understanding of Humanity – i.e. through the reconciliation of Humanity and World.

Whereas Kierkegaard’s experience of nihilism is in one stride an acceptance; that is, an acceptance that there is a crisis of meaning, it is in the next stride a refusal. His leap of faith is a leaping away from the meaninglessness of life, a replacement of nothingness with God through a mere decision. Beyond meaning and meaninglessness, beyond good and evil, Nietzsche however, attempts to completely accept the totality of being (the World) as it is beyond Human interpretation. This acceptance is not doubled with a further negating. It is an acknowledgement thereof, in Löwith’s words, that everything “that is, is the way it is because it is, in its entirety, fateful”:

Was ist, ist so, wie es ist, weil es im Ganzen und schicksalhaft ist.⁹⁴

Nietzsche’s tenet that one should love one’s fate (*amor fati*) is an attempt to bind Humanity with the order of the World. Similar to how the ancient Greeks were convinced of a Cosmos that revolved around the concepts of generation and degeneration and applied this to historical events and life, Nietzsche postulates a Humanity that gives up its search for meaning and accepts its fate as being tied into the eternal recurrence, the eternal generation and degeneration of the World. Fate is merely a word used to describe this process of generation and degeneration in which one is intimately involved without attempting to give it meaning or to back away from its apparent incoherence.

⁹⁴ “Kierkegaard und Nietzsche”, VI, 93.

Speaking in terms, once again, of Nietzsche's metamorphoses, this stage in the history of philosophy is that of the lion who wants to be its own master. Confronted, however, with his inability to create or discover objective truths⁹⁵, the lion stands in front of an abyss, in front of nihilism and is confronted with a dilemma. The Christian irony of the lion, inasmuch as it has negated the idealistic values of its precursor, is as Kierkegaard identified it, problematic and thus confronted with a decision. The decision is for Löwith, however, not as Kierkegaard had posited it; it is not a decision between a leap of faith and despair but a decision to create new values. Löwith sees the treatment of nihilism by both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to be markers for future philosophical discussions concerning the crisis of meaning. Either one, with Kierkegaard, leaps back to the meaning giving structure of the Humanity – God duality or one, with Nietzsche, tries to create new values in an attempt to translate Humanity back into the World.

The result of twentieth century German philosophy as being Human-centric is, however, not one that Löwith viewed positively. Rather, Löwith followed Nietzsche in his commiseration over a lost metaphysical relationship between Humanity and World and was not far from mimicking Nietzsche in calling the disregard of the World in Western philosophy "the longest error".

2.4 THE LONGEST ERROR: HAVING FORGOTTEN THE WORLD

Das Erstaunlichste ist für Augustine nicht die Welt, sondern er selbst
(*Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 12).

Löwith's awareness of a problem of meaning arising out of nineteenth century philosophy drove him to attempt to understand Humanity as a natural phenomenon that was not historically conditioned but was identifiable in its totality.

Dennoch kann sich kein Mensch mir nichts dir nichts der Einsicht entziehen, daß Deutsche wie Juden, Franzosen wie Russen, Weiße wie Schwarze zuerst und zuletzt doch Menschen sind. Denn wie könnte man überhaupt noch die Menschen im Hinblick auf ihre Verschiedenheit vergleichsweise unterscheiden, wenn nicht nach Maßgabe von etwas, das inmitten aller Verschiedenheit und Unterscheidung gleich bleibt?⁹⁶

The picture Löwith draws of modern philosophy is one in which Humanity, now freed from God, struggles to define itself and its surroundings independently. He sees this

⁹⁵ In chapter five this inability will be discussed in relation to Löwith's "secularization thesis."

⁹⁶ Löwith, "*Zur Problematik der Humanität in der Philosophie nach Hegel*," 51.

independence, as Nietzsche does, as an opportunity to reconcile the longest error in philosophy by developing a metaphysical connection with the World. Löwith's yearning for a concept of World as an all-enveloping Cosmos that binds and regulates everything within is hard to miss in his writings. It is to this extent that Löwith's affinity to Nietzsche lasted his philosophical career. The only support he found in his attempt to develop a natural understanding of Humanity was in the writings of Nietzsche and it is thus appropriate to quote "Wie die 'Wahre Welt' endlich zur Fabel wurde" in length from Nietzsche's *Götzen-Dämmerung*, as Löwith⁹⁷ himself does. 'How the real world became a fable' is an extrapolation of the first stage of *Geist* and it mournfully concentrates on only one element of the trinity, the World, and its fading into obscurity.

Geschichte eines Irrthums.

1. Die wahre Welt erreichbar für den Weisen, den Frommen, den Tugendhaften, – er lebt in ihr, *er ist sie*.
(Älteste Form der Idee, relativ klug, simpel, überzeugend. Umschreibung des Satzes "ich Plato, *bin* die Wahrheit".)
2. Die wahre Welt, unerreichbar für jetzt, aber versprochen für den Weisen, den Frommen, den Tugendhaften ("für den Sünder, der Busse thut").
(Fortschritt der Idee: sie wird feiner, verfänglicher, unfasslicher, –*sie wird Weib*, sie wird christlich...)
3. Die wahre Welt, unerreichbar, unbeweisbar, unversprechbar, aber schon als gedacht ein Trost, eine Verpflichtung, ein Imperativ.
(Die alte Sonne im Grund, aber durch Nebel und Skepsis hindurch; die Idee sublim geworden, bleich, nordisch, königsbergisch.)
4. Die wahre Welt – unerreichbar? Jedenfalls unerreicht. Und als unerreicht auch *unbekannt*. Folglich auch nicht tröstend, erlösend, verpflichtend: wozu könnte uns etwas Unbekanntes verpflichten?...
(Grauer Morgen. Erstes Gähnen der Vernunft. Hahnenschrei des Positivismus.)
5. Die "wahre Welt" – eine Idee, die zu Nichts mehr nützlich ist, nicht einmal mehr verpflichtend, - eine unnützlich, eine überflüssig gewordene Idee, *folglich* eine widerlegte Idee: schaffen wir sie ab!
(Heller Tag; Frühstück, Rückkehr des bon sens und der Heiterkeit; Schamröte Plato's; Teufelslärm aller freien Geister.)
6. Die wahre Welt haben wir abgeschafft: welche Welt blieb übrig? Die scheinbare vielleicht? ... Aber nein! *Mit der wahren Welt haben wir auch die scheinbare abgeschafft!*
(Mittag; Augenblick des kürzesten Schattens; Ende des längsten

⁹⁷ *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 127-128.

Irrthums; Höhepunkt der Menschheit; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)⁹⁸

Löwith does, however, add a critique to this passage saying that Nietzsche does not differentiate between the World we *revere* and the World we *are*. He acknowledges that this lack of differentiation is taking the idea that Humanity is separate from the World for granted but that it fails to point to an appropriate relationship between Humanity and World that can otherwise be found in Nietzsche's philosophy; namely, that the two should not be thought of as different.

“*Ich, Nietzsche-Zarathustra, bin die Wahrheit der Welt.*”⁹⁹

This passage from *Götzen-Dämmerung* is important, however, because Löwith extrapolates on this idea that the World, as a metaphysical component, has been lost in our post-Platonic and Christian thinking. In *Gott, Mensch und Welt* he writes:

Erst das Christentum hat den Menschen von dieser Welt befreit und Erlösung von ihr möglich gemacht. Seit dem Christentum ist die Welt nicht mehr ein *Sein*, sondern nur noch ein *Zustand*, der wechseln kann; die derzeit herrschende Weltgestalt ist, in neutestamentlicher Sprache, ein “Schema” (1.Kor. 7,31).¹⁰⁰

He achieves this goal by often citing the philosophies of early Greek philosophers and comparing these philosophies to those important in the Western philosophical canon. Löwith refers to the first stage that Nietzsche describes in his history as being entailed, quite simply, in the philosophies of the early Greeks. He, however, skips over the second stage in Nietzsche's history, in which the World becomes more Christian, and moves on to the third stage in our having forgotten the World – where the true World is neither inaccessible nor verifiable; neither can one know of it nor hope to know of it in the future. In further attempts to bring ancient Greek thinking against modern philosophies he turns his critique towards modern historical thinking. Using the ancients as a counter-example he emphasizes their lack of presumptions concerning the meaning and goals of history:

The ancients were more moderate in their speculations. They did not presume to make sense of the world or to discover its ultimate meaning. They were impressed by the visible order and beauty of the cosmos, and the cosmic law of growth and decay was also the pattern for their under-

⁹⁸ Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*, “*Wie die ‘wahre Welt’ endlich zur Fabel wurde.*”

⁹⁹ As quoted by Löwith in: *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 128.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

standing of history.¹⁰¹

The “cosmic law of generation and degeneration” meant for Löwith the law of the eternal recurrence. The historical understanding of the Greeks that Löwith reveals is one that is non-linear, one that cannot have a goal or *telos* because every building-up was coupled with a breaking-down. Things could not be ‘built-up’ to the point where they had *progressed* past the point of a possible ‘breaking-down’ – these two processes were coupled in a circular understanding of reality. The Greeks then, in Löwith’s interpretation, would have viewed a philosophy of history as a “contradiction in terms”.¹⁰² Whereas philosophy was meant to deal with that which was eternal and unchanging, history was to deal with the processes of generation and degeneration, thus making the two irreconcilable.

In the introduction to *Meaning in History*, Löwith quickly summarizes the views of history of Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius. He explains that for Herodotus it was important to merely explain the happenings of history so that the acts of Humanity did not become lost in the passage of time. The meaning behind these acts in history were neither declared nor sought; they found their worth in being narratives that were to continue the knowledge of something having taken place. Similar to Herodotus, Löwith summarizes Thucydides view of history as following:

History was to him a history of political struggles based on the nature of man. And, since human nature does not change, events that happened in the past ‘will happen again in the same or in a similar way.’ Nothing really new can occur in the future when it is ‘the nature of all things to grow as well as decay.’¹⁰³

One could, namely, learn from history and more intelligently act in the future. History did not, however, essentially change a person or persons. Only Polybius, the reader is told, comes close to sharing a view of history with the Christians because he viewed ‘all historical events as leading to one goal’, the domination of the world by Rome. The law of history for him was, however, change and like the “goal” of spring showers is to bring life to summer, this too is overcome by a fall and winter.

Löwith feels a kinship to the classical view of history because, in his mind, they

¹⁰¹ *Meaning in History*, 4.

¹⁰² See: *Ibid*, 4f. “To the Greek thinkers a *philosophy* of history would have been a contradiction of terms. To them history was political history and, as such, the proper study of statesmen and historians”.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 7.

were able to connect the law of the Cosmos (i.e. World) – that of generation and degeneration – with the events within the history of Humanity. The classical view did not divide reality in two, they did not separate Humanity and its products (*die Welt der Geschichte*) from the World (*die Welt der Natur*) but viewed the law of one as being the law of the other and thus avoided a postulate of two worlds. The predominance of eschatology, however, and its forward-looking nature arose out of the promise of the salvation of Humanity by God that the nineteenth century secularized into a philosophy of history – promising the salvation of Humanity by a future deified, or ideal, Humanity. Concerning the modern expectations of a ‘better’ future Löwith writes:

We of today, concerned with the unity of universal history and with its progress toward an ultimate goal or at least toward a ‘better world’, are still in the line of prophetic and messianic monotheism; we are still Jews and Christians, however little we may think of ourselves in those terms.¹⁰⁴

It is not only the circular notion of time that Löwith wants to emphasize in his introduction by making one familiar with early Greek views of history, he wants to reveal a difference in how philosophers have posed the question of history and dealt with its subject. For “the classical historian asks: How did it come about? The modern historian asks: How shall we go ahead?”¹⁰⁵ And with this secondary point Löwith shows how both history and philosophy have become future oriented as both have the unspoken prerequisite question of ‘how shall we go ahead’. Löwith, for this very reason, does not attempt to answer the question of ‘how shall we go ahead’; he does not attempt to rectify what he sees as a problem in our historical thinking.

One might tend towards the guess that Löwith wants us to return to the classical view of history but this would be false. Whereas he praises Nietzsche for re-introducing the doctrine of the eternal recurrence and reviving the controversy between paganism and Christianity he challenges the thought that the modern philosopher could once again adopt classical views:

Der griechische Kosmos scheint unwiederholbar und der christliche Glaube an das Reich Gottes scheint nicht mehr gegenwartsfähig.¹⁰⁶

One might hope that Löwith create a new way of viewing history that is neither ‘classi-

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰⁶ “Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen” (1950), II, 249.

cal' nor 'modern' but this too goes unfulfilled as Löwith comments that the classical and modern views "have exhausted the basic approaches to the understanding of history".¹⁰⁷ The questions that do push this study for Löwith is "whether the 'last things' are really the first things and whether the future is really the proper horizon of a truly human existence" and "whether man's living *by expectation* agrees with a sober view of the world and of man's condition in it".¹⁰⁸ In opening a debate on this question Löwith provides the following points:

1. Man's hopes are "blind," i.e. unintelligent and miscalculating, deceptive, and illusory.¹⁰⁹
2. And yet mortal man cannot live without this precarious gift of Zeus, as little as he can live without fire, the stolen gift of Prometheus. If he were without hope, *de-sperans*, he would despair, in "wan-hope".¹¹⁰
3. History, instead of being governed by reason and providence, seems to be governed by chance and fate.¹¹¹
4. There would be no American, no French and no Russian revolutions and constitutions without the idea of progress and no idea of secular progress towards fulfillment without the original faith in a Kingdom of God...¹¹²

Löwith continues by quoting St. Paul as saying that "we are saved by hope – in fear and trembling" and then Léon Bloy as stating "mankind began to suffer *in hope*, and this is what we call the Christian era!" Löwith's insistence on staying neutral on this point leads him in one sentence to call the Hebrew and Christian faith in hope both foolish and enthusiastic. It was neither Löwith's goal in *Meaning in History* to solve the problem he saw as being fundamental to philosophies of history nor was it his intention to provide alternatives. His aims were critical, descriptive and hermeneutic. His preference for finding a metaphysical connection between Humanity and World is, however, obvious and underlies his philosophical career.

¹⁰⁷ *Meaning in History*, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 204. Löwith attaches an interesting footnote to this sentence: "The emphasis upon the future has found its most thorough explication in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, in spite of his rejection of theological transcendence. The *Dasein* is constantly ahead of itself by taking care of and providing for its worldly existence. It is determined by an all-pervading *Vor-struktur*. To exist authentically means to anticipate resolutely the ultimate end of one's own existence, i.e., one's death. Since existence knows of no other *eschaton* than death, the prevalent mode of existential anticipation is not hope but dread". 204, fn. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 206.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 199.

¹¹² Ibid, 212.

This understanding of nineteenth century German philosophy relies heavily on a Nietzschean interpretation of the history of metaphysics. Early in his career, however, Löwith did not apply the conceptual framework of God, Humanity and World in his philosophical writings. The concerns Löwith expresses with these concepts and their relationships (especially in the first transformation of *Geist*) are, however, concerns that had motivated Löwith's writings from the beginning of his philosophical career. It is to this extent that the concepts can be used as hermeneutic tools for understanding Löwith's entire philosophy despite the apparent anachronistic quality of doing so. This is not to say that Löwith's philosophy is completely homogenous or that one cannot discern a difference in style between his earlier and later writings. Characteristic of his early period is his critical preoccupation with the concept of Humanity (*Das Individuum*, 1928; "Max Scheler und das Problem einer philosophischen Anthropologie", 1935; "Die Einheit und Verschiedenheit der Menschen", 1938; "Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism", 1948¹¹³); a preoccupation that one does not often find in his writings in exile or after his return to Germany in 1952. This concentration on the concept of Humanity shifts¹¹⁴ at the beginning of and during the duration of his exile to the Human-historical (*Nietzsche*, 1935; *Burckhardt*, 1936; *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, 1941; *Meaning in History*, 1949) and distinctive of Löwith's late period after his return to Germany in 1952 is his critical engagement with the Human-World duality ("*Natur und Humanität des Menschen*", 1957; "*Der Weltbegriff der*

¹¹³ Although this work came twenty years after *Das Individuum* it is a re-working and re-tooling of two of his earlier writings that share the names of two of Jaspers' publications on existentialism "*Existenzphilosophie*" (Löwith, 1932 – Jaspers, 1937; although Löwith's essay predates Jaspers' printed lectures, Jaspers' philosophy, amongst others, is discussed) and "*Die geistige Situation der Zeit*" (Jaspers, 1931 – Löwith, 1933). Löwith's main concerns pertaining to existentialism, however, is not Jaspers' attempt at a "metaphysics of objective transcendence" but the much more radical and captivating attempt by Heidegger to understand "Being within the horizon of time." It is for this reason that Löwith omits Jaspers from his later discussion of existentialism. See: "Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism" (1948), VIII, 105.

¹¹⁴ In an essay from 1970, Manfred Riedel notes that Löwith's philosophy experienced an abrupt change (*Kehre*) and Burckhard Liebsch speaks of a turn (*Wende*) in his introductory lectures on Löwith held in 1990/91 at the University of Bochum. Riedel, *Löwiths philosophischer Weg*, 128f: "*Denn wie sein Lehrer Heidegger hat auch Löwith eine Art 'Kehre' vollzogen – eine Umkehr von der anthropologischen Orientierung an der personhaften Welt von Ich und Du, die sich später zur Abkehr von der Geschichte und zur Rückkehr zur Welt der Natur radikalisiert*". Liebsch, however, unnecessarily conjoins Löwith's engagement with the Human-historical and his engagement with the Human-World duality: "...im Jahr 1936, die ihm die totale Unzuverlässigkeit der eigenen Kultur offenbarte und infolgedessen seine Wende zu einer Philosophie der natürlichen Welt forcierte, zum Versuch der Rehabilitierung einer Natur, die allen und keinem gehört..." *Verzeitlichte Welt*, 11.

neuzzeitlichen Philosophie”, 1960; *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, 1967).¹¹⁵ His first period is the shortest and is exemplified by his *Habilitationsschrift, Das Individuum*. This work is one of his only attempts to engage in popular philosophical dialogue.

2.5 THE HUMAN-CENTRIC PHILOSOPHY OF PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGIES

After having finished writing *Das Individuum*, Löwith was encouraged by Heidegger to change the title to “*Beiträge zur anthropologischen Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme*” with the one aim of helping Löwith obtain a position in Marburg, where philosophical anthropology and ‘social’ philosophy were en vogue.¹¹⁶ Löwith agreed to turn in the work under this title but was not entirely happy in doing so. After its official acceptance by the University of Marburg he changed the title back to the more appropriate *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*. In evaluating Löwith’s *Habilitationsschrift*, Heidegger correctly justifies calling it an anthropological work because of the centrality of the question of correctly defining Humanity (*was ist der Mensch?*). Löwith explains the goal of the work in the preliminary remarks to the first edition as being the construction of a original (*ursprünglich*) and fundamental (*grundlegend*) hermeneutic of Human *Dasein*:

Streng phänomenologisch geht die Untersuchung aber doch nur insoweit vor, als Phänomenologie zunächst einen allgemeinen “Methodenbegriff” bedeutet, nicht jedoch im engeren Sinn von “universaler phänomenologischer Ontologie”. Zur Abgrenzung gegen diesen rein ontologischen Begriff von Phänomenologie wird die “Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme” als eine *anthropologische* bezeichnet. Dennoch impliziert sie als Grundstück einer *philosophischen Anthropologie*, so etwas wie “ontologische” Ansprüche, wenn auch besonderer Art, nämlich schon allein dadurch, daß sie an einem bestimmten Strukturzusammenhang des

¹¹⁵ This is a convenient list of different writings of Löwith’s as not every single one of his texts fits this particular progression. There is, however, an undeniable shift in emphasis in the timeline of Löwith’s writings that moves between the concepts of Humanity (and the Human-historical) to the World.

¹¹⁶ See: “*Nachweise und Anmerkungen des Herausgebers*” by Bernd Lutz, I, 469f.: “Heidegger hatte zu der Titeländerung: **Beiträge zur anthropologischen Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme** geraten. Das war inhaltlich zwar nicht in Löwiths Sinne, aber Heideggers Absicht war, mit dem Akzent auf ‘Anthropologie’ im Titel der Habilitationsschrift es leichter möglich machen zu können, Löwith einen Lehrauftrag für Sozialphilosophie zu verschaffen. ‘Sozialphilosophie’ war zu der Zeit das einzige Fach, für das in Marburg ein Lehrauftrag mit einiger Aussicht auf Erfolg beantragt werden konnte, und in der Tat hat Löwith ihn auch drei Jahre später, zum Sommersemester 1931, erhalten.” A letter from Heidegger to Löwith (20th of August, 1927) pertaining to *Das Individuum* can be found in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, 33-38.

menschlichen Lebens – dem “Verhältnis” des einen zu einem andern, ihrem “Miteinander” – ein *ursprüngliches* oder *grundlegendes* Verständnis für den “Sinn” des menschlichen Daseins überhaupt zu gewinnen trachtet.¹¹⁷

As with the school of phenomenology Löwith, however, did not properly belong to the school of philosophical anthropology.¹¹⁸

As a work itself, *Das Individuum*, was not only to act as a response to Heidegger’s book *Sein und Zeit*¹¹⁹ but as a response to the ever-growing trend of philosophies of anthropology in the late 1920s. The work, however, is an outlier in respect to the overall picture that makes up Löwith’s life work. As mentioned, Löwith had misgivings in demarcating his *Habilitationsschrift* a philosophical anthropology when turning it in to Heidegger and the university. This hesitance in 1928 was only to be emphasized and clarified through the course of Löwith’s philosophical career. Central to Löwith’s mature thought is his critique of philosophy and its forgetfulness of the World via its concentration on Humanity as being the beginning and end of all philosophy. As such, *Das Individuum* is a work completed before Löwith’s work had gained its overarching focus, before he was exiled and distanced from his peers and before he began focusing his philosophical prowess on the questions of the Human-historical. He is most effective in critiquing Heidegger from a historical perspective – inasmuch as he contextualizes Heidegger, his thoughts and links them to various dubious philosophical trends. *Das Individuum*, however, is not a critique of Heidegger from a historical standpoint but a critique that is textual specific. In doing so Löwith forces himself to enter into a

¹¹⁷ *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, I, 11.

¹¹⁸ Joachim Fischer in *Philosophische Anthropologie* describes the school of philosophical anthropology as gaining interest beginning with Max Scheler’s appeal to Helmuth Plessner to join him in Cologne in 1919 and marks its end with Plessner’s retrospective article on Max Scheler in 1975 (H. Plessner, “*Erinnerungen an Max Scheler*”). He also names the classical works of philosophical anthropology to be the following: *Zur Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Scheler, 1928), *Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (Plessner, 1928), *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (Arnold Gehlen, 1940), *Kulturanthropologie* (Erich Rothacker, 1942) and *Biologischen Fragmenten einer Lehre vom Menschen* (Portmann, 1944). See: Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie*, 11.

¹¹⁹ In the preliminary remarks to the first edition Löwith not only notes the importance of *Sein und Zeit* in the creation of *Das Individuum* but he spends considerable amount of time in clarifying his terminology so that it is not confused with that of Heidegger: “*Die Untersuchungsmethode des folgenden Beitrags ist die phänomenologische, wie sie dem Verfasser durch seinen Lehrer M. Heidegger zugänglich und vorbildlich wurde. Auf dessen **Sein und Zeit** ist daher im ganzen zu verweisen...*” I, 11. “*Terminologisch sei im voraus bemerkt, daß im folgenden die Ausdrücke: ‘Welt’, ‘Dasein’, ‘Existenz’, ‘Miteinandersein’, ‘Freisein’, aber auch ‘ursprünglich’, ‘primär’, u. dergl. ihrem Sinn nach nicht identisch sind mit den gleichlautenden Ausdrücken in Heideggers **Sein und Zeit**’.* *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, I, 12, fn. 3.

dialogue whose very foundation – that of Humanity, *das Individuum*, or *Dasein* – is for him of little interest. In the preface to the new edition Löwith himself concedes this point:

So erfreulich es für den Verfasser ist, seine erste Veröffentlichung – es war seine Habilitationsschrift – nach vierunddreißig Jahren neu aufgelegt zu sehen, so peinlich ist doch der Wiederabdruck einer Schrift, deren Mängel ihm seither deutlich geworden sind. Würde er das Thema heute von neuem bedenken, so geschähe es nicht mehr in der Vereinzelung auf die formale Struktur des Verhältnisses von “Ich” und “Du”, sondern in dem weiteren Zusammenhang mit der umfassenden Frage *nach dem Verhältnis von Mensch und Welt*, innerhalb dessen *Mitwelt* und *Umwelt* nur relative Welten sind. Der Leser möge deshalb zur Korrektur der Fragestellung die letzte der *Gesammelten Abhandlungen* (1960) über “*Welt und Menschenwelt*” berücksichtigen, um die Frage nach dem Menschen als Mitmenschen in der ihr zukommenden Proportion zu sehen.¹²⁰

Das Individuum remains, however, an interesting and comprehensive work whose importance lies in its presentation of the individual as always primarily being in a role amongst fellow human beings (*Mitmenschen*) and in its conceptualization of a uniform and homogeneous Humanity. Löwith begins by summarizing the differences between an idealist and Hegelian definition of Humanity – i.e., of an individual – and that of Feuerbach. Through this summary one is to see the dislocation of Humanity within philosophy as a whole. Löwith’s summary of the prerequisites of an idealist philosophy is as follows:

1. Der formale Grundbegriff der klassischen Philosophie ist das *Selbstbewußtsein*.
2. Der Ausgang vom Selbstbewußtsein setzt zweierlei voraus:
 - a) daß das “*Ich*” – selbst etwas ursprünglich Selbständiges sei, und
 - b) daß das geistige *Bewußtsein* dieses Ich aus sich selbst verständlich sei.
3. Beides zusammen bedeutet, daß die klassische, Hegelsche Philoso-

¹²⁰ Ibid, 14 (My emphasis). The essay, *Welt und Menschenwelt* (1960), can now be found in the first of his collected works: I, 295-328. In this later essay, the fundamental question for understanding Humanity is its relationship to the World and not its relationship to its *Mitmenschen*: “*Die physische Welt läßt sich ohne eine ihr wesentliche Beziehung zum Dasein von Menschen denken, aber kein Mensch ist denkbar ohne Welt. Wir kommen zur Welt und wir scheiden aus ihr; sie gehört nicht uns, sondern wir gehören zu ihr.*” I, 295. It is also for this reason that it is faulty to look for a Löwithian concept of World in this early work as attempted by Sung-Sik Choi in his dissertation, *Der Mensch als Mitmenschen; Eine Untersuchung über die Strukturanalyse des Miteinanderseins von Karl Löwith im Vergleich mit dem dialogischen Denken von Martin Buber*. Choi’s misunderstanding is best summarized by his claim that Löwith’s concept of World is anthropological: “*Bei Löwith hat ‘Welt’ gleichfalls ‘eine wesentlich humane oder anthropologische Bedeutung’*”, 135.

phie eine Philosophie auf dem Standpunkt der Philosophie ist.¹²¹

4. Weil aber doch nur der *Mensch* philosophiert, so muß auch diesem Begriff vom Selbstbewußtsein eine ganz bestimmte, wenngleich un- ausdrückliche Anthropologie zugrunde liegen.
5. Das anthropologische Selbstbewußtsein, welches dem idealistischen zugrunde liegt, besteht darin, daß sich der Idealist auf Grund dessen seiner selbst bewußt ist, daß er in dem Bewußtsein existiert:
 - a) ein *selbständiger*, und
 - b) ein *wissender* Mensch zu sein.

Being thrown back upon itself with the loss of the Godly, Humanity begins with Feuerbach to rely on fellow-Humans (*Mitmenschen*) for meaning and purpose:

1. Der formale Grundbegriff der wahren Philosophie ist der denkende *Mensch*, und nur dieser "ist" das Selbstbewußtsein;
2. Dieser Ausgang vom Menschen setzt zweierlei voraus:
 - a) daß ich selbst etwas ursprünglich Unselbständiges, ein an Andern wesentlich teilhabender Mitmensch, aber kein Individuum bin, und
 - b) daß nicht nur der Geist den Leib mit Bewußtsein bestimmt, sondern er seinerseits schon unbewußt, von Natur aus, bestimmt wird.
3. Beides zusammen bedeutet, daß die unklassische, Feuerbachsche Philosophie gerade deshalb eine "radikale" Philosophie ist, weil sie sich aus dem, was *gegen* die Philosophie ist, aus der ursprünglichen "Nichtphilosophie", erzeugt.
4. Die Idee vom Menschen, welche dieser philosophischen Anthropologie zugrunde liegt, besteht darin, daß sich der Feuerbachsche "Mensch" auf Grund dessen seiner selbst bewußt ist, daß er in dem Bewußtsein lebt:
 - a) ein durch etwas, was er nicht selber ist, durch Zu- und Angehörigkeit begründetes, und
 - b) ein ebenso sinnliches wie geistiges Wesen zu sein.¹²²

¹²¹ Löwith returns to this point in his essay "Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage: Die Natur des Menschen und die Welt der Natur" (1969) (VIII, 276-299) in relationship to Heidegger's essay, *Was ist Metaphysik?* He draws a connection between Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein* to an idealist philosophy of self-consciousness (*Bewußtsein*): "Die Voraussetzung der Ontologie des Bewußtseins von Descartes bis zu Hegel und darüber hinaus bis zur Existenzphilosophie, daß das seiner selbst bewußte und sich zu sich selbst verhaltende Sein auch für das Verständnis des unbewußt-lebendigen Seins das maßgebliche sei, diese Voraussetzung ist nur die halbe Wahrheit". "Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage, VIII, 286. The other half of the "truth" of this formulation is Humanity's existence in the World: "Der Mensch mag noch so sehr aus der Natur herausstehen, ek-sistieren, transzendieren und reflektieren, er ist von dieser Zugehörigkeit und Zuordnung zum Ganzen der Naturwelt nicht ausgenommen... Denn diese [Welt] läßt sich ohne eine ihr wesentliche Beziehung zum Dasein von Menschen denken, aber kein Mensch ist denkbar ohne Welt". Ibid, VIII, 286f. This is in contrast to Heidegger's claim: "... im Dienst der Frage nach der Wahrheit des Seins, wird eine Besinnung auf das Wesen des Menschen nötig". *Was ist Metaphysik?*, 13.

¹²² "Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen Philosophie" (1928), V, 25f.

The shift from the traditional philosophical starting point of the *autonomous* self-consciousness to the *affiliation* of an “I” with a “thou” sets the stage for the movement of philosophical anthropology.¹²³ One was, namely, forced to investigate and define this affiliation, leading some to the conclusion that Humans are only *immediately* affiliated with their fellow-Humans, i.e. not *universally*, thus keeping this affiliation from being the foundation of a universal concept of Humanity. Löwith explicitly draws attention to this concern as voiced by Theodor Haecker¹²⁴ in his work, *Was ist der Mensch?* (1933):

Haecker geht zur Klärung seiner Frage: “Was ist der Mensch? ” von der Einsicht aus, daß die Philosophen dieser Zeit überhaupt nicht mehr an die Einheit des Menschseins glauben, daß sie gar nicht mehr wissen wollen, was der Mensch und die Menschheit ist, weil sie auch nicht mehr glauben wollen, daß der Mensch nach wie vor des einen Gottes Ebenbild ist. Der extreme Nationalismus der heute die ganze Welt bestimmt, kennt nur noch verschiedene Völker und Rassen; *der Mensch* gilt gemeinhin, und sogar Theologen, nur noch als abstrakter Begriff und nicht mehr als eine göttliche Idee, die eine gewaltige Realität ist.¹²⁵

In the time period surrounding the rise of the National Socialists, Löwith shared Haecker’s misgivings that philosophy had become uninterested and unable to present Humanity as a coherent and uniform entity. He did not, however, want to regain this unity by returning to Christian ideals¹²⁶; his goal was the construction of a coherent philosophical anthropology in which the existence of an individual was dependent on a universal context of fellow-Humans. In working towards this conclusion Löwith continues to emphasize Feuerbach’s philosophy as the originator of philosophical anthropology:

Feuerbach stimmt zwar dem Idealismus darin bei, dass man vom Ich ausgehen müsse, denn man könne von der Welt nichts aussagen, abgesehen davon “*wie sie für mich da ist, unbeschadet ihrer Selbstständigkeit*”. Aber ich [Feuerbach] behaupte, daß das Ich, wovon der Idealist ausgeht, selbst keine Existenz hat. Das wirkliche Ich ist nur das Ich, dem ein Du

¹²³ Fischer explicitly references this idea of Löwith’s in his chapter on the background of philosophical anthropology when he writes: “*Diese mit der Idealität des Ich brechende Bewegung setzt ein, wenn die Figur des denkenden Ich nicht als aktiv setzende, allgemeine Subjektivität, sondern als durch und durch leibverhaftet sinnliches und durch das konkrete ‘Du’ vermitteltes Ich begriffen wird.*” *Philosophische Anthropologie*, 509.

¹²⁴ Theodor Haecker (1879 – 1945) is considered a catholic existentialist and opponent of National Socialism.

¹²⁵ “*Max Scheler und das Problem einer philosophischen Anthropologie*” (1935), I, 225, fn. 7.

¹²⁶ See: Theodor Haecker, *Was ist der Mensch?* 13: “**...das Höhere kann das Niedere erklären, niemals das Niedere das Höhere.** Dieses Prinzip erfüllt die Forderung jedes echten Prinzips: *es ist durchsichtig, es ist notum per se*”.

gegenübersteht und das selbst einem anderen Ich gegenüber Du ist...¹²⁷

In agreement with Feuerbach, Löwith found the idealist concept of an autonomous individual to be, in its entirety, a false concept. An individual, rather, is a *persona* that essentially plays an unlimited amount of roles in the context of a greater social world (*Mitwelt*):

z.B. als Sohn, nämlich seiner Eltern; als Mann, nämlich einer Frau; als Vater, nämlich von Kindern; aber auch als Schüler, nämlich seiner Lehrer; als Dozent, nämlich möglicher Zuhörer; als Schriftsteller, nämlich möglicher Leser usw.¹²⁸

Because a Human is founded in its different social roles it cannot be individuated away from a social world; the “I” cannot be individuated from its constituent “thou” – in the same sense but in a different scope, that being German could not be individuated away from being Jewish.

Löwith continues by degrading philosophies of anthropology that did not unify Humanity as a totality and found such a disunity in the writings of Max Scheler. Löwith’s critique of philosophical anthropology as a school of thought began in 1935 with the essay “*Max Scheler und das Problem einer philosophischen Anthropologie*”. Scheler was a dynamic figure in his time. In 1920 he was invited to Marburg by the Catholic Student Council to give a lecture. Gadamer had the luck to help lead Scheler through the city and the luck to sit across from the man in the street car or, in Gadamer’s words:

Und so war ich dem saugenden und bohrenden Gegenüber von Max Scheler schutzlos preisgegeben.¹²⁹

Gadamer learned quickly what it meant to be sitting across from Scheler for an extended period of time. It meant to be questioned about everything, it meant to be sitting on the witness stand, asked to bear witness to unconventional wisdom – leaving one with a “demonic impression” of the man. Having shared this impression with Husserl, Husserl replied that he was glad to have Scheler as well as Pfänder (Löwith’s mentor from Munich and an apparently dry personality) on the side of

¹²⁷ *Das Individuum*, I, 25.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

¹²⁹ Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 70-71.

phenomenology.¹³⁰ Husserl, however, was not free from Scheler's eccentricity as he made Husserl stumble with the question if God could differentiate between left and right.¹³¹ For Löwith, however, it was not Scheler's personality that had interested him but his conceptualization of Humanity.

Löwith quotes from one of Scheler's last lectures¹³² in order to pinpoint the leading motivation found in his works, a motivation Löwith could relate to:

Wir sind in der Geschichte das erste Zeitalter, in dem sich der Mensch völlig restlos 'problematisch' geworden ist; in dem er *nicht* mehr weiß, was er ist, zugleich aber auch *weiß*, daß er es nicht weiß.¹³³

For Scheler this problem was best answered through the development of an ethic, through the Feuerbachian investigation of the affiliations of an "I" with a "thou". By establishing the irrational domain of sensations and feelings, that of rejection and acceptance, encouragement and discouragement, affection and animosity, hate and love, he attempted to disclose essential emotional structures. These emotional structures were based on an essential being-together (*Miteinandersein*) of an "I" with a "thou" and based on an ethic of emotional interaction possible only for Humanity. Namely, that which separates Humanity from God and World is the ability to be ashamed and this is the case not because Humans are Godly or Natural, but because they are both *spiritual* and *natural*.

That Humanity was to be reduced to its emotions and feelings expressed via its being-together was to reduce Humanity to the respective culture by which it was bound. In the essay, "*Die Einheit und die Verschiedenheit der Menschen*" Löwith explains Scheler's conclusion concerning the basis of Humanity:

...es gebe eben gar keine wirklich universelle Humanität, sondern nur bestimmte Kulturkreise mit spezifisch verschiedenen Strukturen des Fühlens und Wertens, des Weltanschauens und der Weltgestaltung.¹³⁴

The conclusion that Humanity is not a uniform concept, under which all humans could be placed but an abstract generalization, as Haecker had feared, was not just the result

¹³⁰ Gadamer quotes Husserl from memory in: Ibid, 72. "Oh, es ist gut, daß wir nicht nur ihn, sondern auch Pfänder haben. (Das war der nüchternste, trockenste, undämonischste Phänomenologe, den man sich denken konnte)".

¹³¹ Ibid, 73.

¹³² Scheler, "*Mensch und Geschichte*", 8f. In: *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 9: *Späte Schriften*.

¹³³ As quoted in: "*Max Scheler und das Problem einer philosophischen Anthropologie*", I, 221.

¹³⁴ "*Die Einheit und die Verschiedenheit der Menschen*" (1938) I, 251.

of Scheler's philosophical anthropology but a result that Löwith found to be consequent of Heidegger's philosophy:

Die Frage nach der Einheit der Menschen scheint somit negativ beantwortet zu sein, zunächst durch den Hinweis auf das Faktum einer unausgleichbaren *Verschiedenheit* (Scheler) und schließlich durch die Selbstbehauptung der *Eigenheit* des je eigenen, individuellen oder auch nationalen Daseins (Heidegger).¹³⁵

Also belonging to Löwith's critique of philosophical anthropologies¹³⁶ is the differences he draws between his concept of an "individual" and Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit*. Löwith understands Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) as a being-together (*Miteinandersein*) because, namely, of his insistence on not conflating the terms World (*Welt*) – as an all encompassing Cosmos – and social world (*Mitwelt*). The Heideggerian concept, "being-in-the-world", is then further translated by Löwith into his own terms, namely, as "a fellow-being (*Mitmensch*) in its social world (*Mitwelt*)". Löwith contrasts his notion of a Human as being *primarily* a fellow-human to Heidegger's notion of each *particular* (*je eigenes*) *Dasein* and its experience of the other:

Unter "Mitwelt" wird im folgenden nicht die "Welt" verstanden, sofern sie mit anderen im gemeinsamen Besorgen geteilt wird, sondern die Mitmenschen als solche und genauer: das In-der-Welt-sein *als Miteinandersein*. Und dieses baut sich nicht bezugsmäßig auf aus dem Mitsein des "je eigenen" Daseins und dem Mitdasein des "je eigenen" Daseins anderer, sondern ist zu verstehen als ein ursprüngliches Miteinandersein, worin es dem einen je um den andern und mit dem andern zugleich um sich selbst geht. Durch Besorgen unvermittelt, in 'zweckfreiem Füreinandersein', ist der eine mit dem andern aber nur dann verbunden, wenn er weder als ein anderes Selbst noch als ein *alius*, sondern als 'alter' oder 'secundus', als der andere meiner selbst verstanden wird. Dieser 'andere' und nur dieser ist die wahrhaft 'andere Seite' des eigenen Daseins, welche den Idealismus der einseitig konstituierenden Intentionalität durch eine ursprüngliche Gegenseitigkeit im Ansatz unterbindet.¹³⁷

Essentially, Löwith accuses Heidegger of coming dangerously close to committing a philosophical misstep that Heidegger himself addresses in the fourth chapter of *Sein und Zeit*. Heidegger wants to avoid having to explain the "other" (*die Anderen*) from the

¹³⁵ Ibid, 255.

¹³⁶ Löwith does not use this term in the traditional sense; his critique of philosophical anthropologies is not a critique specific to the philosophy of Plessner or Scheler but a critique of philosophies that center on the concept of Humanity or *Dasein* and not God or World.

¹³⁷ *Das Individuum*, I, 12, fn. 3.

standpoint of an “I” in order to side-step the popular Cartesian problem of having to bridge the gap between two “minds”. He does this by claiming that the “other” are not those who are outside of the individual and whose differentiation from the individual leads to the lifting out of the “I”, he understands the “other” (*das Man*) as being those from which one does *not* differentiate oneself, those with whom one *is*. To not differentiate oneself from the other (*das Man*), however, is to be overly dependent (*verfallen*), resulting in an unauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*) and alienation from one’s particular *Dasein*.

In diesem beruhigten, alles ‘verstehenden’ Sich-vergleichen mit allem treibt das Dasein einer Entfremdung zu, in der sich ihm das eigenste Seinkönnen verbirgt. Das verfallende In-der-Welt-sein ist als versuchend-beruhigendes zugleich *entfremdend*.¹³⁸

As such, every respective *Dasein*, although always present in a social world and amongst others (*das Man*), is not primarily a fellow-human (*Mitmensch*) but a particular (*eigenes*) *Dasein*.¹³⁹ Whereas Löwith understands existence as being dependent on and defined by the relationship with others (*Miteinandersein*) – i.e., *Dasein* being primarily *Miteinandersein* –, Heidegger understands the existence of a *Dasein* as being *amongst others* (*unter anderen*), namely, other *particular Dasein*. To this extent the “individual” is a term that dissolves in Löwith’s philosophy of *Mitmenschen* whereas the concept of a “particular *Dasein*” is preserved in *Sein und Zeit*.

Im Mit-einander-sein neutralisiert sich das Leben des *Individuums* zur unbestimmt-bestimmten Lebendigkeit des Lebens. *Wir* sind *das* Leben. Der Lebenszusammenhang des Individuums mit Anderen bildet eine eigene Art von Leben aus, und diese Neutralisierung des individuellen Daseins im Miteinandersein bekundet sich in nichts anderem als in dem sachlichen neutralen Sinn des sprachlich neutralen Artikels: *das* Leben. Auf dieses ursprünglich neutralisierte Leben im Miteinandersein zielen alle Ausdrücke wie: Lebenserfahrung, Kenntnis des Lebens, den Anforderungen des Lebens genügen usw. Das Leben, von dem man im Sinne dieser Ausdrücke Erfahrung und Kenntnis hat und dem man genügen kann, ist nicht das je eigene, sondern das Leben in der Bedeutungsrichtung

¹³⁸ *Sein und Zeit*, §28, 178.

¹³⁹ See: *Sein und Zeit*, §26, 118: “Die Charakteristik des Begegnens der **Anderen** orientiert sich so aber doch wieder am je **eigenen** Dasein. Geht nicht auch sie von einer Auszeichnung und Isolierung des ‘Ich’ aus, so daß dann von diesem isolierten Subjekt ein Übergang zu den Anderen gesucht werden muß? Zu Vermeidung dieses Mißverständnisses ist zu beachten, in welchem Sinne hier von ‘den Anderen’ die Rede ist. ‘Die Anderen’ besagt nicht soviel wie: der ganze Rest der Übrigen außer mir, aus dem sich das Ich heraushebt, die Anderen sind vielmehr die, von denen man selbst sich zumeist **nicht** unterscheidet, unter denen man auch ist”.

tung des Miteinanderseins.¹⁴⁰

What is then the individual for Löwith? It is a persona with an irreducible number of roles within a social world (*Mitwelt*).¹⁴¹ In his article “*Grundzüge der Entwicklung der Phänomenologie zur Philosophie und ihr Verhältnis zur protestantischen Theologie*” (1930) Löwith claims that his idea of an individual lies between the extremes of an I-for-itself (*Ich-selbst*) and a “other-for-itself” (*Man-selbst*):

...daß gerade die zunächst und zumeist bedeutungsvollsten Bestimmungen des menschlichen Daseins, wie: Kind seiner Eltern, Mann seiner Frau, Vater seiner Kinder, Lehrer seiner Schüler, Freund seiner Freunde, Diener seiner Herrn u. dgl.-Sein gerade *zwischen* den ontologisch-ontischen Extremen eines Ich-selbst und Man-selbst liegen und eine grundsätzlich andere Art des Miteinanderseins und folglich auch des Selbst-seins darstellen, nämlich ein “persona”-Sein des Individuums, aber kein bloßes Mitsein eines Selbstseins.¹⁴²

Although apparently slight, this discrepancy between Löwith’s concept of an individual as a “persona” and Heidegger’s concept of a *particular Dasein* has many implications, the most important of which is ethical.

Daraus ergibt sich auch unmittelbar, inwiefern die “anthropologische Grundlegung” eine solche von “ethischen” Problemen ist, denn die Struktur der menschlichen Lebens*verhältnisse* bildet sich dadurch aus, daß sich die Menschen zueinander *verhalten*, und dieses Verhalten impliziert eine menschliche Grund-*Haltung*, d.i. ein “Ethos”, welches das ursprüngliche Thema der Ethik ist und das seinerseits nur dadurch zur Geltung kommt, daß sich der Mensch verhält, nämlich als Mitmensch zu seinen Mitmenschen.¹⁴³

That one should conduct oneself as a fellow-human with other fellow-humans is to make the uniformity of Humanity poignant and clear. One can imagine philosophies in which the uniformity of Humanity is not clear, where one might, for example, be able to say that another particular *Dasein* could be treated not as an equal or fellow but as something decidedly lowly. When Humanity is not united, room is opened for the valuation of different “peoples”. One sees this non-universal concept and its possible role, for example, in the nationalism of the early twentieth century and the ability to

¹⁴⁰ *Das Individuum*, I, 37.

¹⁴¹ See: Ibid, 67. “*Die Mitmenschen begegnen nicht als eine Mannigfaltigkeit für sich seiender ‘Individuen’, sondern als ‘personae’, die eine ‘Rolle’ haben, nämlich innerhalb und für ihre Mitwelt, aus der heraus sie sich dann selbst personhaft bestimmen*”.

¹⁴² “*Grundzüge der Entwicklung der Phänomenologie zur Philosophie und ihr Verhältnis zur protestantischen Theologie*”, III, 60, fn 12.

¹⁴³ *Das Individuum*, I, 13.

only recognize peoples and races, thus enforcing the inhumane treatment of Humans. Löwith comes back to the importance of the unity of Humanity towards the end of the first chapter of *Das Individuum*:

Die Einheit des Menschen mit dem Menschen ist das erste und letzte Prinzip der Philosophie, der Wahrheit und Allgemeinheit (als einer wesentlichen Bestimmung der Wahrheit).¹⁴⁴

Writing this in 1928 Löwith could not have been aware of the importance and relevance of this ethical statement as he would experience first-hand seven years later the consequences of philosophies and mentalities that refused to see Humanity as a whole. Löwith himself had hoped to overcome this philosophical obstacle by defining an individual as always being in the role of a fellow-being (*Mitmensch*), that is, as an entity indivisible from its relation with others. This tight interconnection between an individual and its persona and roles was enough for Löwith to declare that one could not philosophically claim that Humanity was anything but a unity.

When an individual or *Dasein* is conceived of as being enslaved (*verfallen*) to its predicament of being *merely amongst others*, this *Dasein* can be closed off and be seen as not being defined by any potential thou but through its immediate surroundings and, in this case, its nation. Heidegger describes this relationship to the other in *Sein und Zeit* as follows:

Man selbst gehört zu den Anderen und verfestigt ihre Macht. “Die Anderen”, die man so nennt, um die eigene wesenhafte Zugehörigkeit zu ihnen zu verdecken, sind die, die im alltäglichen Miteinandersein zunächst und zumeist “*da sind*.” Das Wer [...der das Sein als alltägliches Miteinandersein übernommen hat¹⁴⁵] ist nicht dieser und nicht jener, nicht man selbst und nicht einige und nicht die Summe Aller. Das “Wer” ist das Neutrum, *das Man*.¹⁴⁶

This “they” determines the everyday norms by which any particular *Dasein* is, in its inauthenticity, to abide by. “They” does not include everyone but those who *are there*, it is not the sum of Humanity but those in one’s immediate surroundings. A *Dasein* is inauthentically bound to its respective immediate surroundings and the question of the unity of Humanity as such cannot be asked. Although Heidegger speaks of this depend-

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 26. Löwith will later dispute that this is the “first” and “last” principle of philosophy inasmuch as the question of the unity of Humanity will fall second place to the question of the philosophical ignorance of the World.

¹⁴⁵ *Sein und Zeit*, §26, 125.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, §27, 126.

ence on the “they” negatively in *Sein und Zeit*, Löwith accuses him of conflating the authenticity of a particular *Dasein* with that of a particular German *Dasein*. Heidegger saw his participation in National Socialism as not being a dependence on the other (*das Man*) but as the affirmation of his own particular German *Dasein*. This transference of the authenticity of a particular *Dasein* to a German *Dasein* is one he emphasized in his speeches as rector in Freiburg.

This transference of authenticity is first evidenced in Heidegger’s praise of Alber Leo Schlageter in his speech “*Schlageterfeier der Freiburger Universität*”.¹⁴⁷ As a student in Freiburg, Schlageter participated in attacks against the occupying French forces after the First World War. He was tried and found guilty by a French military court for espionage and sabotage and was promptly executed. For Löwith, this speech of Heidegger’s is of importance because it is evidence to and shows the consequences of a philosophical anthropology that had failed to find basis for the *unity* of Humanity. For Heidegger, an authentic German *Dasein* could be embodied in different persons not only as that which “stipulates the way of being in the everyday”¹⁴⁸ but as those who exemplify a way of being that captures the essence of a German *Dasein* – Schlageter was one of these embodiments, Hitler the other. Notable in Heidegger’s speech on Schlageter is that his deeds are never mentioned, rather, Heidegger emphasizes Schlageter’s having been shaped by the nature in Freiburg and the Black Forest. With this emphasis Heidegger alludes to his audience of students from Freiburg that they too could reach this ideal if they were to take in the “native” nature of the hero Schlageter. Heidegger exaggerates the German word for “native” or “home” [*Heimat*] in this speech with, in all likelihood, the purpose of connecting his listener, who shared the same home, to the hero. That which had shaped this great hero of German nationalism was there to shape the next generation, namely, the surrounding nature of Freiburg:

Freiburger Student! Deutscher Student! Erfahre und wisse es, wenn du auf den Fahrten und Märschen die Berge, Wälder und Täler des Schwarzwalds, die Heimat dieses Helden, betrittst: Urgestein, Granit sind die Berge, zwischen denen der junge Bauernsohn aufgewachsen ist. Sie schaffen seit langem an der Härte des Willens¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, “*Schlageterfeier der Freiburger Universität*”. In: *Nachlese zu Heidegger*, Ed. Guido Schneeberger, 47-49.

¹⁴⁸ “*Das Man... schreibt die Seinsart der Alltäglichkeit vor.*” *Sein und Zeit*, §27, 127.

¹⁴⁹ *Nachlese zu Heidegger*, 48.

A second instance in which Heidegger translates a particular *Dasein* into German *Dasein* can be found in his speech titled, “*Deutsche Männer und Frauen*”, where he asks the question of whether or not the German people want to affirm their own *Dasein* through electing Hitler.¹⁵⁰ And, as the hero Schlageter was deliberately tied to his German homeland and upbringing in Freiburg and as he was asserted as being the product of a very particular German *Dasein*, Hitler was for Heidegger the personification of Germany and as representing the authenticity of every German.

Löwith saw the transfer of the authenticity of a particular *Dasein* to a German *Dasein*¹⁵¹ as not being a large step for Heidegger and his philosophy. Heidegger himself notes that giving into the “other” is something that is calming and that brings security:

Die Selbstgewißheit und Entschiedenheit des Man verbreitet eine wachsende Unbedürftigkeit hinsichtlich des eigentlichen befindlichen Versteehens. Die Vermeintlichkeit des Man, das volle und echte “Leben” zu nähren und zu führen, bringt eine *Beruhigung* in das Dasein, für die alles “in bester Ordnung” ist, und der alle Türen offenstehen. Das verfallende In-der-Welt-sein ist sich selbst versuchend zugleich *beruhigend*.¹⁵²

The reassuring quality of being part of a communal “they” (although expressed as German *Dasein*) is something Heidegger gave into during his time as rector of the university in Freiburg and is something he had also wished for from his audience.

Das deutsche Volk ist vom Führer zur Wahl gerufen. Der Führer aber erbittet nichts vom Volk. Er gibt vielmehr dem Volk die unmittelbarste Möglichkeit der höchsten freien Entscheidung: ob es – das ganze Volk – sein *eigenes Dasein* will oder ob es dieses nicht will.¹⁵³

This transference was not something Löwith saw as being typical to Heidegger’s philosophy in *Sein und Zeit*, Löwith had rather expected a critical approach from Heidegger concerning the “they” of the German nation:

Heideggers Führung dauerte nur ein Jahr. Er trat nach manchen Enttäuschungen und Ärgernissen von seinem “Auftrag” zurück, um seitdem wieder in alter Weise dem neuen “*man*” zu opponieren...¹⁵⁴

That Löwith had stumbled across the ethical and political misgivings of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 144-45.

¹⁵¹ See: “*Heideggers Übersetzung des ‘je eigenen Daseins’ in das ‘deutsche Dasein’*”. In: *Mein Leben in Deutschland*, 32-42. “*Und doch ist der Sprung von der ontologischen Analyse des Todes zu Heideggers Schlageter-Rede nur ein Übergang vom je vereinzelt Dasein zu einem je allgemeinen, aber in seiner Allgemeinheit nicht minder vereinzelt, nämlich deutschen*”. 36.

¹⁵² *Sein und Zeit*, §38, 177.

¹⁵³ *Nachlese zu Heidegger*, “*Deutsche Männer und Frauen*”, 144-145.

¹⁵⁴ *Mein Leben*, 35.

Heidegger's philosophy of *Dasein* in 1928, five years before the institutionalization of National Socialism in Germany, shows incredible foresight. He could not have imagined that this philosophical anthropology would one day justify his exclusion from German society but he clearly saw the need to find the basis for a *unity* of Humanity. On the contrary, his mentor Heidegger felt the need to find the basis for the unity of the German people – one which was to exclude German Jews and one which was to allow for the mistreatment of fellow-humans [*Mitmenschen*].

CHAPTER 3

EXILE

3.1 RE-BECOMING JEWISH

Judaism did not play an important role in Löwith's upbringing; he was, however, of Jewish heritage. He was baptized in a Protestant Church and, in 1929, became engaged to Ada Löwith, of Christian descent, and thus the question of his Jewish heritage was never raised.¹⁵⁵ In the late 1920s and early 1930s his professional career in Marburg seemed promising as he filled Heidegger's position until Heidegger's successor, Erich Frank, arrived. Löwith mentions that none of his students would have imagined him to be a Jew who had intruded the university system and that nobody was in a position to envisage that the university needed to be cleansed of his presence. Löwith describes this period of his life, because of the constant contact with intelligent students and lecturers, as being incredibly gratifying but his busy academic life kept him politically uninformed:

Gegenüber den politischen Verhältnissen war ich indifferent, auch las ich all die Jahre hindurch keine Zeitung, und erst sehr spät nahm ich die drohende Gefahr von Hitlers Bewegung wahr. Ich war politisch so ahnungslos wie die meisten meiner Kollegen.¹⁵⁶

Hitler and his propaganda tour around Germany eventually found its way to Löwith's doorstep and Hitler himself gave a speech at Löwith's quaint university town of Marburg. Jews were forbidden to enter the tent in which Hitler spoke, the older professors kept themselves away and Löwith himself caught drift of the speech through a friend and only until this came to pass did he begin to worry about his status as professor.¹⁵⁷ This small worry led him to inquire whether or not he could find a position in Munich – “because Bavaria would never participate in the insanity of the Prussians”.¹⁵⁸ The seriousness of the impending institutionalization of National Socialism, however, escaped Löwith's perceptive abilities. During the clamor of Hitler's last electoral campaign Lö-

¹⁵⁵ *Mein Leben*, 65.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 66.

¹⁵⁷ See: *Ibid*, 72.

¹⁵⁸ “Denn dass Bayern den Wahnsinn der ‘Preußen’ mitmache, sei vollkommen ausgeschlossen!” *Ibid*, 72.

with was calmly enjoying a ski trip in Austria with friends. Busses brought the Germans staying at the resort in Lech, Austria across the border so that they too could cast their vote. The only thing that came to mind for Löwith at that moment was to go skiing and mock the Germans who went to vote.¹⁵⁹

The enforced political conformity at the university in 1933 saw the driving off of many Jewish Professors.¹⁶⁰ Löwith's future at the time, because of the "*Frontparagraf*" that allowed Jews to keep their official office if they had served in the military, was still uncertain. In this time Löwith had the opportunity to accept a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and move to Italy but was encouraged by colleagues – including Heidegger – to keep his position in Marburg until it was clear to what extent the new politics in Germany would concern itself with the "Jewish question". Both Löwith and some of his colleagues feared that if Löwith were to leave it would seem as if he were voluntarily giving up his position, keeping him from being able to return. That Löwith was considering applying for the Rockefeller grant was unknown in Marburg until a friend and colleague, Leo Strauss, made it public in May of 1933 to some of his colleagues (including Gadamer) without Löwith's approval.¹⁶¹ In a letter to Strauss, Löwith writes that the last thing he wants is to be a German-Jewish emigrant and that he was counting on the "*Frontparagraf*" to further protect his status:

Mit der Vorlesung hab ich erst heute begonnen – alles Weitere warte ich ab – ein deutsch-jüdisches Emigrantschicksal wäre das *Letzte* was ich auf mich nehmen wollte und durch die Teilnahme am Krieg bin ich ja beamtenrechtlich zunächst geschützt.¹⁶²

Löwith's presence in Marburg was not desirable but tolerated and his lectures continued until the end of 1933.

Ich war [1933] kein junger Dozent mehr, der zum Kern des akademischen Nachwuchses zählte, sondern ein wegen seiner Kriegsteilnahme geduldeter Nichtarier, der vor S.A.-Studenten dozierte, in einer Atmo-

¹⁵⁹ "Da Lech im Österreichischen lag, wurden Autobusse zur Verfügung gestellt, welche die deutschen Feriengäste zur Wahlbeteiligung an die Grenze führen. Wir dachten so wenig wie T's [his friends] daran, auch nur eine Stunde der Politik zu opfern. Wir unternahmen eine Skitour und moquierten uns über die wenigen Bürger, die zur Wahl führen". Ibid, 73.

¹⁶⁰ "Die deutsche Erhebung äußerte sich in Marburg wie überall zunächst durch die Entlassungen und die Judenhetze". Ibid, 74.

¹⁶¹ Löwith, letter to Leo Strauss dated May 13, 1933, 621-622. In: *Korrespondenz Leo Strauss – Karl Löwith*. Strauss, Leo, *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band 3, 607-698. Leo Strauss befriended Löwith in Marburg along with Hans Jonas, Jacob Klein and Hans-Georg Gadamer and was living in Paris with the help of a grant from the Rockefeller foundation before the Nazi regime came to power.

¹⁶² Ibid.

sphäre des unüberwindlichen Abstands. In dieser schwer zu atmenden Luft hatte ich mich noch zwei Semester lang zu behaupten und durch mein Noch-Dasein ein Anstoß zu sein für die gleichgeschalteten andern.¹⁶³

He was able to cross the border with little incident although he and his things were searched. The money that he had brought with him – more than the allowed sum – went unnoticed because of its being hidden in a pack of cigarettes on the floor of the train.¹⁶⁴

3.2 THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION AND ROME

The Rockefeller Foundation began a major program for the relocation of German Jews in the early 1930s and, after the beginning of the Second World War, it began a full-fledged rescue operation.¹⁶⁵ Löwith received a grant last minute in 1934 although he had begun the application process in 1932. The application, however, was delayed because of the death of his father. Leo Strauss, a Rockefeller grant-holder living in Paris, played a key role in helping Löwith eventually obtain a grant of his own. He made Löwith aware of the important names that he should mention in his application, tirelessly answered numerous questions as to the details of the grant and proof-read Löwith's proposal. Despite Strauss' help it was uncertain whether or not Löwith would be eligible for the grant. He was informed that of the thirty applications the Foundation had received only six had looked promising, one of which was Löwith's. However, because the grant was directed towards studies in the social sciences and because Löwith's proposal did not completely qualify as such, his application in the end was pitted against a more qualified applicant and the decision as to whom the grant would be given was left to the discretion of the Foundation. Upon being informed that his one chance to leave Germany might be taken away due to a technicality, Löwith, again, wrote to Strauss for help in making it clear to the sponsors of the foundation that he *must* receive the grant.¹⁶⁶ Thanks to Strauss' efforts and after long months of insecurity, Löwith wrote on the twentieth of July, 1933 that he would be one of the recipients of the grant. Löwith's existence in Rome was secured by the Rockefeller foundation until June of 1936, thus

¹⁶³ *Mein Leben*, 79.

¹⁶⁴ See: *Ibid*, 81.

¹⁶⁵ See: John Ensor Harr and Peter J. Johnson, *The Rockefeller Century: Three Generations of America's Greatest Family*, 401-403.

¹⁶⁶ See: Löwith, letter to Strauss dated May 13, 1933, 621-622.

seeing through the publication of two of Löwith's most intriguing studies, that on Nietzsche, his last work to be published in National Socialist Germany,¹⁶⁷ and that on Burckhardt.¹⁶⁸

It goes without saying that Löwith's exile put a strain on his relationships with his acquaintances who stayed in Germany. The last encounter Löwith and Heidegger had as friends was during Heidegger's visit to Rome in 1936 where he was invited to give a lecture on Hölderlin at an Italian-German institute for culture. Heidegger came to see Löwith and his wife under their new circumstances away from Marburg and together they took an excursion to Frascati and Tusculum where Löwith described him as being "friendly and attentive".¹⁶⁹ Löwith, however, was interested in pushing Heidegger to talk about politics, a topic Heidegger apparently was not embarrassed about as he wore his swastika on his coat sleeve. Heidegger was not oblivious to the fact that the swastika represented the reason for the chaos brought into Löwith's life; he was, however, adamant not to compromise his "decision" for the sake of an old friend. Without reservation Heidegger emphasized his belief in Hitler and justified the basis for his political determination by referring to his concept of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*):

Heidegger stimmte mir ohne Vorbehalt zu und führte mir aus, daß sein Begriff von der "Geschichtlichkeit" die Grundlage für seinen politischen "Einsatz" sei".¹⁷⁰

Heidegger was "thrown" into certain circumstances, these circumstances were affirmed as "fate" and this fate determined the facticity of his *Dasein*, thus making the historical and political occurrence that was the rise of National Socialism in Germany one with the historical occurrence of Heidegger's *Dasein*. For this reason Heidegger did not feel ashamed when he wore his swastika in front of Löwith and his wife and it is for this reason that he never felt the need to excuse himself for his participation in National Socialism after its downfall. After Heidegger left Rome Löwith sent him his works on Nietzsche and Burckhardt but received no response. When Löwith was in Sendai, Japan he wrote to Heidegger concerning a Japanese translation of one of Heidegger's works and again asked him to send a manuscript that he needed. It was, however, dangerous in

¹⁶⁷ Other works were published under the pseudonym, Hugo Fiala.

¹⁶⁸ Published in: VII, 39-362. This book was to be taken from libraries and bookstores and become fuel for the Nazi burning of books in Heidelberg. See: Joachim Leonhard, *Bücherverbrennung in Heidelberg*, 161.

¹⁶⁹ See: *Mein Leben*, 57.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

this period for a German in a high position to keep contact with a Jew in exile. It comes as no surprise then that Heidegger never responded to Löwith's letters, marking the end of a friendship that began around 1919 with Löwith's studies in Freiburg.

Löwith, however, was not to stay long in Rome as an Italian version of the Nuremberg Laws was set in place in 1938. According to the law, the Jews that had fled Germany had six months to seek work, a new visa and a new home abroad. Löwith, frantically looking for another opportunity, had hoped to receive a position in Bogotá, Colombia for which he and his wife took Spanish lessons. His only other hope at the time was through another acquaintance made in Marburg, Leo Spitzer, who at the time was in Istanbul, Turkey. In 1936 Spitzer invited Löwith to give a lecture to see if he could better his chances at receiving a position. During his stay in Turkey, Löwith's wife informed him via telegram that his potential position in Bogotá fell through and during his stay he discovered that he would not be able to find solace in Istanbul.¹⁷¹ It was during this time, however, that Löwith's *Habilitationsschrift, Das Individuum*, was gaining popularity in Japan. To this extent a Japanese student traveled to Marburg with the hope of being able to study under Löwith without knowing the he was in exile in Rome. The two eventually found each other and Löwith was encouraged to come in contact with Baron Kuki, Professor of philosophy in Kyoto, who offered Löwith not too much later a position in Sendai, Japan.

3.3 SENDAI, JAPAN

In 2001 Löwith's travel diary encompassing the years from 1936 to 1941 was published along with an essay on Löwith from the Swiss author, Adolf Muschg. Page one begins with the 11th of October 1936, the day in which Löwith left Rome and three months after having written the preface to his book on Burckhardt. His love of Italy and its landscape was once again to find expression through what Löwith called "being able to live without having to do anything definite for the immediate and the distant *future*".¹⁷² Not having to be *future*-oriented was for Löwith of philosophical importance because of its contrast to the directedness of historicism that aims at a particular future with a par-

¹⁷¹ See: Ibid, 107.

¹⁷² "Man kann hier leben, ohne irgend etwas Bestimmtes für die nächste und weitere *Zukunft* zu tun". (My emphasis). *Von Rom nach Sendai, von Japan nach Amerika* (1936-1941) 7.

ticular guiding goal. The last months in Rome were, however, for the Löwiths, not entirely unproblematic. The allocated time for the Rockefeller grant had run out and was replaced by a letter of credit from the M. Mendelssohn foundation which itself was not to cover their costs for long. When money was tight and the Löwiths were uncertain of their future, he was called to Japan. This string of events that kept their existence secure, Löwith called “a succession of lucky coincidences that one tends to attribute to fate”:

Die Emigration führte mich durch eine Reihe glücklicher Zufälle, die man gern Schicksal nennt, über Rom nach einer japanischen Universität. Nach dem deutschen Bündnis mit Japan und unter dem Druck der nationalsozialistischen Auslandspropaganda wurde meine Stelle unsicher.¹⁷³

The Löwiths boarded a ship in Naples and followed their fate through the Suez Canal, through the Gulf of Aden, past the coasts of Sri Lanka, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Korea to finally land in Kobe, Japan.¹⁷⁴ Their four years in Sendai, Japan were to be fruitful but not without complications. Löwith was a Professor at the Tōhoku University where he was able to teach in his native language and, because of the popularity of his *Habilitationsschrift* and the phenomenological works of Heidegger and Husserl, he was able to continue the direction of teaching he had developed in Marburg:

Ich hatte für diese Arbeit [*Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*] während meiner Lehrtätigkeit in Sendai das unwahrscheinliche Glück, vor japanischen Studenten dort fortfahren zu können, wo ich in Marburg abrechnen musste.¹⁷⁵

After his *Habilitationsschrift* there was a distinct change in Löwith’s philosophical style as he stepped away from the philosophic quarrels of his time and began concentrating on nineteenth century philosophy. As little as his interest in Heidegger’s question of Being might have been in Marburg, his exile was the last straw that had not only separated Löwith ideologically from his peers but physically as well.

Löwith writes that his Nietzsche book was the culmination of his Nietzsche-based lectures in Marburg, a study that highly influenced and directed his book on Burckhardt as much of it is dedicated to the correspondence and differences of the two. In Sendai, Löwith was to open his horizons and place his main philosophical interest, Nietzsche, in

¹⁷³ *Mein Leben*, 150.

¹⁷⁴ See: *Von Rom nach Sendai, von Japan nach Amerika*, 39, 43, 54, 55, 67, 85 and 87.

¹⁷⁵ *Mein Leben*, 151.

a historical context – namely that of the nineteenth century. In this analysis one sees Nietzsche not as a solitary figure within the history of philosophy but as a philosopher who was able to diagnose and push forward the Hegelian revolution in philosophy, a revolution interpreted in this paper as the first transformation of *Geist*.

Unique to this style developed in exile was to understand philosophers and philosophies as not being unique and solitary phenomena but as playing roles within a greater tradition or narrative. Just as Löwith had argued in *Das Individuum* that the formation of an individual “I” is fundamentally bound to others through its *role* and *persona*, he writes with the aim of showing every individual philosophy as being fundamentally bound to the philosophical dialogue from which it arose. Every claim of profundity, every claim of philosophical enlightenment was to bear the brunt of Löwith’s critique and every claim to individuality was to be shown in its fundamental role in the philosophic tradition and in directedness amongst others. On the other hand, philosophers who receive Löwith’s praise are those who had been aware of the philosophical trends of their time and reacted according to them without the pretence of creating something new. Instead of wanting to *create* something new these philosophers claimed to have been *aware* of something new. Löwith saw Marx as having consciously internalized not only Hegelianism, but Feuerbach’s version thereof:

Für Marx bedeutet sie [die Auseinandersetzung mit Feuerbachs Zurückführung der Theologie auf Anthropologie] nur die *Voraussetzung* für die *weitere Kritik* der menschlichen Lebensverhältnisse selber. Im Hinblick darauf gilt ihm Feuerbachs Religionskritik als ein unumstößliches “*Resultat*”.¹⁷⁶

Kierkegaard was another whose philosophy Löwith conceived of as being timely – that his “leap of faith” was an answer to the philosophical dialogue of Hegelianism:

Wenn man Kierkegaard nicht bloß als “Ausnahme” nimmt, sondern als eine hervorragende Erscheinung innerhalb der geschichtlichen Bewegung der Zeit, dann zeigt sich, daß seine “Einzelheit” gar nicht vereinzelt war, sondern eine vielfach verbreitete Reaktion auf den damaligen Zustand der Welt.¹⁷⁷

In the above cited references Löwith emphasizes the words “result” [*Resultat*] and “reaction” [*Reaktion*] and that is exactly to what extent Löwith saw a philosophical work

¹⁷⁶ *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 439 (My emphasis).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 143.

as being valuable – as being in dialogue with former philosophical works.

Löwith saw, from the different trends of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche's philosophy as being the most brilliant contextualization of modern philosophical problems. Nietzsche accepted the consequences of Hegelianism – namely, the first transformation of *Geist* and the separation of theology and philosophy – and drew out its uttermost consequences. Nietzsche did not want to continue a merely secularized philosophy; instead he posed the question of how philosophy can start anew and how philosophy can reclaim the World in its thinking.¹⁷⁸ Philosophies and philosophers who were unconsciously bound up in their respective historical context and who did not enter into a historical dialogue were subject to Löwith's unrelenting critique.

It is no accident that Löwith wrote *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* in Sendai. The distance Löwith had between himself and Germany was at the same time a distance between him and the tradition of German philosophy. This distance is such that it had allowed him to look at philosophy from the outside, to picture trends therein, connect them to their heirs and hermeneutically interpret them.

Löwith's experiences in Italy introduced him to a different people, to a different mentality and to an altogether different attitude towards life. These experiences, according to those around him, influenced his character and his appreciation for the natural World. To this extent, his friend Gadamer writes:

Insbesondere hatte ihn seine jugendliche Einkehr in das lateinische Wesen geprägt, als er, knapp dem Tode in der Schlacht entronnen, an den italienischen Soldaten, die seine Bewacher waren, eine ihm zutiefst gemäße Lebenshaltung erkannte: Hingabe an den Augenblick, das Natürliche natürlich finden, das Unvermeidliche hinnehmen.¹⁷⁹

The cultural differences that Löwith experienced in Italy, however, were not so extreme that he felt himself and his philosophical training to be alien. Löwith was able to teach in German at Tōhoku University and he was able to hold lectures that were in line with

¹⁷⁸ See: *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 117: "Nietzsches Lehren vom 'Tode Gottes', vom daraus folgenden 'Nihilismus', der eine Überwindung des bisherigen, christlich geprägten Menschen zum 'Übermensch' verlangt, und schließlich von der 'Welt', die als eine lebendige ein sich selber wollender 'Wille zur Macht' und eine 'ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen' ist, sind keine Lehrstücke im herkömmlichen Sinn, sondern ein einziger Versuch zur 'Wiederanverlobung' der Welt, von der uns der erfolgreiche Kampf des Christentums gegen die heidnische Verehrung des Kosmos geschieden hat".

¹⁷⁹ Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 231-32.

his lectures in Marburg¹⁸⁰ but he was not kept completely isolated from Japanese culture. The contrast between the East and West was something that had intrigued him. In his essay, “*Bemerkungen zum Unterschied von Orient und Okzident*” (1960), he writes of the importance of experiencing the alien and unfamiliar:

Wer nie in eine Berührung kam mit einem Andern und Fremden, der weiß auch nicht, wer er selbst ist. Eine solche Berührung veranlasst zweierlei: Vergleich mit und Unterscheidung von, weil sich nur Ungleiches oder Verschiedenes auch miteinander vergleichen lässt. Der unterscheidende Vergleich führt jedoch nicht notwendig zu einem Ausgleich, sondern eher zur Auseinandersetzung, und diese bedeutet zugleich eine Selbstunterscheidung oder “Kritik” an sich selbst.¹⁸¹

This possibility to “critique himself” was given to him thanks to his having to emigrate, something Löwith would most likely have described as a “lucky coincidence”. Löwith is firstly challenged to think of the trinity of God, Humanity and World as being dependent on the understanding of creation taken from Christianity and the Bible. He is forced to consider the impossibility of translating his Christian version of the word, “God”, into Chinese or Japanese where neither the Chinese symbol *Ti* (what Löwith calls God of Heaven or *Himmelsgott*) nor the Japanese word, *Kami* (with a meaning closer to the Latin word *superi*) can be made to be understood in a Christian sense. It is to this extent that the conflict in this trinity – that Humanity, lost to its creator God and estranged from the World, is bound up with a crisis of meaning – is primarily a Western and *Christian* phenomena and in no sense a *necessary* development of *Geist* as Hegel might have seen it.

Knowing that Löwith had been conscious of the restriction of the trinity of God, Humanity, and World to the Christian, Western world is important in understanding how he used this trinity as an interpretative tool even late in his philosophical career. Even though Löwith was aware of this dependence he continued to use this trinity because of its hermeneutic advantages for describing the tradition of Western metaphysics. Löwith connected the story of creation, which has a beginning and an end, to the

¹⁸⁰ See Löwith’s *Curriculum vitae* from 1959 in: *Mein Leben*, 146-157. “Ich schrieb zuerst in Rom, in der Ausarbeitung von Marburger Vorlesungen, eine systematische Interpretation von **Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des gleichen** (1935) und eine Monographie über **J. Burckhardt** (1936) und dann in Japan **Von Hegel zu Nietzsche** (1941), worin ich den Versuch unternahm, die entscheidenden Ereignisse in der denkerischen Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts auf eine unkonventionelle Weise zu vergegenwärtigen”, 151.

¹⁸¹ “Bemerkung zum Unterschied von Orient und Okzident”, 2. In: *Vorträge und Abhandlungen: Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung*.

ever developing historical consciousness in the West that oriented itself on the future. Löwith uses these three hermeneutic concepts and their ever-changing relationships to describe different points in the history of philosophy all the while aware of their contingency on the Biblical story of creation. His time in Japan was most likely not the only reason why Löwith was able to step back from the tradition and look at it “from the outside” but his experiences with the Japanese philosopher, K. Nishida encouraged him to think of Western philosophy in comparison to the wisdom of the Japanese.

In 1960 Löwith calls Nishida’s essay on “*Die morgenländischen und abendländischen Kulturformen in alter Zeit vom metaphysischen Standpunkt aus gesehen*”, published in 1939, a document in which Nishida uses his precise knowledge of Zen Buddhism to make a decidedly “Eastern” analysis of early Western philosophy.¹⁸² According to Löwith, Nishida’s essay revolves around the idea that Western philosophy from Parmenides to Hegel concentrates only on Being and neglects Emptiness, even when it spoke of “nothingness”. Zen Buddhism emphasizes a concept of Emptiness and not that of Being but Löwith saw a difference in tradition as not being an adequate argument against practice. Löwith notes that in Japan one does not write horizontally from left to right, that the Japanese gesture for someone to draw near appears to a Westerner as a plea to leave, that umbrellas are carried from their tips with the handle pointed towards the ground and the color of mourning is not black but white. Löwith spends considerable amount of space in his essay, *Bemerkung zum Unterschied von Orient und Okzident*, describing the extent by which Japanese cultural practices are different from those in Germany. Most compelling for Löwith, however, is a statement directed to him by a physician that Europeans get too caught up in their individuality:

“Ihr Europäer”, sagte mir ein Mediziner, “seid durch die christliche Sorge um das Heil der eigenen Seele verdorben, ihr hängt zu sehr am *eigenen* Leben”.¹⁸³

It is not surprising that Löwith interpreted this critique as being close to his own found in *Das Individuum* and claims that the Japanese and Chinese people are primarily fellow-Humans (*Mitmenschen*) not primarily concerned with their individual existences:

Japaner und Chinesen sind nicht in erster Linie für sich existierende “Individuen”, sondern Mitmenschen, mit Vorfahren und Nachkommen,

¹⁸² See: Ibid, 10.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 9 (My emphasis).

Söhne und Väter, Erzeugte und Zeugende innerhalb der Ahnenreihe eines Familienstammes. Sie predigen nicht, aber sie praktizieren auf Grund einer tief verwurzelten Moral der Solidarität das stellvertretende Leiden und sie opfern sich daher leichten Herzens, sei es im Krieg oder auch in den bürgerlichen Verhältnissen.¹⁸⁴

Löwith idealizes Japanese culture and attributes to it not only a manner of being-together (*Miteinandersein*) that he had depicted in his *Habilitationsschrift* but he attributes to Japanese culture the ideal practice of Nietzsche's *amor fati*:

Die menschenwürdigste Haltung gegenüber dem Schicksal ist für den Japaner, der noch nicht durch die Ansprüche eines selbstbewussten Fortschrittswillens geprägt ist, die Gelassenheit und Ergebenheit, was immer der Anlaß zu ihr auch sein mag: Krankheit und anderes Missgeschick, Krieg und politische Umwälzungen, Erdbeben und Brände, Taifune und Überschwemmungen. "Shikata-ga-nai", d.h. da lässt sich nichts machen, ist eine der geläufigsten Redensarten.¹⁸⁵

This experience in Japan allowed Löwith to see the climate of philosophical crisis taking place in late nineteenth century Germany as a particularly Christian European phenomenon. And, for a philosopher who was dedicated to the eternal Cosmos, this experience helped justify his skepticism and noninvolvement in pressing philosophical issues in Germany – something Jürgen Habermas tries to downplay by calling it Löwith's "stoic retreat".¹⁸⁶ This "stoic retreat" however was based on an understanding of the tradition of philosophy that had provided Löwith with a new context for philosophizing, one different than that which had driven his work, *Das Individuum*.

3.4 PHILOSOPHY AS TRADITION

Löwith understood the history of philosophy as moving in a direction and always moving within the dialogue of a tradition and for this reason neither Hegel nor his students could be simply skipped over (eg. Neo-Kantians) nor could ancient Greek ideals be translated into modernity (e.g. Nietzsche). To get an idea of how Löwith pictured the tradition of philosophy one needs to refer to his correspondence with Strauss where Löwith is accused of wanting with Nietzsche to *return* to Greek ideals in order to dis-

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Jürgen Habermas, "*Karl Löwiths stoischer Rückzug vom historischen Bewußtsein*" (1963).

pose of historicism.¹⁸⁷ To this accusation Löwith responds:

Dass ich mich trotzdem nicht durch sie [die Kritik von Strauss] tödlich getroffen fühle liegt daran, dass mir die Überwindung des historischen Relativismus – in dem ich nach Ihrer Ansicht “befangen” bin – nicht dadurch möglich scheint, dass man etwa *nicht* von der notwendig polemischen – Situation der Gegenwart ausgeht. ...ich glaube, dass wir gerade *auf Grund* des Historismus erst wieder sehr unbefangen sein können und *auf Grund* unseres technisch gewordenen Daseins sehr natürlich. Der Historismus wird durch keine historische Verabsolutierung überwunden und auch durch keine *dogmatische* Zeitlichkeit (Heidegger), sondern durch das *vorantreibende* Schicksal der eigenen geschichtlichen Situation, in der man philosophierend mit und vorwärts geht, Hand in Hand mit der sehr un-natürlichen Zivilisation.¹⁸⁸

Löwith did not want to overcome historicism by returning to a style of philosophy that had preceded it, rather he approached this philosophical movement as a necessary consequence of the philosophic tradition and, as such, one that could not be pushed aside. For Löwith this meant treating the tradition in a very Hegelian fashion; i.e., taking the thesis of historicism, providing an antithesis and having the thesis, through this interaction, be lifted up, abolished and sublated. For Hegel the purpose and process of the dialectic of history was to bring about the Absolute Spirit. An idea that would have brought one closer to the Absolute is an idea that would not have gone under in this dialectic, rather, it would be one that would always subsume and consume others. Essential to the influence of Hegel’s philosophy of history on later generations are the two concepts, *Aufhebung*¹⁸⁹ and *Versöhnung*. The dialectic of history engenders conflict between movements, ideas, philosophies etc. and in this interaction some concepts are annulled and others preserved, creating something new from the old. Feuerbach, Marx and Kierkegaard disputed the philosophy of Hegel thus bringing it to a conflict out of which some ideas were annulled and some preserved (*aufgehoben*) – continuing and directing the Hegelian philosophic tradition. Important in dictating the continuation of this tradition and its direction was Nietzsche. He did, however, make the blunder of wanting to abolish convention, to forget, to start anew. Nietzsche stumbled with his

¹⁸⁷ Strauss, letter to Löwith dated Dec. 30, 1932, 612-614.

¹⁸⁸ Löwith, letter to Strauss, dated Jan. 8, 1933, 615.

¹⁸⁹ Charles Taylor in his book, *Hegel*, translates *Aufhebung* as “abrogation” or “suppression” and defines it as follows: “In Hegel’s special usage, the term combines its ordinary meaning with a rarer sense, of ‘setting aside’ or ‘preservation’. It thus serves to designate the dialectical transition in which a lower stage is both cancelled and preserved in a higher” xi. *Versöhnung*, on the other hand, is translated as ‘reconciliation’ which implies “that the two terms [in a dialectical transition] remain, but that their opposition is overcome,” 119.

acceptance of the philosophies that had preceded him and carried a resentment towards it that had him calling forth the Greek god, Dionysius. In a moment of both clarity and insanity, however, Nietzsche signs a letter, “Dionysius the crucified” thus perhaps accepting a dialectic in which he hoped something new would spring forth.

Whereas Löwith did not see the philosophical tradition as having a goal or leading to a positive development of *Geist*, he did view every returning to an earlier philosophy either from the Neo-Kantians¹⁹⁰ or Nietzsche as an ignorance of tradition and a philosophical misstep. For him an idea that *should* not go under in the dialectical process of history is one that reunites Humanity with the World, bringing Humanity back to a natural way of living, to being harmonious with the World. Because of Nietzsche’s Greek style of wanting to return to the World in *Zarathustra*, for his love of fate (*amor fati*) and for his affirmation of the eternal Cosmos in his concept of the eternal recurrence he is a figure constantly emphasized by Löwith. Continuing the tradition of philosophy in the twentieth century meant, for Löwith, beginning with Nietzsche’s philosophy and drawing it forward. It is with this background that he himself analyzed Nietzsche’s philosophy and critiqued Heidegger’s analysis thereof.¹⁹¹ For to have correctly situated Nietzsche in the history of philosophy was to be his proper heir, was to dialectically confront Nietzsche’s ideas and create out of them something new.¹⁹²

The next section will be dedicated to the development of what could be called Löwith’s understanding of history as a dialectic of remembering, as seen through his analysis of Burckhardt, and forgetting, as accentuated by Nietzsche’s second *Untimely Meditation*.

¹⁹⁰ Kantianism was an outdated philosophical style for Löwith because he saw idealism and philosophical systems as such as having come to an end with Hegel’s philosophy in the beginning of the nineteenth century. See: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 3: “Weil man aber in Hegels Werk zumeist den glanzvollen Abschluß der Systeme des Idealismus sah und aus Nietzsches Schriften beliebige Teile zu einer zeitgemäßen Verwendung entnahm, mußte man sich mit Rücksicht auf beide versehen”.

¹⁹¹ See: The third chapter of *Heidegger – Denker in dürftiger Zeit*: “Die Auslegung des Ungesagten in Nietzsches Wort ‘Gott ist tot’” (first written in 1953). In: VIII, 193-227.

¹⁹² The following works all arose within a few years: C.G. Jung, “Eine psychologische Analyse von Nietzsches *Zarathustra*”, 1935-39 (Seminar); K. Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, 1935; K. Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, 1936 and M. Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche of 1936.

CHAPTER 4

THE DIALECTIC OF FORGETTING AND REMEMBERING – THE USEFULNESS OF HISTORY FOR LIFE

4.1 NIETZSCHE; LEARNING TO FORGET AND THE THIRD STAGE OF *GEIST*

Die Feindschaft der Historie gegen das Leben hat also ihren letzten geschichtlichen Grund in der christlichen Religion, die von allen Stunden des Menschenlebens die letzte für die wichtigste nimmt (*Jacob Burckhardt. Der Mensch inmitten der Geschichte*, VII, 69).

As has been previously discussed, Nietzsche viewed the history of philosophy since the advent of Christianity as a progression leading to the emergence of nihilism, to the second stage of *Geist*. This stage, that of the lion, designates a development wherein free spirits throw away the desire to obey and strive to become, themselves, masters. Their failure lies in their inability to create new values and because of this inability they remain chained to old ideals and traditions. The third stage, the child, is a stage in philosophy that has yet to come, a stage in which new values are created through the possibility of forgetting tradition. In light of these stages of *Geist* in *Zarathustra* it becomes clear to what extent Nietzsche wished to overcome the philosophical tradition via a second metamorphosis. The child, as a new beginning, comes to the forefront of the second of Nietzsche's untimely meditations, "*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*" and is discussed in contrast to the deficiencies of the second stage of *Geist* in which philosophers are chained to tradition and unable to create anew. Nietzsche's impatience towards the speed at which history is moving forward, his lamentations that no new gods have been created in the last two thousand years¹⁹³ and his claims that his time has not yet come¹⁹⁴ are all motivated by his desire to overcome and forget. Nietzsche's second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung* undoubtedly played a large role in Löwith's study of the question of history and his own treatment thereof.¹⁹⁵

Whereas in Hegel's treatment of the historical, terms such as abrogation or su-

¹⁹³ "Zwei Jahrtausende beinahe und nicht ein einziger neuer Gott!" Nietzsche, *Der Antichrist*, §19.

¹⁹⁴ "Ich selber bin noch nicht an der Zeit, Einige werden posthum geboren." Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Warum ich so gute Bücher schreibe", §1.

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche's second meditation acts as an introduction to Löwith's study of Burckhardt as a large part of the study itself is dedicated to a comparison of both Nietzsche's and Burckhardt's ideas pertaining to the "usefulness" of a historical consciousness.

pression (*Aufhebung*) and reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) play important roles in the dialectical exchange and progression of *Geist*, terms such as overcoming (*Überwindung*) and forgetting (*Vergessen*) are of importance for Nietzsche's writings on history. Where Hegel had hoped for development, Nietzsche had hoped for an end and for a new beginning. As Löwith notes, Nietzsche's teacher was not Hegel but Schopenhauer¹⁹⁶, thus perhaps providing the distance between Nietzsche and the popular Hegelian influenced philosophy of history of the time. It is important in understanding Löwith and his thought to come to terms with not only the extreme opposition between Hegel's idea of the Absolute as being the culmination of history and Nietzsche's determination towards a new beginning but with Burckhardt's wish to retain a continuity of history.

The question with which Nietzsche begins his second meditation is: to what extent does history serve life? The moral worth of a historical consciousness relies on a positive answer to this question because, if it is the case that history does not serve life (i.e., if it does not improve life), then it should be allowed to slide away into forgetfulness and not burden one's being.

Nur soweit die Historie dem Leben dient, wollen wir ihr dienen: aber es gibt einen Grad, Historie zu treiben, und eine Schätzung derselben, bei der das Leben verkümmert und entartet: ein Phänomen, welches an merkwürdigen Symptomen unserer Zeit sich zur Erfahrung zu bringen jetzt ebenso notwendig ist, als es schmerzlich sein mag.¹⁹⁷

That which makes this meditation untimely is the fact that Nietzsche is questioning the historical education of his contemporaries who were by and large themselves historicists or otherwise adherents to a philosophy of history akin to that of Hegel.¹⁹⁸ This obsession with the historical Nietzsche calls a "consuming fever" that is an "infirmity, detriment and deprivation of the time."¹⁹⁹ Nietzsche follows this statement with a descrip-

¹⁹⁶ See: "*Nietzsche nach sechzig Jahren*" (1956/60), VI, 448.

¹⁹⁷ Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II*, III, I, 241. Far from being a modern problem this question of Humanity's relationship to time spans back to Augustine. In his lectures on Löwith Burckhard Liebsch states: "*Unübersehbar ist das Vorherrschen dieser 'jemeinigen' Sorge bereits in Augustinus' Phänomenologie der 'Zerspannung der Seele' zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft und in Montaignes Klage, als 'zukünftige' Wesen seien wir 'ständig außer uns'*". *Verzeitlichte Welt*, 8.

¹⁹⁸ As to the influence of this work against his time Löwith writes: "*Die allmächtige Zeit hat aber Nietzsches Kritik der Historie zum Siege verholfen und den 'Historismus' des 19. Jahrhunderts zum Schweigen gebracht...*" *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 66.

¹⁹⁹ "*Unzeitgemäss ist auch diese Betrachtung, weil ich etwas, worauf die Zeit mit Recht stolz ist, ihre historische Bildung, hier einmal als Schaden, Gebreite und Mangel der Zeit zu verstehen versuche, weil ich sogar glaube, dass wir alle an einem verzehrenden historischen Fieber leiden und mindestens erkennen sollten, dass wir daran leiden.*" Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II*, III, I, 242.

tion of history as a burden that Humanity drags behind itself. This concept of history as a burden, as a kind of sin that one always carries with oneself, a sin that one always has to overcome can be found in Hegel's philosophy – although Hegel himself viewed this rather positively.

Original sin for Hegel was a necessary aspect of being a particular and finite Human. One sinned because one was not Absolute, one sinned because one was still, in history, on the way to becoming complete and this sin was to be seen as an obstacle for *Geist* in attempting to realize itself.²⁰⁰ Sin is also tied in with salvation inasmuch as Humanity is redeemed from original sin after it has historically developed to completion. Those living in the times when *Geist* had not yet developed into the Absolute had to bear the burden of being sinful creatures and had the responsibility of carrying their history on their shoulders and improving it. When the Absolute is realized in history Humanity is no longer sinful and no longer needs to care for its history as a development of *Geist*. Every dialectical movement within history is a step away from sin and a step towards salvation. This idea of history, one in which history was to not be forgotten but carried forth and improved, was what inspired Nietzsche to ask the question of its usefulness for life. Denying Hegel's interpretation of history as having a goal, as ever coming to completion puts into question the very relationship Humanity has with history and a historical consciousness. If it cannot be believed that Humanity is marching towards perfection and if it cannot be believed that history is leading *Geist* to the development of the Absolute, exactly how useful is history for the *everyday* life? Nietzsche's answer is clear and is in harmony with his negative sentiments pertaining to Christian ideas of sin and shame. So long Humanity sees history as having a goal, whether it is salvation, the Absolute or the acquirement of immutable truths, Humanity will carry history on its back as a burden. When comparing Humanity to an animal that lives in the lightness of forgetting, Nietzsche describes the heavy weight history puts on Humanity's shoulders:

So lebt das Tier *unhistorisch*: denn es geht auf in der Gegenwart, wie eine Zahl, ohne daß ein wunderlicher Bruch übrig bleibt, es weiß sich nicht zu verstellen, verbirgt nichts und erscheint in jedem Momente ganz und gar als das, was es ist, kann also gar nicht anders sein als ehrlich. Der Mensch hingegen stemmt sich gegen die große und immer größere Last

²⁰⁰ See: Charles Taylor's short examination thereof in *Hegel*, 174.

des Vergangenen: diese drückt ihn nieder oder beugt ihn seitwärts, diese beschwert seinen Gang als eine unsichtbare und dunkle Bürde, welche er zum Scheine einmal verleugnen gern verleugnet: um ihren Neid zu wecken.²⁰¹

Not only does Nietzsche see history as being a burden but he sees it in practice as a degree of insomnia and regurgitation that drives either a person, a people or a culture to perish. This does not mean, however, that Nietzsche thinks that history has no use for everyday life. It is the particular view of history – as being the only source in understanding the present and directing the future and as bringing the meaning of being ever slowly into light – which Nietzsche sees burdening Humanity.

For Humanity to not be indebted to history and for it to be possible that history is useful for life, according to Nietzsche, is to see the World as always having been and always being complete and having reached its “goal” (i.e., its existence is its goal). It is in this way that history does not become a tool for reaching perfection but a tool for understanding life.

With Nietzsche’s concerns found in the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* one finds Löwith’s general doubts concerning the historicism of his time. These concerns are expressed by Nietzsche in the style of a moral argument inasmuch as he wishes to show that an excess of history is *injurious* to life. This is first drawn out in his argument that a personality is diluted and weakened through an excess of history. According to Nietzsche an excess of history begets a sharp contrast of the internal and the external by making one too reflective, by making one lost in the delusion that one’s period possesses more justice than any other point in time.²⁰² Viewing history as being progressive confers upon a time period the feeling of being a “late-comer and epigone” and thus bestowing a time period with the false quality of being more commendable and laudable than those of the past. This means that one does not need to *try* and *strive* to become mature or developed because maturity and development is a gift of history. History dulls creativity and the need for spiritual creation if the present is nothing but the heir to the creativity and spiritual creation of the past. Nietzsche’s fear is that late-comers are

²⁰¹ Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II*, III, I, 245.

²⁰² “Die entgegengesetzte Empfindung, das Wohlgefühl des Baumes an seinen Wurzeln, das Glück, sich nicht ganz willkürlich und zufällig zu wissen, sondern aus einer Vergangenheit als Erbe, Blüte und Frucht herauszuwachsen und dadurch in seiner Existenz entschuldigt, ja gerechtfertigt zu werden – dies ist es, was man jetzt mit Vorliebe als den eigentlich historischen Sinn bezeichnet.” Ibid, 262-263.

too inwardly proud of their predecessors and their physical (external) accomplishments such to the extent that they lose the vitality to accomplish anything themselves. Nietzsche's much greater fear, however, is that one loses sight of the eternal and the sublime in the conceited praise of the progression of history. In answering Nietzsche's question as to what extent history is useful to life is to understand to what extent an appreciation of history becomes mere simplemindedness.

Wer dort im Augenblick verstehen, berechnen, begreifen will, wo er in langer Erschütterung das Unverständliche als das Erhabene festhalten sollte, mag verständig genannt werden, doch nur in diesem Sinne, in dem Schiller von dem Verstand der Verständigen redet: er sieht einiges nicht, was doch das Kind sieht, er hört einiges nicht, was doch das Kind hört; dieses Einige ist gerade das Wichtigste: weil er dies nicht versteht, ist sein Verstehen kindischer als das Kind und einfältiger als die Einfalt – trotz der vielen schlaun Fältchen seiner pergamentnen Züge und der virtuoson Übung seiner Finger, das Verwickelte aufzuwickeln.²⁰³

Nietzsche's counterpart, however, with whom he was to personally dispute the usefulness of history was not Hegel but Burckhardt. Nietzsche's arrival in Basel in 1869 to become a Professor of classical philology was to precipitate his relationship with the historian, who, at the time, was already at the height of his career. Löwith describes their relationship as never being one of mutual respect. Instead it was Nietzsche who constantly vied for the esteem and recognition of his older peer to have only been met with disinterest and distance. Whereas Nietzsche's second meditation can be seen as an attack on the fervent historicists imbued with the spirit of Hegel's philosophy, its scope, however, reaches beyond this trend and deals with a general sense of using history for life. Because of this, Burckhardt's historical teachings fell victim to Nietzsche's critical eye – although perhaps unjustly.

4.2 BURCKHARDT; PRESERVATION THROUGH REMEMBRANCE

So *Hegel* in seiner Philosophie der Geschichte. Er sagt, der einzige Gedanke, den die Philosophie *mitbringe*, sei der einfache Gedanke der Vernunft, der Gedanke, daß die Vernunft die Welt beherrsche, daß es also auch in der Weltgeschichte vernünftig zugegangen sei, und das Ergebnis der Weltgeschichte *müsse* (sic!) sein, daß sie der vernünftige, notwendige Gang des Weltgeistes gewesen sei, – was alles doch erst zu beweisen und nicht "mitzubringen" war (Burckhardt, "*Unsere Aufgabe*", 4. In:

²⁰³ Ibid, 276.

Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen).

Looking at Burckhardt and his treatment of history after that of Nietzsche might at first appear erroneous and anachronistic inasmuch as Burckhardt acted as a role model and mentor (whether he wanted to or not) to the latter. Nietzsche wrote the second of the untimely meditations, however, partly in spite of Burckhardt and his teachings and partly because of him. His historical situatedness is less important than his treatment of history as providing a third alternative, in opposition to Hegel and Nietzsche, to viewing history and its role in everyday life. It is also safe to say that Löwith himself discovered and treated Burckhardt's works with the question of the usefulness of history in mind only after having been introduced to the subject by Nietzsche.²⁰⁴

Löwith's treatment of Burckhardt as a thinker strongly emphasizes the latter's views as expressed in *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*. This work of Burckhardt's is a collection of lectures that were originally given the title *Über das Studium der Geschichte*. Eight years after Burckhardt's death, however, his nephew, Jacob Oeri, published the work under the title by which it is now known.²⁰⁵

As mentioned, conceptually important terms for Hegel's philosophy of history are abrogation and suppression (*Aufhebung*) and reconciliation (*Versöhnung*); conceptually important for Nietzsche's treatment thereof being overcoming (*Überwindung*) and forgetting (*Vergessen*); to which the following terms, obligation (*Pflicht*) and remembering via preservation (*Erinnern*), will be shown as conceptually important for Burckhardt. Rather than being Hegelian, Burckhardt viewed *Geist* as always being "complete"²⁰⁶ and not on a road to development. *Geist* was not historical (*vergänglich*) but mutable (*wandelbar*) and as such is not a continuous development to be followed at points in different cultures at different times but can be seen in its different forms in different cultures regardless of the time period. Löwith describes Burckhardt's historical sense as also being anthropological and pathological based on Burckhardt's statements in the introduction to *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*:

Unser Ausgangspunkt ist der vom einzigen bleibenden und für uns mög-

²⁰⁴ Löwith's work on Nietzsche, wherein the question of time and the eternal recurrence play a central role, was published two years before that on Burckhardt.

²⁰⁵ For more information concerning the history of this work see: Kurt Meyer, *Jacob Burckhardt; Ein Porträt*.

²⁰⁶ "Der menschliche Geist sei schon früh "komplett" gewesen..." As quoted by Löwith in: "Burckhardts Stellung zu Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie" (1928), VII, 4.

lichen Zentrum, vom *duldenden, strebenden und handelnden Menschen*, wie er ist und immer war und sein wird; daher unsere Betrachtungen gewissermaßen pathologisch sein wird.²⁰⁷

To which Löwith adds:

Aus der weitläufigen Weltgeschichte will Burckhardt gerade auf das Nächstliegende zurückführen.²⁰⁸

Leading one back to that which is closest at hand (*Nächstliegendes*) in world history is to concentrate on the *Human* element of history and not its expression in *Geist*, progress, truth or the Absolute. Concentrating on the Human element in history is the reason, explains Löwith, that it made no difference for Burckhardt if he was lecturing on Napoleon or on ancient Greek cuisine – as both had very *Human* elements:

“Die Begebenheit in ihrer menschlichen Fasslichkeit darzustellen” ist zwar nach Rankes Worten die Aufgabe der Geschichtsschreibung, faktisch erfüllt hat sie aber Burckhardt, der Schüler Rankes, bei dem es sich in der Tat um Hervorhebung dessen handelt “was den Menschen interessieren kann”; daher macht es für Burckhardt keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied aus, ob er einmal ‘Napoleon’ und ein andermal ‘die Kochkunst der Griechen’ zum Thema eines Vortrags macht, denn er verstand es gleich gut, weltgeschichtliche Größen auf das menschlich Bemerkenswerte hin zu reduzieren, wie aus dem Zustand der Kochkunst Aufschlüsse über die Gesinnung einer Zeit und ihrer Gesellschaft zu gewinnen.²⁰⁹

The remarkable aspect of Humanity (*das menschlich Bemerkenswerte*) in history for Burckhardt was how life as such was thought of in different periods of time and how it was appraised and valued (*taxiert*). Thus the study of history is to serve in the presentation of the circumstantial nature of Humanity in life and in the World through an analysis of past appraisals and valuations. Knowing this circumstantial nature is to build a historical consciousness, allowing for a distancing between the individual and the mundane. An informed historical consciousness is *not* the realization of the Absolute in the sense that world events will *not* at some point be in harmony with one’s being. This distance, rather, is a way of positing oneself in line with a greater history of Human culture.

For Burckhardt, in contrast to Hegel, Humanity stands at the hub of history and not its expression in *Geist*. With respect to philosophical endeavors pertaining to World-

²⁰⁷ Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, 6 (My emphasis).

²⁰⁸ “Burckhardts Stellung zu Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie”, VII, 3.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

history Burckhardt had little patience:

Ich habe überhaupt nichts mehr gegen diese Art von Zeitvertreib [die Philosophie] einzuwenden, wenn Sie nur Eins versprechen wollen, nämlich in den Momenten philosophischen Hochgefühls ... jedesmal dreimal im Stillen zu sagen: ‘Und ich bin doch nur ein armer Tropf gegenüber den Mächten der äußeren Welt.’ – ‘Und dieses Alles wiegt doch keinen Gran realer Anschauung und Empfindung auf.’ – ‘Und die Persönlichkeit ist doch das Höchste, was es gibt’.²¹⁰

The spiritual overcoming of the mundane is, according to Löwith, obtaining a straightforward appraisal (*Taxation*) of life and is the goal of both Burckhardt’s historical works and his works on the history of art. Important to this spiritual overcoming is an *Archimedean* point by which one can extract oneself from the mundane. This Archimedean point was the extent of how history was to serve life; it was namely to help determine in general what life *is*. Löwith himself admits that the differences and similarities between Hegel and Burckhardt are not unequivocal. It suffices, however, for the current project to say that whereas Hegel emphasized the *development* of *Geist* in history, Burckhardt emphasized the Human element, which was already a totality. A historical consciousness, therefore, found its usefulness in the education of life and in an appraisal of that which is closest at hand (*Nächstliegendes*), allowing one to escape the mundane through a distancing – the Archimedean point.

Das gemeinsame Motiv von Burckhardts historischen und kunsthistorischen Werken ist aber die geistige “Überwindung” des Irdischen” und dem entspricht, daß das einfache und beständige Ziel seiner Betrachtung der Welt die Gewinnung einer “freimütigen Taxation des Lebens” war. Diese erfolgt von einem “archimedischen Punkt” her, der außerhalb der bloßen Ereignisse liegt, und der Ausgangspunkt für die von da aus gesichtete Geschichte ist der duldende und handelnde Mensch...²¹¹

For Burckhardt, remembering and studying history is an obligation that one should not circumvent. History is Humanity’s “highest spiritual possession” (*höchster geistiger Besitz*) and one is obligated to recognize it as the *spiritual continuum* that it is (*geistiges Kontinuum*) – failure to do so results in barbarism, for only barbarians live without history.²¹² Burckhardt was a temperate thinker who in contrast to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche neither wanted to retrieve a primordial Christianity nor the ancient world

²¹⁰ From a letter to his student, Brenner, as quoted by Löwith in: *Ibid*, 1.

²¹¹ *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 42.

²¹² Burckhardt, *Weltg. Betrachtungen*, 9.

of the Greeks.²¹³ Both of these movements were, for Burckhardt, movements of the past that could not be relived in the present. Their remnants did not, however, need to be overcome, replaced or extinguished, rather they are to be respected and safeguarded in a historical consciousness. This approach to history according to Löwith is moderate (*Masshalten*) and aligns itself to a ‘doctrine of the mean’ (*Mitte und Mass*) that was essential for Burckhardt in acquiring an honest appraisal (*Taxation*) of life. That which Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had hoped would disappear via a willing of the past (although this finds expression in Nietzsche as a willing to forget), Burckhardt had hoped to preserve with the goal of understanding one’s time and understanding oneself situated in time:

Der Einzelne sollte kenntlich machen, “daß der Verfasser [...] es verstanden hatte, mit einem einzigen Wort absolut entscheidend auszudrücken [...], daß er *seine Zeit* und *sich in ihr* verstanden hatte”.²¹⁴

Burckhardt’s concept of moderation is attributed by Löwith and Kurt Meyer, in his book *Burckhardt*, to his fidelity to ancient Greek thought. In his work, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Burckhardt speaks of the Greek *polis* and its *autarkeia* as self-sufficiency with reference to Aristotle’s *Politics*²¹⁵ where Aristotle in book seven speaks of a city state as being successful by not having too few or too many citizens:

Nun pflegt Schönheit Zahl und Größe vorauszusetzen; daher muss auch ein Staat dann am schönsten sein, wenn er groß ist und die beschriebene Bestimmung erfüllt. Aber es gibt auch beim Staat, genauso wie bei allem anderen: bei Lebewesen, Pflanzen und Werkzeugen, eine bestimmte Begrenzung der Größe: wenn jedes von ihnen entweder zu klein oder zu groß ist, können sie ihr jeweiliges Vermögen nicht behalten, sondern sie werden entweder völlig ihre Natur einbüßen oder sich in einem minderwertigen Zustand befinden.²¹⁶

This concept of moderation or, doctrine of the mean, as applied to the *polis* is in line

²¹³“Nietzsche, der die alte Welt wieder wollte, wie sie vor dem Einbruch des Christentums war... wogegen sich Kierkegaard in dem Experiment versuchte, das ursprüngliche Christentum wieder zu holen, als hätte es die 1800 Jahre gar nicht gegeben, um wieder ein Nachfolger Christi zu werden.” Jacob Burckhardt, VII, 156.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 157.

²¹⁵ Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte. Zweiter Abschnitt; Staat und Nation, Teil 1; Die Polis*: “Das Lebensmaß, welches eine Polis in sich enthalten muß, wird bezeichnet mit dem Wort αὐτάρκεια, das Genügen. Für unsere Rechnungsart ein sehr dunkles Wort, für den Griechen aber völlig verständlich. Eine Feldmark, welche die nötigsten Lebensmittel schaffte, ein Handelsverkehr und eine Gewerblichkeit, welche für die übrigen Bedürfnisse in mäßiger Weise sorgte, endlich eine Hoplitenschar mindestens so stark als die der nächsten, meist feindlichen Polis, dies waren die Bedingungen jenes ‘Genügens.’ Aristoteles redet hier so deutlich als man es wünschen mag”.

²¹⁶ Aristotle, Pol. 7.1326b.

with Aristotle's ethics wherein one is cautioned against excess and deficiency and the ideal of antiquity, *sophrosyne*, which Löwith claims had determined the ethics of the ancient Greek.²¹⁷

Burckhardt's moderateness can be situated in between Hegel's glorification of history as the development of *Geist* and Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's attempts to turn back the wheel of time. Burckhardt thought that neither ancient Greek philosophy nor Christianity, in its many forms, are traditions that needed to be brought to the forefront of a historical consciousness, he did, however, respect them as powerful historical movements. What is important in Burckhardt's historical writings is his emphasis on Humanity and life, inasmuch their forms are historically investigatable, as being useful in appraising and determining one and another. A historical consciousness finds its use in helping one understanding one's time and understanding oneself situated in this time – in finding an Archimedean point from which the contemporary could be regarded.

4.3 A COMPARISON: NIETZSCHE VS. BURCKHARDT

Die entscheidende Differenz zwischen Burckhardt und Nietzsche liegt in ihrer Ansicht von der Aufgabe der Historie, von der Nietzsche vorzüglich den Nachteil und Burckhardt den Nutzen sah (*Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 66).

The comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of remembering and forgetting in a historical sense is done by Löwith in his work on Burckhardt. Whereas Nietzsche feared that a historical consciousness would diminish vitality and creativity, Burckhardt hoped that it would help position one in one's time and help in understanding life. In analyzing Löwith's stance concerning historicism the debate between Burckhardt and Nietzsche on the usefulness of history for life cannot be ignored. Saying that Löwith had a stance, however, is perhaps saying too much. Habermas is not far off in his article, "*Karl Löwith's stoischer Rückzug vom historischen Bewußtsein*", in saying that Löwith was on the brink of finding the "solution" to historicism but, instead of delivering a

²¹⁷ "Dieses antike Ideal der Mäßigung oder Sophrosyne bestimmt auch die ganze philosophische Ethik der Griechen, durch die eine beständige Mahnung auf ein Mittleres tönt." *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 333.

concrete “metacritique”, receded into skepticism.²¹⁸ Löwith’s skepticism and reluctance in providing concrete “metacritiques” as Habermas would have liked to have seen can be frustrating to the reader. This resignation, however, is not accidental and not without deliberation. Löwith’s history with this topic does not begin and end in his more popular investigation of the origins of the philosophy of history in *Meaning in History* but is dealt heavily with in his works on Burckhardt and Nietzsche. Löwith’s restraint in providing the last proverbial blow to historicism is perhaps because he had not answered the question for himself, caught in a debate between the radicalism of Nietzsche and the temperance of Burckhardt. The first section of *Jacob Burckhardt*, encompassing fifty pages on the relationship between Nietzsche and Burckhardt, is some of his most interesting, personal and well-elaborated upon writing throughout his complete oeuvre. Far from being alone in this impression, Wiebrecht Ries writes in his book *Karl Löwith*:

Die Burckhardtmonographie von 1936 ist vielleicht Löwiths “schönstes”, weil mit seiner unverwechselbaren philosophischen Eigenart auf das engste verbundene Buch.²¹⁹

And Kurt Meyer comments to what extent Löwith’s Burckhardt study is his most intimate (*das engste verbundene Buch*):

Auf den letzten Buchseiten macht Löwith aus Burckhardt einen Weisen der Spätantike, einen *unabhängigen Epikureer*, der sich nicht *preisgegeben* habe und dem es gelungen sei, sich vom *Zug des Geschehens* nicht mitreißen zu lassen. Mit dieser Deutung beschrieb Löwith offensichtlich auch sein eigenes Lebensideal.²²⁰

Furthermore, one is pressed to ask the question to what extent the skeptic, Löwith, drew a comparison between his relationship with the “disagreeable character and sermonizer,”²²¹ Heidegger, and the relationship between the moderate Burckhardt and Nietzsche, the philosopher who philosophized with a hammer. That Löwith favored the mild tempered Burckhardt as the prototype of what Meyer calls Löwith’s “ideal of life” (*Lebensideal*) is apparent when reading his exposition and comparison of Burckhardt with

²¹⁸ “Wenn er aber die Positionen des praktisch in Anspruch genommenen historischen Bewusstseins so genau kennt, daß man auf der Hut sein muß, die Metakritik mit längst antizipierten Gegenargumente zu bestreiten, wird der stoische Rückzug vom historischen Bewußtsein, die ebenso beharrliche wie unvermittelte Rückkehr zur Antike um so erstaunlicher.” Habermas, *Stoischer Rückzug*, 368.

²¹⁹ Wiebrecht Ries, *Karl Löwith*, 102.

²²⁰ Meyer, *Jacob Burckhardt*, 219.

²²¹ *Mein Leben*, 27.

Nietzsche.²²² That Löwith was also opposed to the philosophical as well as political radicalism of Heidegger is not to be doubted and, although Löwith almost always uses Nietzsche's philosophy as a starting point for his own formulations, he does not hesitate to be critical of Nietzsche's radicalism. One such starting point that Löwith had borrowed was the question of the usefulness of history for life.

Aside from trying to put to rest a historicism that laid too much value and worth on history as such, that had become "the last religion of the educated", to what extent should one pose the question of how useful history is for life? In the cyclical systems of antiquity time did not strive towards perfection; rather, the essence of the World and Humanity was complete, set and eternal. With the influence of a Christian eschatology that depicted history as linear, Humanity was given a different relationship to time – from original sin to the return of the savior one was given the task of building the kingdom of God on earth. Hegel's interpretation thereof continued a tradition where past times were negatively valued inasmuch as they were to be seen as not as *developed* as the present. The question of the usefulness of history for life, however, would have had little philosophical meaning in antiquity as Löwith mentions in *Meaning in History*:

Even the tutor of Alexander the Great depreciated history over against poetry, and Plato might have said that the sphere of change and contingency is the province of historiography but not of philosophy. To the Greek thinkers a *philosophy* of history would have been a contradiction of terms. To them history was political history and, as such, the proper study of statesmen and historians.²²³

The question of the usefulness of history as posed by Nietzsche was timely when one considers that the strength of Christian eschatologies and the belief in reason in history had waned in nineteenth century philosophy.²²⁴ The very basis for the modern relation-

²²² Michael Jaeger in his work *Autobiographie und Geschichte* goes so far as to claim that Löwith's philosophy experienced a "conversion" (*Konversion*) between his work on Nietzsche and his work on Burckhardt. Jaeger misunderstands Löwith's study of Nietzsche and assumes that Löwith supported (in 1935) the Nietzschean style of philosophizing with a hammer and later gave up this style two years later (in 1937) with the publication of his monography on Burckhardt. The last chapter of Löwith's Nietzsche book, "*Der kritische Maßstab für Nietzsches Experiment*", in which Löwith criticizes Nietzsche's radicalism is not to be overlooked. Nietzsche's importance for Löwith's handling of the historical should also not be underestimated but seen as working in tandem with the temperance of Burckhardt. See: Jaeger, *Autobiographie und Geschichte*, 185: "*Der Gegensatz zwischen Nietzsche und Burckhardt verdeutlicht den Positionswechsel, den Löwith in seiner Konversion vollzieht*".

²²³ *Meaning in History*, 4.

²²⁴ See: Ibid, 192: "Hegel translated and elaborated the Christian theology of history into a speculative system, thus preserving and, at the same time, destroying the belief in providence as the leading principle. ...Marx rejected divine providence categorically, replacing it by a belief in progress and per-

ship to history, and the basis for the usefulness of a historical consciousness, had therefore been lost and became a philosophical problem that Löwith was engaged with for the breadth of his career. The crux of this problem and the most intriguing discussion thereof for Löwith is the dispute between Burckhardt and Nietzsche.

Nietzsche sent his second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung* to Burckhardt in hope of raising discussion and obtaining critical feedback. Burckhardt responded with disinterest because of his reluctance to enter into philosophical debate. He was a teacher of history who treated his work as a propaedeutic subject and had no intentions of entering a discussion about the Hegelian understanding of world history. His disinterest in Nietzsche's essay is also based upon Nietzsche's having dealt exclusively with the *disadvantages* of history for life and not once touching upon, as the title would have one believe ("On the Use and Abuse of History for Life" - *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*), the advantages of history for life. Burckhardt did not let himself be drawn into an argument in which he would have to justify the last thirty years of his career practice of history was just and beneficial.²²⁵

For Nietzsche there are three ways of being historical; the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. The monumental historian searches for that which is worthy of being repeated and looks for historical greats and paragons, for the monuments of time and builds mythologies and legends around them lest the present become too boring. This possibility of being historical is unjust to the possibilities of the present.

Ihre Gefahr ist, daß sie durch Analogien täuscht und gegenüber den Möglichkeiten der eigenen Gegenwart ungerecht wird.²²⁶

The antiquarian is a conservator who enshrines, conserves and finds happiness in being the heir of a particular history – such that this constructed history allows the historian to define herself to her satisfaction. The antiquarian, however, loses her instinct for the new and emerging.

Die Gefahr dieser Historie ist, daß ihrem Sammeleifer alles und jedes in

verting religious belief into the antireligious attempt to establish predictable laws of secular history. Finally, Burckhardt dismissed the theological, philosophical, and socialistic interpretations of history and thereby reduced the meaning of history to mere continuity, without beginning, progress, or end".

²²⁵ See part 1, chapter 2 of Löwith's *Burckhardt* book, "*Burckhardts Antworten auf Nietzsches Briefe und Schriften*". VII, 50-62. "...und auf den eigentlichen Inhalt dieser 'gewaltig inhaltsreichen Schrift' [*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie*] geht Burckhardt auffallenderweise nicht ein". *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 51.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

gleicher Weise bewahrenswert wird und sie den Instinkt für das Neue und Werdende verliert.²²⁷

The third, the critical “historian”, hopes that the historical perishes as Humanity not only inherits the reason of past ages but their madness as well – everything that arises is worthy of descending once again (“*daß alles was entsteht auch wert ist, daß es zu Grunde geht*”²²⁸). This way of being historical can be too critical in its attempt to negate the past.

Die Gefahr dieser Historie ist, daß sie im Verneinen und Verurteilen die Grenze des zu Bewahrenden überschreitet und durch maßlose Kritik den Menschen in eine geschichtslose Leere stellt.²²⁹

Making history useful for life is finding a way to balance these three ways of regarding the historical. Nietzsche does not deny that knowledge of history is necessary for life, he does not deny that each of these ways of regarding history have their positive uses or that they can fulfill different needs at different times. Nietzsche overemphasizes, however, that they should be pursued only inasmuch as they do not dull the senses for the *new* and the *becoming* – reminding one of the quote from Goethe Nietzsche uses to begin his second meditation:

Übrigens ist mir alles verhasst, was mich bloß belehrt, ohne meine Tätigkeit zu vermehren oder unmittelbar zu beleben.²³⁰

For Nietzsche there was no such thing as the study of history for history’s sake but the study of history for the sake of life. If one were to merely stand in awe of that which has already been accomplished, a new seeding of ideas, a willingness to make audacious experiments and a free-desiring could be hindered.

Löwith summarizes Nietzsche’s goal in the second meditation in his polemic against Heidegger in *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*:

Wenn irgend etwas den Anfang sowie das Ende von Nietzsches Betrachtung auszeichnet, so ist es der Blick auf eine ungeschichtliche Weise des reinen Daseins, welches “vergessen” kann, was “war”, und sorglos im gegenwärtigen Augenblick ohne Rest aufgeht: das Tier und, “in vertrauter Nähe”, das Kind. Beide sind nicht wie der erwachsene Mensch “ein nie zu vollendendes Imperfectum”, das deshalb um sein Ganzseinkönnen besorgt ist, sondern spielend vollkommen und ganz, was sie sind, und

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid, 67.

²³⁰ Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen II*, III, I, 241.

darum glücklich. Nach einer solchen Vollkommenheit verlangt auch der geschichtlich lebende, unvollendete Mensch.²³¹

Historicism,²³² in Nietzsche's view, did not treat history as a tool for life; instead it sought history for the sake of other goals. Instead of treating history as sustenance for life, historicism was an excess of the resolution that history served a larger purpose than those of the present. This had as consequence the alienation of Humanity from being *essentially* complete (*vollkommen*) in any particular historical moment.

Not belonging to the historicist tradition one must ask, however, to what extent Burckhardt could be seen as affected by Nietzsche's criticism and to what extent Burckhardt could have treated history without consideration for the present. Telling for this purpose is the previously quoted mandate Burckhardt gives to lofty philosophers with the hope of dragging them back to the "reality" of their insignificance in the face of a larger World that encompasses a vast history. Namely, in order for their occupation to be sufferable they should say, in the moment of their philosophical bliss, that they are only small drops in comparison to the greatness of the outer world and that their bliss does not compare to a grain of real intuition and perception. This relativization of the ego of the philosopher can be interpreted as a warning from Burckhardt to the philosopher, who thinks she has created something new, that she is merely an epigone. It could be a warning to philosophers who philosophize completely unhistorically, unaware of the contextual content of their thinking. Or, it could be a warning against the efforts of a philosopher trying to create in spite of the historical, i.e., trying to create something new and not in line with a continuity or tradition of history.

Against all possible critique Löwith defends Burckhardt as he sees him as not having experienced the historicism of his time as a "sickness of life".²³³ With this claim Löwith gives an answer to the question of the extent Burckhardt fell victim to Nietzsche's critiques; namely, not at all. In justifying his defense of Burckhardt one gets a glimpse of Löwith's own ideal treatment of history as such. That, against the radicalism of Löwith's time as propagated by Heidegger and the National Socialists, it was the task

²³¹ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 205.

²³² Löwith describes historicism as being much more extreme than any of these three ways of being historical: "*Der Historismus des 19. Jahrhunderts hat jedoch alle Grenzpfähle umgerissen: alles was nur überhaupt einmal war, stürzt wahllos in das Bewußtsein herein und beansprucht gleich viel zu gelten, wodurch die Historie selber im Verhältnis zum Leben gleichgültig wird*". *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 67f.

²³³ *Ibid*, 76.

of scholars to preserve a *continuity* or specific narrative of history. Löwith inherited this point of view from Burckhardt's reaction to the radicalism of his time, namely as a result of the French revolution of 1848 and the concurrent hunger strikes in Germany. Burckhardt felt that the basic principles of life had been dispossessed and that the continuity in history was in danger of being forgotten.

...daß uns seit der französischen Revolution durch die völlige Negation der überlieferten Grundlagen des bisherigen Lebens der "historische Boden" entzogen ist, und es darum die Aufgabe des durch die Geschichte Gebildeten ist: durch Erinnern die "Kontinuität" zu bewahren, anstatt durch jugendliches "Zerstören" und "Aufräumen" eine "bereits in der Hoffnung lebendige Zukunft" zu bauen.²³⁴

Important in understanding Burckhardt's treatment of history is to understand what he meant by preserving a "continuity" in history. Continuity is, according to Löwith, not just "any history or the sum of everything that was, rather, it is the *unity* of European peoples."²³⁵ This statement of Löwith's is ambiguous but can be interpreted as meaning that the history of a people is that which defines a people. The continuity in and of European history was seen as giving light to the European people as a whole. The facts that were worthy of being remembered by the current age, however, were those that held influence for the present and the near future. Facts and histories that no longer belonged in the continuity because of their relative unimportance for the present age were worthy of being forgotten. The three powers (*Potenzen*) whose heights and turning points were to be analyzed in this continuity, for Burckhardt, are the state, religion and culture.²³⁶ In his chapter on "*die historische Größe*" in his *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* Burckhardt claims that it is the job of the artist, the poet and the philosopher to hand down the contents of the time:

Künstler, Dichter und Philosophen haben zweierlei Funktion: den innern Gehalt der Zeit und Welt ideal zur Anschauung zu bringen und ihn als unvergängliche Kunde auf die Nachwelt zu überliefern.²³⁷

Essentially, Burckhardt's emphasis on the prolongation of a continuity was in argumentation against a *tabula rasa*, the idea that the revolution and revolts of the 1840s would

²³⁴ Ibid, 76f.

²³⁵ "Als Historiker erinnerte Burckhardt nicht "irgend eine" Vergangenheit und ebenso wenig die *anti-quarische* Summe alles Gewesenen, sondern die *Einheit* der europäischen Menschheit." Ibid, 77.

²³⁶ The first chapter of Burckhardt's *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* is an explication of these three powers (*Potenzen*) and the second investigates their many interrelationships and contingencies (*Bedingtheiten*).

²³⁷ Burckhardt, *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, 214.

provide European societies with a blank slate from which the past could be forgotten.²³⁸ Burckhardt feared that this era would not only revolt against politics but revolt against its history and, with the disenthronement of its monarch, disenthroned its social and political history.²³⁹ Unlike Nietzsche who spoke in high terms of the animal for living unhistorically and the child who bears the possibility for a new beginning, Burckhardt, in the face of revolution and new beginnings, sought to preserve the past.

In comparison, however, with the Absolute, with an ever developing *Geist*, with eschatologies of salvation and analogies of forgetting, the idea of “continuity” seems rather dull, unimpressive and unphilosophical. Its apparent unphilosophical nature – in that it does not provide a principle under which history can be subsumed – is why Löwith was drawn to it. The idea of continuity was one that he found insightful because of its moderate nature. In comparison to Burckhardt, Nietzsche’s radicalism and his very non-Greek ignorance of the doctrine of the mean led him towards the faulty attempt to overcome and to start anew:

Es fehlen in Nietzsches Lehre zwischen dem Extrem des Nihilismus und dem umgekehrten der ewigen Wiederkehr, sowie zwischen dem Übermenschen und dem letzten Menschen, alle *mittleren Begriffe*... Maß und Mitte ist ... das, was Nietzsches Versuch zur Überwindung des Menschen von Grund aus fehlt.²⁴⁰

That Löwith was put off by Nietzsche’s radicalism can be found not only in his works on Nietzsche and Burckhardt but in the aforementioned correspondence between him and Strauss. Because of the constant challenges of Strauss, Löwith was compelled to provide his own opinions on the many critiques of historicism which he, in the works published in his lifetime, merely elucidates. To this extent he writes to Strauss:

Da *ich* aber überhaupt nichts Utopisches, Radikales und Extremes will und mich andererseits auch mit keiner “Mittelmässigkeit” begnügen will,

²³⁸ Burckhardt went against the traditional historical view of the ancient world as having collapsed (e.g.; Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776-1788) and described a transference of culture between the ancients and the rising Christian tradition. The Christians did not bury ancient Greek and Roman culture and they did not start with a *tabula rasa* but were the keepers of the continuity of ancient Greek and Roman history. See: Meyer, *Jacob Burckhardt*, 52f: “Mit seiner Auffassung vom **sinkenden Heidentum** beschreibt auch er eine alternde Kultur. Er zeigt, wie alte Institutionen an Prestige verlieren, die Korruption zunimmt, wie die Zustände schliesslich zur **Apolitie der Besten** führen. Er zeigt aber auch, dass das heraufkommende Christentum nicht zum Totengräber, sondern zum Bewahrer des antiken Erbes wurde... Constantins Leistung bestand darin, die antike Welt mit der christlichen versöhnt und somit die **Kontinuität des Geistes** gesichert zu haben”.

²³⁹ See the chapter “Krise und Kontinuität” in: *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Nietzsches Philosophie*, VI, 322f.

so bleibt mir als positiv-kritischer Maßstab nur übrig, die grundsätzliche Destruktion all jener Extremitäten (*sic*), im Rückgang auf das – ursprünglich ebenfalls antike – Ideal von *Mitte und Mass*.²⁴¹

Löwith is clearly referring to Burckhardt with this statement and continues his letter with references to Burckhardt's temperance (*Mäßigkeit*). The doctrine of the mean (*Mitte und Maß*) is not, however, necessarily an ideal of antiquity, it is not bound to a time period in the sense that the doctrine of the eternal recurrence *belonged* to a past age and its greater understanding of the World. In this sense, Löwith was not trying to return to the ancient world of the Greeks, rather, he found himself to be thinking in a very timely fashion:

Nicht ich sondern der unglückselige Kierkegaard und die restaurativen Menschen von heute wollen immer noch "Verlorenes" wieder-holen und rehabilitieren – ich denke dagegen *auf Grund eines extrem-historischen Bewusstseins* bereits wieder ganz *unhistorisch*, so wie ich auch privatim sehr unhistorisch lebe, sehr augenblicklich und unbeschwert von dem "Nachteil" der Historie.²⁴²

This declaration of Löwith's opens up many more questions than it answers. He, in that he quite rarely takes a personal stance in his writing, finally reveals his individual attitude concerning history. To what extent does an "extreme historical consciousness" (*extrem-historischen Bewusstseins*) provide a basis for living "unhistorical" and "in the present"? Löwith, neither in his letters nor in his writings, provides an answer to this question. Coming towards the end of Löwith's analysis of Burckhardt, however, makes looking behind Löwith's guardedness much easier. His "extreme historical consciousness" is his extreme education in the historical. Löwith was not only a student of the two most important German philosophers of his time but he shows his mastery over philosophical thought in the nineteenth century time and again. Rare was a work of Löwith's an attempt to join in his contemporary philosophical discourse; recurrent were analyses of the history of philosophy. Being conscious of the history of philosophy and having been in the middle of contemporaneous influential philosophical movements enabled his being unhistorical; it enabled him to find an Archimedean point and stand outside of the narrative of German philosophy. Important to note is Löwith's emphasis on philosophizing unhistorically as being synonymous with his claim of having an "extreme historical consciousness" *and* his style of philosophizing from an Archimedean

²⁴¹ Löwith, letter to Strauss dated July 13, 1935. 653-654.

²⁴² Löwith, letter to Strauss dated Aug. 1, 1933, 617.

point. The unhistorical is not a *return* to a past mode of thinking but a consequent of historicizing philosophy and truth.

4.4 THE FRICTION OF A RETURN; A LETTER TO LEO STRAUSS

The most radical statement, however, of Nietzsche's *Unzeitgemässheit* is to be found in his attack on Richard Wagner: "What is the first and last thing that a philosopher demands of himself? To overcome his age in himself, to become 'timeless.' With what then does the philosopher have the greatest fight? With all that in him which makes him the child of his time. Very well then! I am just as much a child of my age as Wagner, i.e., I am a decadent. The only difference is that I have recognized that fact, that I have struggled against it. The philosopher in me has struggled against it ("Nietzsche's Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence" (1945), VI, 416).

Löwith was often confronted with the question of whether or not he was in favor of returning to a mode of thought that preceded the development of a deep historical consciousness in Western philosophy. His admiration for Nietzsche and his elucidation of the eternal recurrence of the same in *Nietzsches Philosophie* led many of his critics to believe that he too wished to recreate for modernity the ancient Greek style of pondering the World. That Löwith, however, was reluctant to espouse his own views led to the obvious consequence of him being often misinterpreted and misunderstood.²⁴³ When

²⁴³ In the secondary literature it is widely and erringly accepted that Löwith wanted to "return" to ancient Greek thought and most if not all references to this claim quote Habermas' essay from 1963, "*Karl Löwiths stoischer Rückzug vom historischen Bewußtsein*". See: Rüdiger Bubner, *Geschichtsprozesse und Handlungsnormen*, 78. "*Aus der verständlichen Ernüchterung gegenüber den großen Entwürfen der Geschichtsphilosophie heraus glaubte er [Löwith], das historische Denken überhaupt verabschieden zu können, wenn die Ahnherrschaft einmal aufgedeckt war. Ihm schien anstelle dessen eine Rückkehr zum antiken Kosmos möglich, der die historische Irritation ablösen sollte. Er verkannte freilich, daß diese Vergewaltigung des Vergangenen ihrerseits eine Leistung des historischen Bewußtseins ist*". The footnote (fn. 8) Bubner uses to evidence this claim does not lead the reader to the appropriate literature where Löwith makes this claim but rather to the essay by Habermas which itself is lacking in references. See also: Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Heidegger und Nietzsche*, section 8 of part 1 titled, "*Gegenbewegung zur Dominanz der geschichtsphilosophischen Problematik in den fünfziger Jahren: Gerhard Krüger und Karl Löwith*". Gerhard H. Dietrich, *Das Verständnis von Natur und Welt bei Rudolf Bultmann und Karl Löwith*, chapter 7, "*der stoische Rückzug aus der Krise der Geschichte*". Roberto de Amorim Almeida, *Natur und Geschichte*, chapter 6, "*Karl Löwiths Rückgang in das griechisch-römische Ursprünglichkeitsverständnis*". Arno Heinrich Meyer in, *Die Frage des Menschen nach Gott und Welt inmitten seiner Geschichte im Werk Karl Löwiths*, names chapter 2 of the second part of the work after Habermas' essay. Ante Čović, "*Die Aporien von Löwiths Rückkehr zur 'natürlichen Welt'*", 192: "*Daher muß das Scheitern von Nietzsches 'letzten Experiment' – der Wiedergewinnung der vorchristlichen Welt mit Hilfe der Lehre von der ewigen Wiederkehr – zugleich auch als Scheitern von Löwiths philosophischer Intention gelesen werden*". The thesis espoused by Habermas is best summarized with the following quotation from his essay: "...Löwith will zu der im klassischen Sinne theoretischen Welteinstellung zurückfinden, weil sie der Praxis überhoben und von

presented with the question of a “return” by Leo Strauss in 1933 and again in 1935 (after the publication of *Nietzsches Philosophie*) Löwith is candid and has no problem in setting the case straight according to his negative opinion of “returning” to an earlier mode of thought. The conversation between the two philosophers gained depth when Strauss sent Löwith his early work, *Philosophie und Gesetz*, in the year of its publication, 1935.

Strauss’ book aims, according to Martin D. Yaffe,

to alert and equip its German-Jewish reader concerning the need to *recover* the rather old-fashioned understanding of Maimonides and his predecessors – namely, an understanding guided by the possibility that their teaching might simply be true.²⁴⁴

The book also aims to address “the core of the predicament of German Jewry as he saw it, namely, their double dependence, both political and spiritual, on their precarious German surroundings”.²⁴⁵ This book generated a rather passionate response from Löwith – who like Strauss fled his homeland because of his Jewish ancestry – in which he distances himself from the Jewish religion and tradition which, as he says, aims towards the “*higher World*”. Löwith claims to only know how to appreciate the “*lower World*”, the World without meaning and without a past and thus a World without the shadow of metaphysics hanging upon it. Strauss, according to Yaffe, “wanted to *recover* a [particular] understanding of Maimonides” and this recovery was needed in response to the crisis of modern suppositions (*moderne Voraussetzungen*). Löwith, himself, was no stranger to the details of this crisis, either in the form of nihilism, a degenerating historicism or the rise of National Socialism. His own stoic response, however, was not a result of having escaped into former truths:

Ebenso ist für mich das Dilemma: orthodoxer Jude oder aufgeklärter politischer Zionist nie Problem gewesen und Ihre Lösung dafür: radikale Kritik an den “*modernen*” *Voraussetzungen* liegt zeitgeschichtlich wie sachlich für mich in der “fortschrittlichen” Richtung Nietzsches: d.h. in Zuendedenken bis zum modernen *Nihilismus*, von dem ich aber weder abspringe in Kierkegaards paradoxen “Glauben” noch in Nietzsches nicht minder absurde Wiederkunftslehre – sondern... ja sondern – er-

den Schranken des pragmatisierten Bewußtseins frei ist; und gerade durch die historische Analyse der Entstehungsgeschichte des modernen Bewußtseins als einer Verfallsgeschichte kosmologischen Denkens will er sich den Weg zurück zur antiken Weltauffassung bahnen...” Habermas, “*Karl Löwiths stoischer Rückzug*”, 355.

²⁴⁴ Yaffe, Martin D. “On Leo Strauss’s Philosophy and Law: A Review Essay,” 213 (My emphasis).

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

schrecken Sie nicht! – wenn ich solche “radikalen” Umkehrungen grundsätzlich für falsch und unphilosophisch halte und mich von all diesem Masslosen und Überspannten abwende, um wahrscheinlich eines Tages – auf gut spätantike Weise (– stoisch – epikureisch – skeptisch – kynisch –) bei wirklich praktizierbaren Lebens-Weisheiten zu landen – bei den “nächsten Dingen” und nicht bei den entferntesten, wozu ebenso das historische Ausschweifen in die Zukunft wie in die Vergangenheit gehört. Aber den Deutschen fehlt ebenso wie den Juden der Sinn für die Gegenwart – für das nunc stans von “Mittag und Ewigkeit”.²⁴⁶

Löwith views every attempt to recover the past,²⁴⁷ either a more original Christianity, an ancient Greek view of history – the eternal recurrence of the same – or an understanding of Maimonides’ teachings as “unphilosophical” and criticizes his German and Jewish peers for not having an understanding of the *present*. Löwith uses Nietzsche’s ambiguous terms, “midday and eternity”, to describe the present, the “*nunc stans*” and leaves one questioning their meaning and struggling to understand this statement as a critique of modern philosophy. With the completed discussions of Nietzsche and Burckhardt, however, the puzzle slowly begins to dissolve.

That Löwith found a return to a previous mode of thinking to be unphilosophical is a perspective that found its origins in his readings of the works of Hegel and Burckhardt. Against Hegel’s idea that reason pushed history forward, giving history a directness, Burckhardt’s efforts in the study of history revolved around the conniving, striving and acting Human (*duldenden, strebenden und handelnden Menschen*). It was not, then, reason that pushed history forward but the wiles of Humanity. The task of the historicist to pinpoint reason in history was a task that demanded conjecture; it demanded the placement of particulars under dubious universals. Pinpointing the wiles of Humanity in history, however, is to be overburdened with material. Where with Hegel Humanity developed with the development of reason, with Burckhardt Humanity is something that is unchanging in history. Investigating history was for Hegel the key to understanding reason and for Burckhardt history was the key to an Archimedean point by which life and Humanity itself could be appraised (*taxiert*). The hope of a return to a past truth

²⁴⁶ Löwith, letter to Strauss dated April 15, 1935, 646.

²⁴⁷ In his editorial remarks to the third volume of Löwith’s collected works, Bern Lutz quotes from an unpublished note from 1940 in which Löwith states his unwillingness to return to past truths: “*Auch von mir haben manche Freunde eine radikale Lösung erwartet, sei es im Sinne eines Rückgangs zum Judentum oder einer Entscheidung fürs Christentum oder auch einer politischen Festlegung. Stattdessen habe ich eingesehen, daß gerade die ‘radikalen’ Lösungen gar keine Lösungen sind, sondern blinde Versteifungen, die aus der Not eine Tugend machen und das Leben vereinfachen*”. Lutz, *Zu diesem Band*, III, 469.

has neither room in the ever moving-forward history of Hegel nor in the history of Burckhardt for whom the past was to create a historical consciousness from which one could regard the present. Philosophers are mistaken when they believe that Humanity has overseen or lost truth – that truth had been discovered but is being swept away with the tides of time. In Löwith's essay, *Burckhardts Stellung zu Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie* (1928), he writes:

Die Vergangenheit, von der nichts mehr zu erhoffen, aber auch nichts mehr zu befürchten ist, kommt also deshalb wie keine andere Zeit für die reine, freie Betrachtung in Betracht, weil man nur ihr gegenüber die *Zeit* und d.h. zugleich die *Ruhe* zur bloßen Betrachtung aufbringen kann. Eine solche Ruhe und Beruhigung war es, die Burckhardt in seiner Zuwendung zur Vergangenheit suchte und fand, und die das innerste Motiv seiner Tendenz auf Freiheit als Unabhängigkeit ausmacht. Burckhardt verschaffte sich aber auf eine noch viel radikalere Weise die Freiheit zur ruhigen Betrachtung. In der Betrachtung der *Vergangenheit* lebend, wurde er frei von der Unruhe der Zeit überhaupt.²⁴⁸

With this passage Löwith describes the *use* and *utility* of Burckhardt's treatment of history for life, namely, the possibility of an Archimedean point from which freedom from a tumultuous (“*unruhig*”) time is possible. This freedom from the unrest of the time is not a return to the past but a bringing forth of the past to the present as a context – and not as a truth – in which one can trivialize a certain upheaval or unrest (*Unruhe*). The experience of the Second World War and his continued exile were tolerated by Löwith with a stoic calm. Only in moments of brief fragility did he revolt against his circumstance.²⁴⁹ This stoicesque calm (*Gelassenheit*), however, can easily be misinterpreted as having its premises in the philosophy of the Stoics. Its basis, in the face of constantly being under the watch of the National Socialists, however, can be found in Burckhardt's treatment of the historical and the possibility of establishing an Archimedean point by which the unrest of the time could be viewed in a larger context. Löwith concentrated

²⁴⁸ “*Burckhardts Stellung zu Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie*”, VII, 14. Nine years later in “*Burckhardts 'Kultur'-Geschichte*” (1937) Löwith reformulated this passage as follows: “*Sein Entschluß zum Studium der Geschichte motiviert sich zwar aus der Flucht vor dem Geschehen der Gegenwart, aber gerade damit bekommt seine Zuwendung zur Geschichte ihrerseits wieder einen gegenwartspolitischen Sinn. Die Geschichte (zunächst des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts, in denen eine Welt der Bildung zugrunde ging) wird ihm zum Medium, in dem er sich – aus dem Abstand der historischen Sicht – mit dem Geschehen der Gegenwart auseinandersetzt und so seiner Zeit verbunden bleibt... weil er zu einer Zeit, wo sonst noch niemand ein vom 'Fortschritt' unabhängiges Urteil besaß, die Historie zum geschichtlichen Verständnis der Gegenwart trieb*”. “*Burckhardts 'Kultur'-Geschichte*”, VII, 364.

²⁴⁹ Löwith's treatise on Heidegger, *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, is in my opinion one of his most poorly written works and was written more out of spite than out of inspiration.

his efforts, much like Burckhardt, on writing historical texts, on writing on the history of philosophy to become independent of the chaos of the time. The previous quotation taken from an essay on Burckhardt could just as well be used to describe Löwith:

Eine solche Ruhe und Beruhigung war es, die *Burckhardt* in seiner Zuwendung zur Vergangenheit suchte und fand, und die das innerste Motiv seiner Tendenz auf Freiheit als Unabhängigkeit ausmacht.²⁵⁰

It seems as if the only reason Löwith was perceived as having wanted to *return* to a previous way of thinking, to recreate previous truths, was because of his affinity to the philosophy of the Greeks. There is no evidence in Löwith's many writings on the history of philosophy, in his analysis of Hegel, in his treatment of the "debate" on the historical between Burckhardt and Nietzsche and in his own secularization theory that depicts a certain development of the historical that Löwith wanted to return and recreate ancient Greek thought. Not only can this stand-point not be found in Löwith's works but a close reading thereof shows the opposite to be the case. In addressing Löwith's philosophy with respect to the question of a "return", Manfred Riedel approaches the concept of the Archimedean point:

...man sollte Löwiths Berufung auf die Natürlichkeit der Natur besser so verstehen, wie Kant Rousseaus Pathos der Natur verstanden hat: nicht, daß der Mensch... aus dem Zustand der Kultur herausgehe, sondern daß *er wieder hinter ihn zurücksehe* [i.e., via a Archimedean point], um zu wissen, was er verloren hat – nämlich den Maßstab zur Beurteilung der Kultur... So bedeutet auch bei Löwith die Berufung auf die Natur nicht die *Abkehr* von der Geschichte, sondern die Wiedergewinnung einer Dimension des Wissens, für die das historische Bewußtsein keinen Maßstab hat.²⁵¹

But why exactly is it not the case that Löwith does not look for truth in past philosophies? The first answer lies in Löwith's kinship to Burckhardt for whom the *use* or treatment of history was not to find truth – but context – and the second lies in the directedness of history that Hegel brought into philosophy, a directedness that binds a time period to a historical tradition of philosophy. In a very Hegelian fashion Löwith makes the following claim:

Der griechische Kosmos scheint unwiederholbar und der christliche Glaube an das Reich Gottes scheint nicht mehr gegenwartsfähig.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ "Burckhardts Stellung zu Hegels Geschichtsphilosophie", VII, 14.

²⁵¹ Manfred Riedel, "Karl Löwiths Philosophischer Weg", 132 (My emphasis).

²⁵² "Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen" (1950), II, 249.

What Löwith means by saying that Christian belief is not “tenable in the present” (*gegenwartsfähig*) is that this belief is no longer historically appropriate for modern philosophy.²⁵³ It is in this thread of thought that Löwith had hoped to draw out the consequences of historicism in order to build a path for a new philosophy. Löwith’s philosophy is not a *return* to Stoicism but a *consequence* of the philosophies in the century preceding his own.

Burckhardt’s influence on Löwith was not, however, just one of studying history independent from theological or philosophical goals. Löwith felt a kinship to Burckhardt’s temperament and to the motivation that drove his historical works. In an essay published in 1937, *Burckhardts “Kultur”-Geschichte*, Löwith himself describes this motivation:

Das ursprüngliche Motiv seiner Historie hat er mit vielen andern gemein, denn allgemein hat sich nach 1830 das Bewußtsein gebildet, daß es mit “Alteuropa” zu Ende geht, mit seiner Kultur, seinen geistlichen und politischen Autoritäten. Niebuhr kündigte 1830 – und Goethe stimmte ihm bei – eine Zerstörung des Wohlstandes, der Freiheit und Bildung an. Donoso Cortés antwortete zwanzig Jahre später auf die Untergrabung der alten Autoritäten mit einer radikal katholischen Reaktion, Kierkegaard gleichzeitig auf die beginnende Nivellierung mit einer radikalen protestantischen Hervorhebung des Einzelnen. Marx stellte 1867 im *Kapital* der Herrschaft der Ware einen atheistischen Kommunismus entgegen, und Burckhardt trug 1868 seine *Weltgeschichtlichen Betrachtungen* vor, worin er auf alle “Wünschbarkeiten” verzichtet. Ihr Resultat mußte deshalb, im Verhältnis zu den radikalen Programmen der andern, ein “mäßiges” sein.²⁵⁴

It doesn’t take a large stretch of the imagination to wonder to what extent this same consciousness of the end of “old-Europe” was prevalent one hundred years later. With the experience of the First World War and with the Second World War under way one sees to what extent Löwith viewed Burckhardt’s problem as his own. Because the twentieth century was a time of crisis, both in the political and philosophical sense, there was

²⁵³ Gadamer calls this tact (*Takt*) or having a sense (*Sinn*) for history: “und wer historischen Sinn besitzt, weiß, was für eine Zeit möglich ist und was nicht, und hat Sinn für die Andersartigkeit der Vergangenheit gegenüber der Gegenwart”. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 22.

²⁵⁴ *Jacob Burckhardt*, VII, 363. In response to this particular interpretation of Burckhardt, Strauss wrote to Löwith: “Ich glaube Ihnen gern, dass B. der ideale Repräsentant antiker Mässigkeit im 19. Jhd. war – aber die Themen seines Philosophierens sind nur auf Grund der modernen “Unmässigkeit” möglich: kein antiker Philosoph war Historiker. Und das beruht nicht auf dem Mangel am sechsten Sinn, sondern eben auf dem Sinn für das, was dem Menschen zu wissen gemäss, was seine “Mitte und Mass” ist. Nein, lieber Löwith, Burckhardt – das geht wirklich nicht.” Strauss, letter to Löwith dated July 17, 1935, 657.

a tendency to look for and recover forgotten truths, truths that, had they been preserved by modern consciousness, would have prevented intellectual crisis. What was needed, in the eye of most philosophers, was a return, a reevaluation, something new but mostly *different*. Löwith describes the continued need to react in the face of decay in the twentieth century and, in place of Cortés, Kierkegaard and Marx, he emphasizes Husserl's attempt to find a new foundation for philosophy (*Neubegründung*²⁵⁵) and Heidegger's overcoming (*Überwindung*²⁵⁶) of metaphysics. Löwith, however, was able to make himself independent from his teachers and had the courage to draw out the *consequences* of the philosophy of his time and neither created a philosophy that was independent from tradition nor returned to past truths. Löwith's strength as a philosopher was his dedication to the history of philosophy and as having viewed it as something *worthy* of being built upon. His strength as a philosopher was his consciousness of philosophizing in a historical context, a consciousness that neither allowed a return nor a radical new beginning independent from its historical context. Löwith was a diligent thinker and, because in his schooling of the historical, was aware of the prerequisites and circumstances that had driven others to create their philosophies. Löwith was convinced that Humanity was bound to its historical tradition and convinced that Humanity was made up of fellow-humans (*Mitmenschen*) who lived in a social-world (*Mitwelt*) that shared a common history. This consciousness is best described by Gadamer in the introduction to *Wahrheit und Methode*:

Die Begrifflichkeit, in der sich das Philosophieren entfaltet, hat uns vielmehr immer schon in derselben Weise eingenommen, in der uns die Sprache, in der wir leben, bestimmt. So gehört es zur Gewissenhaftigkeit des Denkens, sich dieser Voreingenommenheiten bewußt zu werden. Es ist ein neues, kritisches Bewusstsein, das seither alles verantwortliche Philosophieren zu begleiten hat und das die Sprach- und Denkgewohnheiten, die sich dem einzelnen in der Kommunikation mit seiner Mitwelt bilden, vor das Forum der geschichtlichen Tradition stellt, der wir alle gemeinsam angehören.²⁵⁷

Whereas this section attempted to show Löwith's kinship to Burckhardt's treatment of history the next section will attempt to show Löwith's affinity to Nietzsche's atemporality and how this atemporality is seen by Löwith as a consequence of historicism.

²⁵⁵ *Gott, Mensch und Welt*, IX, 31.

²⁵⁶ "Diltheys und Heideggers Stellung zur Metaphysik" (1965), 257. In: *Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung*.

²⁵⁷ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 5.

4.5 THE LAST CONSEQUENCE OF HISTORICISM – THE ARCHIMEDEAN POINT OF ETERNITY AT MIDDAY

“Der große Mittag” ist die Zeit der hellsten Helle, nämlich des Bewußtseins, das unbedingt und in jener Hinsicht sich seiner selbst als desjenigen Wissens bewußt geworden ist, das darin besteht, wissentlich den Willen zur Macht als das Sein des Seienden zu wollen und als solches Wollen aufständisch zu sich jede notwendige Phase der Vergegenständlichung der Welt zu überstehen und so den beständigen Bestand des Seienden für das möglichst gleichförmige und gleichmäßige Wollen zu sichern (Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 257).

The present of which Löwith speaks, as a mode of directedness in contrast to that of the past or future, is not the present of the animal from Nietzsche’s second meditation who is unable to remember, nor is it the present of the child from *Zarathustra* who is a new beginning, it is a non-historical present identified with eternity. It is through knowledge of the past that Löwith achieves an Archimedean point from which he can regard the philosophical contingencies of his time. This Archimedean point is not only a knowledge of but a freeing from the contingencies and demands of a time period. It is not to *forget* or to implement a *tabula rasa* of all hitherto knowledge but a conscious stepping away. Whereas Burckhardt attempted to appraise life through the study of history, Löwith attempted to appraise philosophy through his studies in the history of philosophy.

The Archimedean point for Löwith was not just a perspective that allowed one to see the historical contingencies behind philosophical movements nor was it to operate purely negatively through a depreciation of the value of the movements in question. Rather, the “positive” results that Löwith achieved by pulling himself out of historical contingencies through an awareness of the historical are related to that which is *unhistorical*. And, although Löwith often found Nietzsche’s philosophy to be too radical he was unwilling to dismiss the latter’s discussion of “midday and eternity” (*Mittag und Ewigkeit*) and used it, rather, as an expression for describing the non-historical aspect of the present for describing a moment of eternity within time.

“Eternity and midday” are bound terms found in a number of Nietzsche’s works but are given their own sections in “*Der Wanderer und sein Schatten*” in *Menschliches*

Allzumenschliches and in *Zarathustra*. Midday is the time of day in which the sun bears down its rays from directly above, leaving the object of the sun's light shadowless. Midday is also a synonym, in *Zarathustra*, for eternity in that as the sun reveals everything in light it too clears away the shadows of the past and of the future. In the morning the shadow cast on the ground reminds of the time that is still to come, the progression of the day and the future. In the afternoon the shadow cast on the ground reminds of the time that was, the past progression of the day and the past. Being caught at midday is to be caught without the expectations of the future or the burdens of the past; it is to be in the center of the present. Midday and eternity is at the same time eternity *at* midday and is the metaphor that Löwith borrowed from Nietzsche to depict his own fondness for the non-historical. Löwith, not wanting to resolve the crisis of historicism by *returning* to a previous way of thinking as with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, wants to gain a sensibility for the present, the *nunc stans* (the everlasting now) and neither wallows in the fleeting quality of the past nor lives out of expectation and hope for a specific future. This sensibility for the present is Löwith's key to transcending the historical and is the positive result of his learning the historical in order to be free from it.

The theme of "midday and eternity" is broached towards the end of Nietzsche's *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* under the title "*Am Mittag*". In this passage the midday of life is described as that in which everything is silent and asleep, as if one were to experience death with open eyes and experience that which one has never before experienced – it is an expression of eternity.

Vieles sieht da der Mensch, was er nie sah, und soweit er sieht, ist Alles in ein Lichtnetz eingesponnen und gleichsam darin begraben. Er fühlt sich glücklich dabei, aber es ist ein schweres, schweres Glück.²⁵⁸

In Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* a section is once again dedicated to the topic of midday and, as in the section "*Am Mittag*", against all desires sleep takes over, a sleep, however, conducted with open eyes. In this moment Zarathustra experiences the world as being essentially complete (*vollkommen*) and he celebrates the hour in which no shepherd plays his flute.²⁵⁹ Midday is the point in which all wants and desires fall asleep, where judgment and hope are laid to rest and one is left to experience the World with open

²⁵⁸ Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II*, "Der Wanderer und sein Schatten", §308.

²⁵⁹ "O Glück! O Glück! Willst du wohl singen, o meine Seele! Du liegst im Grase. Aber das ist die heimliche feierliche Stunde, wo kein Hirt seine Flöte bläst. ... Singe nicht! Still! Die Welt ist vollkommen." Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*. "Mittags", 339.

eyes. Important for Löwith is that the experience of midday is a non-historical experience; i.e., it is not an experience of a becoming but one of a totality. In his Nietzsche book, Löwith defines eternity at midday as follows:

Eine Ewigkeit um Mittag verneint nicht die Zeit, als wäre sie die zeitlose Ewigkeit Gottes vor der Erschaffung der Welt, sondern sie meint die Ewigkeit der Weltzeit selbst: den ewig wiederkehrenden Kreislauf des immer gleichen Entstehens und Vergehens, worin die Beständigkeit des “Seins” und der Wechsel des “Werdens” ein und dasselbe sind.²⁶⁰

But to what extent is this position in contradistinction to historicism? Midday is a metaphor that is used to express the stoppage of time, the moment in which nothing “temporal” is observed. It is, in contrast to an ever-developing *Geist*, a moment in which the World is viewed as being and as always having been essentially complete. Midday does not represent change, development or becoming but the completeness of being – it is an attention to one’s surroundings but not to their potential or usefulness. Historicism aims forward and looks backwards whereas the eternal – i.e., the timeless – midday represents a pure form of the present. In the second appendix to *Meaning in History* Löwith writes of Zarathustra’s experience of midday as reconciliation with his despair of the dubious history and *past* of Humanity:

The dialectic of despair and redemption, of depth and height, of darkness and light, is finally overcome in an “abyss of light,” the time of which is a “standstill of time.” Hence the decisive instant of noontide is neither short nor long but a timeless *nunc stans*, or eternal. In it the despair announced by the prophet of nothingness is turned into the bliss announced by Zarathustra, the prophet of the highest kind of being. Instead of despairing that all is alike and in vain, Zarathustra rejoices in the freedom from all-too-human purposes in the eternal recurrence of all things, whose time is an ever present circle, while the time of ordinary hopes and fears, of regret and expectation, is a straight line into an endless future and past.²⁶¹

Löwith’s pure form of the present of midday is, in contradistinction to Nietzsche’s, the product of having drawn out the *last consequences of historicism*. The connection of Löwith’s idea of the present (as an eternity within time) to his conclusions concerning historicism is the next step in this investigation.

The apparent relativity posed by historicism; namely, that “if all is historical in

²⁶⁰ *Nietzsches Philosophie*, VI, 107.

²⁶¹ *Meaning in History*, 217.

what sense would truth itself not be so?" is essentially problematic.²⁶² That it is problematic leaves the historically trained philosopher in search of an immutable truth in a predicament, one that seems to offer only one solution – the total abandonment of the project of historicism in favor of returning to a previous way of philosophizing in which truths cannot be made relative. Löwith, although in constant battle with the historicists, was bound to this tradition and was determined to follow historicism to its very last consequence. Not abandoning historicism but following it to its last logical consequence is what brought Löwith to the eternal quality of the present.

Turning Hegel's philosophy of *Geist* into an investigative science and thus turning history into a subject of scientific scrutiny was a failed movement. The vicious circle of the process for finding truth in history was already apparent to Burckhardt in writing his introduction to the *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*:

Wir sind (aber) nicht eingeweiht in die Zwecke der ewigen Weisheit und kennen sie nicht. Dieses kecke Antizipieren eines Weltplanes führt zu Irrtümern, weil es von irrigen Prämissen ausgeht.²⁶³

Similar to Burckhard, Löwith describes the problems of a science of history in his preface to the first edition of *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*:

Hegels historischer Relativismus hat zum Anfang und Ende das "absolute Wissen", in bezug auf welches jeder Schritt in der Entfaltung des Geistes ein Fortschritt im Bewußtsein der Freiheit ist; das Wissen der historischen Wissenschaften vom "Geiste" ist nicht einmal relativ, denn es fehlt ihm der Maßstab für eine Beurteilung des zeitlichen Geschehens. Was vom Geist übrig bleibt, ist nur noch der "Zeitgeist". Und doch bedarf es, um nur überhaupt die Zeit als Zeit zu begreifen, eines Standpunktes, der das bloße Geschehen der Zeit überschreitet.²⁶⁴

Historicism shows itself to be a failed science inasmuch as it *arbitrarily* chooses the prerequisites for finding truth in history and struggles to make it relative to a specific point in the future. The methodology of historicism, however, cannot easily be pushed aside. The conviction that truth and time are intimately bound together (i.e., that truth is not eternal) has taken seed and is an important aspect of the *revolution* leading to the second stage of *Geist* in nineteenth century philosophy.

The essence of this methodology is the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* which

²⁶² See: Paul Ricoeur's introduction to *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning* by Jeffrey Andrew Barash, xi.

²⁶³ Burckhardt, *Weltg. Betrachtungen*, 5.

²⁶⁴ *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, IV, 3f.

both cancels out old truths or philosophies and preserves them in new developments. This process of *Aufhebung* had already made past philosophies relative inasmuch as it put into question their pretensions towards truth and inasmuch as it declared these pretensions to be dependent on the time period in which they were developed. If truth develops in history then every later historical development in the philosophical tradition is *a priori* either more advanced or more appropriate for the period in which it was created.²⁶⁵ Returning to an earlier philosophy or searching for lost truths in the past is then taboo. The failure of historicism to create a science is not in itself an argument in favor of returning to a philosophizing of transcendental and eternal truths. Löwith himself was quite aware of the failures of historicism, was, however, an adherent to its methodology and underlying schema. In *Meaning in History* Löwith proclaims that the modern age is lost in how it should view history:

The modern mind is not single-minded: it eliminates from its progressive outlook the Christian implication of creation and consummation, while it assimilates from the ancient worldview the idea of an endless and continuous movement, discarding its circular structure.²⁶⁶

The failure of historicism and the obscurity it threw over the question of history had for Löwith a last consequence. Namely, that one need not search the past for truths, as they already have been undermined, nor live by hope of a future, since the ability of humanity to foresee is the science of prophecy and not philosophy. This has the positive result of showing the immediacy of a directedness towards the present – the unhistorical – and for that which is most intimately tied in with everyday life (*die nächsten Dinge*). Thus Löwith praises with Nietzsche the eternal present of midday and thus Löwith shuns a turning back and a looking forward. Like Zarathustra, Löwith can lie in the grass, freed from a daunting history, and experience the World as it is in the moment.

Löwith rejected the radical emphasis on overcoming (*Überwindung*) in Nietzsche's philosophy as it hints at a negating of that which is overcome. He rejected

²⁶⁵ This has, however, as a consequence the disregard of such movements as neo-Kantianism and explains Klaus Christian Köhnke's remarks against Löwith in his work, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus*, 11: "Während der Neukantianismus von sich behauptete und es als sein wesentliches Verdienst ansah, die Zusammenarbeit von Philosophie und Einzelwissenschaften wiederhergestellt und in Erkenntnistheorie und –kritik 'den metaphysischen Standpunkt' der Systemzeit überwunden zu haben, fertigt Karl Löwith ihn damit ab, daß er den 'scheinbar so unmotivierten Rückgang auf Kant' damit erklärt wissen will, 'daß die bürgerliche Intelligenz in der Praxis aufgehört habe, eine geschichtlich bewegte Klasse zu sein, und darum auch in ihrem Denken die Initiative und Stoßkraft verloren' habe..."

²⁶⁶ *Meaning in History*, 207.

Burckhardt's concept of obligation (*Pflicht*) with respect to history because of the burden this obligation could have on everyday life. He was critical of the Hegelian concept of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) inasmuch as it constricts the ability to forget; he was critical of every new beginning and radical *tabula rasa* because of their lack of historical consciousness and was critical of every attempt to return to past truths as if they could be translated into the present. Distinctive for his style of philosophy, however, was his appropriation of the Hegelian concept *Aufhebung* in its depiction of a dialectical movement of the philosophical tradition, a Nietzschean concept of creation through which the past was to be reinvented and a Burckhardt-inspired Archimedean point from which history was to be governed.

CHAPTER 5

AGAINST AUGUSTINE: THE MORAL QUESTION OF HISTORY

5.1 THE PROJECT OF *MEANING IN HISTORY*

Thus the world is like an oil press: under pressure. If you are the dregs of the oil you are carried away through the sewer; if you are genuine oil you will remain in the vessel. But to be under pressure is inevitable. Observe the dregs, observe the oil. Pressure takes place ever in the world, as for instance, through famine, war, want, inflation, indigence, mortality, rape, avarice; such are the pressures on the poor and the worries of the states: we have evidence of them... We have found men who grumble under these pressures and who say: "how bad are these Christian times!"... Thus speak the dregs of the oil which run away through the sewer; their effluence is black because they blaspheme: they lack splendour. The oil has splendour. For here another sort of man is under the same pressure and friction which polishes him, for is it not the very friction which refines him? (Augustine, *Sermons*, ed. Denis, xxiv. 11)²⁶⁷

Löwith writes in *Nietzsches Philosophie* that Nietzsche's importance is to be found in his willingness to re-open the classical debate between the ancient Greeks and the Church Fathers inasmuch as Nietzsche's eternal return of the same aims to replace the Christian linear forward-moving perception of time.²⁶⁸ The Christian view of history draws on the hope that the future will always be better, leaving one to live out of expectation. These expectations require a certain amount of faith, the faith in a resounding conclusion to history, the faith that the sins of the past will be swept clean and Humanity will be brought back from its alienation with itself and from original sin. Löwith's own aims were much more modest but he does attempt to put these expectations into question with respect to their foundations in philosophy. It is difficult not to see this discussion of time as being a *moral* one. Löwith puts these expectations in question not only because they are epistemologically dubious but because he echoes Nietzsche's concern pertaining to the negative consequences of a non-circular view of time for life. Löwith himself was conscious of the role his project in *Meaning in History* had in this

²⁶⁷ As quoted by Löwith to begin *Meaning in History*. The quote is of significance because, although Augustine's simile pertains to the "world" or "life", it is similar to Löwith's description of Augustine's view of history and the process of perfection through time.

²⁶⁸ See: *Meaning in History*, 214.

moral debate by beginning his book with the above quote from Augustine's *Sermons*. Before the moral arguments posed by Augustine and Nietzsche's and Löwith's reaction to them are considered, it is worth taking a look at the history of the project, *Meaning in History*.

Löwith left Japan for the United States two weeks before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Had he left two weeks later, he would not have been able to accept the offered position at the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut. Although Löwith had finally escaped the watch and the long arm of the German National Socialists he was still far from being content with his teaching environment. In a letter written to Eric Voegelin on official stationery Löwith penciled next to the name of the University: a kindergarten for impoverished Protestantism! ("ein Kindergarten für ausgelaugten Protestantismus!").²⁶⁹ That Löwith had little respect for his colleagues and his students at the Seminary is not difficult to demonstrate. As Löwith moved on to the New School in New York he wrote the following to Strauss:

Nicht so sehr wegen besondrer Sympathie für das New School Gebäude
aber um von der Divinity los zu kommen und wieder einmal verständige
Studenten zu haben und ein besseres Gehalt als Hartford.²⁷⁰

Löwith's first impressions of teaching in the United States were unfavorable. He felt like he was surrounded by theologians of an impoverished Protestantism who led a kindergarten for students who were unable to comprehend his teachings. The Seminary in Hartford even inspired him to write an incredibly witty article called, "Can there be a Christian Gentleman?" in which he answered in the negative.²⁷¹ It was in this environment that Löwith began writing *Meaning in History* and knowing this environment helps understand the structure of the work, its goal and its failures.

This was Löwith's first attempt at publishing a work in English and he was not entirely happy with the results. *Meaning in History* was first translated into German in 1953, shortly after Löwith's return to Germany, by Hermann Kesting under the title *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*. Löwith found the German title to be much more appropriate due to the difficulties of translating the German word "*Heil*" into English.

²⁶⁹ Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated Jan. 7, 1945, 773.

²⁷⁰ Löwith, letter to Strauss dated Aug. 31, 1948, 672.

²⁷¹ Löwith writes of his inspiration for the article in the preface to *Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung*: "...während der Vortrag über den christlichen Gentleman durch die Lehrtätigkeit an einem protestantischen Seminary New Englands veranlaßt wurde," v.

According to Löwith *Heil* stands for terms in English such as “heal”, “health”, “hail”, “hale”, “holy” and “whole” and thus comes to the conclusion that *Heilsgeschehen* cannot acceptably be translated as something so simple as the word “salvation”.²⁷² Important for Löwith was showing an interaction between what he saw as World or natural history (*Weltgeschichte*) and events in this history that were deemed “holy” (*Heilsgeschehen*). The title, *Meaning in History*, in contrast to *The Meaning of History* by N. Berdyaev, loosely identifies this interaction by separating *meaning*, which connotes a meaning-giving subject, from *history*, which Löwith uses to connote natural history. Despite Löwith’s misgivings and cautioning of translating the German word “*Heil*,” which, from my point of view, should provide for little difficulty, the problem in translating “*Heilsgeschehen*” is a theological question based on English and German translations and traditions of interpreting the Bible. Unfortunately, Löwith’s difficulty with the English language did not begin and end with the translation of *Heilsgeschehen* but with the subtitle of the work itself. The original complete title of the work is: *Meaning in History; the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, whereas the German translation reads: *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen; Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie*. The subtitle, as it is in English, could imply that the philosophy of history has *implications*, or consequences, for theology – not exactly what Löwith was hoping to convey. The German word “*Voraussetzung*” can be easily translated as “prerequisite”, “assumption”, or “presupposition” but carries, in this case, the meaning of the word “foundation”. The German title, translated back into English, would read: “the theological presuppositions (or, foundations) of the philosophy of history” and thus conveying Löwith’s intended meaning. It is difficult to say to what extent this language misstep had a role in helping make Löwith’s goal in *Meaning in History* difficult to understand but it surely could not have had positive consequences. Löwith himself speaks of his difficulty with English in the foreword to the German edition and apologizes for his overly detailed formulations:

Eine gewisse Lockerheit der Darstellung ergab sich wie von selbst daraus, daß diese Arbeit ursprünglich im Blick auf amerikanische Leser geschrieben und in einer Sprache gedacht wurde, die sich der Verfasser erst selbst zu eigen machen mußte. Manches wird infolgedessen betont und ausführlich behandelt, was sich für den deutschen Leser wahrscheinlich

²⁷² See: the first footnote to the preface of *Meaning in History*. It is not all too difficult to find an appropriate English translation for the German verb, *geschehen* – to occur, to happen, to take place.

kürzer und mit weniger Nachdruck hätte sagen lassen. Der Verfasser hofft, daß dieser Mangel an Kürze und Strenge durch leichtere Verständlichkeit aufgewogen werden möchte. Er selbst hat es als förderlich empfunden, daß er sich in eine Sprache einzuleben hatte, die sich nicht zu begrifflichen Subtilitäten und verbalem Tiefsinn hergibt, aber auf ihre eigene Weise genau und reich ist.²⁷³

The peculiarity, however, pertaining to this work of Löwith's is the structure. Löwith begins with the modern historian, Burckhardt, and moves backwards to cover, amongst others, Marx, Hegel, Voltaire and Augustine, ending with the biblical view of history. As had been said, while writing this book Löwith felt himself to be in a "kindergarten for impoverished Protestantism", he felt misunderstood and unable to communicate his ideas to his peers or to his students. The structure reflects, therefore, what Löwith felt to be the best way to *teach* his readers the motivating idea behind the work; namely, the appropriation of the Christian belief in salvation in the Western idea of progress in history. Like most introductory books whose aims are pedagogical and not necessarily theoretical, Löwith asks more questions than he answers and structures his book to guide his reader step by step to come to the crux of the work. In the first sentence of the preface Löwith gives reason to his guardedness:

After I had finished this small study of the large topic of *Weltgeschichte* and *Heilsgeschehen*, I began to wonder whether the reader might not be disappointed by the lack of "constructive" results. This apparent lack is, however, a real gain if it is true that truth is more desirable than illusion. Assuming that a single grain of truth is preferable to a vast construct of illusions, I have tried to be honest with myself and, consequently, also with my reader about the possibility, or rather the impossibility, of imposing on history a reasoned order or of drawing out the working of God.²⁷⁴

The pedagogical style and structure of *Meaning in History* left open room for free interpretation and had the consequence of Löwith being misinterpreted. In other words, Löwith wanted to teach the reader the answer with his writings without having to actually say it himself and *failed*. He attempted to bring his work down to a level that he thought would be understandable by his peers and was all the same misunderstood. Without actually knowing either who Löwith's colleagues were at the time or their level of philosophical training and expertise, we are left with Löwith's own appraisal of their academic prowess. In letters to Voegelin he expresses his frustration concerning his sur-

²⁷³ *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*, II, 9.

²⁷⁴ *Meaning in History*, vii.

roundings at the Seminary.

Wenn ich einen Chapelservice zu halten habe beschränke ich mich auf den Speech + lasse einen ordinierten Kollegen das Gebet und die Benediction sagen – obwohl ich unter m. ordinierten Kollegen der einzige bin der noch ungefähr weiss was Christentum ist, ohne es zu vertreten.²⁷⁵

Löwith, Jewish from heritage, Protestant by baptism and non-practicing by choice, not only claimed to understand Christianity better than his ordained colleagues at the Seminary, he decided to teach them the philosophical complications of ascertaining a meaning from history. Three months later Löwith writes Voegelin again describing his aims to teach the American theologians.

Mein Aufsatz “On the Meaning of History” hatte nur den Zweck den christl. Theologen klar zu machen was eine christl. Sinndeutung der Geschichte voraussetzt als prinzipiellen Rahmen, denn grotesker Weise haben ja selbst die (protest.) Theologen vergessen dass ein “Sinn” der Geschichte nicht so billig zu haben ist.²⁷⁶

Again, it is the structure of the work that shows to what extent Löwith wanted to accomplish his pedagogical goals, goals that he listed in the introduction.

The inverted sequence of the work has firstly a didactic goal. Löwith finds it easier for the modern mind to comprehend a modern thinker and to be able to understand old theories firstly through their influence on modern times. The reader is, in the chapter on Burckhardt, to be exposed to the belief in progress and then move backwards in order to understand a belief in providence. Löwith was of the conviction that Burckhardt’s relative neutrality with respect to metaphysical and philosophical suppositions would make his way of thinking easier to access for a generation that was itself ignorant of the metaphysical and philosophical prerequisites of modern thought. The methodological reasoning behind the structure of the work is a practical one. The modern historical consciousness, according to Löwith, understands ancient authors through its own reasoning and thus one must first understand modern reasoning before retracing a concept in its development backwards in time. If contemporary historical consciousness determines the interpretation of a specific historical thinker then it is practical that Löwith start with a modern thinker and then extrapolate backwards to ancient authors in light of this

²⁷⁵ Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated Jan. 7, 1945.

²⁷⁶ Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated March 31, 1945.

modern historical consciousness.²⁷⁷ The third reason for the structure of the work Löwith calls substantial. He attributes a kind of uneasiness to modernity – that in modernity one has “learned to wait without hope” and it is his wish to explain this uneasiness by showing its development over time.

Löwith’s explanations for giving his work an inverted sequence are, however, hardly convincing. He wanted first and foremost to show his contemporaries to what extent their belief in either a secularized form of historical progress or providence was historically contingent – that it was not ultimate but had its roots in early Christianity. He wanted to accomplish this by first teaching them what their idea of progress was, how it became that way via the history of philosophy and to what extent it was drawn from the biblical view of history. These goals and these steps require Löwith to start with modernity and work backwards. All the other reasons for an inverted sequence that Löwith lists in the introduction are secondary and relatively unimportant – his most famous work, after all, is called *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* and not *Von Nietzsche zu Hegel*. When Löwith speaks for another philosopher, whether it is Nietzsche, Burckhardt or Heidegger, he shows his strength and prowess as a writer and critical thinker. When he, however, is given the task of speaking for himself, as in *Meaning in History*, he fumbles, is reserved and much too cautious.

5.2 THE SECULARIZATION THESIS

Thus, if we venture to say that our modern historical consciousness is derived from Christianity, this can mean only that the eschatological outlook of the New Testament has opened the perspective toward a future

²⁷⁷ Michael Jaeger is of the opinion that the structure of *Meaning in History* is anti-theological and anti-eschatological. Because Löwith starts with modernity and moves backwards in time, he avoids a possible theological and linear construction of history. Jaeger continues to claim that Löwith’s construction is cyclical inasmuch as it emphasizes the return of biblical thought in modernity. I have to disagree with Jaeger on this point because Löwith does not consider modernity to have returned to biblical thought but to practice a version of biblical thought that was mitigated through the various philosophers included in *Meaning in History*. Without a doubt Löwith preferred the cyclical histories of the ancient Greeks, this is not something, however, he wanted to attempt in his history of the idea of progress. See Michael Jaeger’s essay “*Jacob Taubes und Karl Löwith; Apologie und Kritik des heilsgeschichtlichen Denkens*” in: *Abendländische Eschatologie: Ad Jacob Taubes. “Dieser Retrospektive entspricht Löwiths Methode, die europäische Eschatologie zu deuten vor dem Hintergrund einer katastrophischen Gegenwart, in der der Glaube an die Geschichtsbewegung dominiert... Hier schließt sich der Kreis, die Historiographie des eschatologischen Denkens ist wieder in der Gegenwart angekommen. Auf subtile Weise illustriert daher allein schon der versteckte zyklische Aufbau von **Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen** die Abneigung des Autors gegen Teleologie*”, 487.

fulfillment – originally beyond, and eventually within, historical existence. In consequence of the Christian consciousness we have a historical consciousness which is as Christian by derivation as it is non-Christian by consequence, because it lacks the belief that Christ is the beginning and an end and his life and death the final answer to an otherwise insoluble question (*Meaning in History*, 197).

The “secularization thesis” of *Meaning in History* is one of the few products of Löwith’s writings that gained attention in secondary literature, the most famous of which led to a “debate” involving the philosopher Hans Blumenberg on the legitimacy of the modern age.²⁷⁸ The secularization thesis finds a defining role in Richard Wolin’s description of Löwith and his philosophy in *Heidegger’s Children* and finds place in most previously written dissertations on Löwith.

The advantage that was available to Jeffrey Andrew Barash’s research on the topic of Löwith’s secularization thesis²⁷⁹ that was not available to critics writing contemporary to the publishing of *Meaning in History* was the publication of the correspondence between Löwith and Strauss. As has already been mentioned in this paper, Löwith was much more open and direct when writing to his peers in opposition to his relatively reserved style in his published works. That this correspondence was available to Barash most surely helped him in seeing behind Löwith’s guardedness and avoiding many of the misunderstandings made by Löwith’s contemporaries; including Strauss himself. Barash summarizes the “secularization thesis” in his abstract as follows:

This critique [of all forms of philosophy of history] is based on the now famous idea that modern philosophies of history have only extended and deepened an illusion fabricated by a long tradition of Christian historical reflection: the illusion that history itself has an intrinsic goal. This modern extension and deepening of the chimera propagated by Christian historical reflection is what Löwith terms “secularization”.²⁸⁰

As Barash later notes, the importance of the secularization thesis does not so much lie in

²⁷⁸ The most notable articles on the secularization thesis are by Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “The Sense of History: On the Political Implications of Karl Löwith’s Concept of Secularization” and Robert M. Wallace, “Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate”. Ulrich Ruh in, *Säkularisierung als Interpretationskategorie*, correctly notes that Löwith did not literally formulate a “secularization thesis” or concern himself with a concept of secularization in *Meaning in History*. This “thesis” is an interpretation of *Meaning in History* but is also representative of Löwith’s understanding of the history of philosophy; most notably, the first transformation of *Geist* as discussed in chapter 2.2 of the present work.

²⁷⁹ In providing an idea of how fruitful Barash’s reading is, it is useful to note that his essay on the topic is available in three languages – German and French being the other two.

²⁸⁰ Barash, “The Sense of History”, 69.

the claim that philosophies of history are offshoots of a Christian eschatology, but in the claim that philosophies of history posit history as linear and as having a goal without accepting the Christian justification for doing so. The secularization thesis makes it poignant that these *philosophies of history neither question the basic principles of their tradition nor venture an association with Christianity*. The success of *Meaning in History* lies in the association of philosophy of history to Christian eschatology via the claim that the former is the mere secularization of the latter. Barash aptly makes the reader aware of the similarities between Löwith's thesis and Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*. The secularization thesis signifies an attempt in philosophy to both *annul* the Christian tradition while *preserving* some of its concepts; namely those pertaining to a *telos* in history. This thesis, however, does not pertain to all philosophies of history dealt with in *Meaning in History*, as many consciously associated themselves with the Christian tradition, and it is these philosophies of history (although the term is anachronistic) that Löwith dedicates the breadth of the work to. Hegel's particular translation of Christianity in philosophy, however, had secular consequences for the next generation.

Fifteen hundred years of Western thought were required before Hegel could venture to translate the eyes of faith into the eyes of reason and the theology of history as established by Augustine into a philosophy of history which is neither sacred nor profane. It is a curious mixture of both, degrading sacred history to the level of secular history and exalting the latter to the level of the first...²⁸¹

What the secularization thesis seeks to uncover, however, is not only this process of annulment and preservation but the forgetfulness tied in to this process – eschatologies become adapted into philosophies of history and their concept of progress is then newly “discovered”. According to Barash, *Meaning in History*, was such a controversial work in the time it was written because of the conviction that the essential historicity of truth was a *modern discovery*:

Löwith's thought places in question above all the assumptions of the predominant historicist tradition, stemming from Hegel, for which the historical worldview represents a fundamentally modern achievement. While purifying this worldview of its underpinnings in the metaphysics of the absolute spirit, historicism after the fashion of Wilhelm Dilthey or of Friedrich Meinecke held modern secularized consciousness of the essential historicity of truth to be a sign of modern superiority and hence of a relative progression in relation to all earlier traditions. Löwith,

²⁸¹ *Meaning in History*, 59.

however, aimed to demonstrate that precisely this idea of the essential historicity of truth, far from being particular to modernity, already emerged in the “theological historicism” of Joachim of Floris.²⁸²

The project of regaining an awareness of secularization finds its importance in making one aware of the moral values that are inherently tied in to the idea secularized. It was, namely, the values supporting eschatologies leading back to Augustine that were to be newly questioned by the historical consciousness of modernity. In re-opening the debate on these values Nietzsche describes, in his *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, their origin via a transvaluation of morals accomplished by the Jews and early Christians.

Barash, however, finds the importance of tying modern philosophies of history to Christian eschatologies not to be tied in with the moral arguments of Augustine and Nietzsche but with the totalitarian movements of the early twentieth century. His article is divided into two sections, the first of which nicely summarizes the secularization thesis as developed in *Meaning in History*. The second section, however, is an attempt to tie many of Löwith’s writings pertaining to history to the fascist movements of the time. Although I do not disagree with Barash’s claims that the decisionism of Heidegger, Schmitt and Gogarten, and Löwith’s discussion thereof, can be seen as a consequence of the historicization of philosophy, I do not see the justification for wanting to connect this decisionism to Löwith’s secularization thesis or to a discussion of *Meaning in History*. Heidegger’s philosophy of time is not so much dependent on this continuity and development of philosophies of history as depicted in *Meaning in History* as it is dependent on an overall trend of historicizing philosophy since Hegel. A critique of philosophies of history is a critique of the Christian hope that history has a meaning and a goal and that it purposefully began and will purposefully end. Löwith’s critique of Heidegger, however, does not take place in this context, rather, Heidegger, his concept of *facticity* and his decisionism are critiqued on grounds of emphasizing the transitory in place of the eternal.

On the one hand the secularization thesis was seen as having the political consequences of implicating Gogarten, Heidegger and Schmitt and their affiliation with the Nazi movement, on the other hand it was seen as de-legitimizing modernity and its claims of progress on the basis of reason. These two popular interpretations of the con-

²⁸² Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “The Sense of History”, 73.

sequences of *Meaning in History*, although in many respects justified, do not capture the true force of Löwith's work. Neither does the discussion of Löwith's critique of Heidegger find its most appropriate expression in *Meaning in History* nor was it his intention to pessimistically delegitimize modernity as will be seen by his disinterest in Blumenberg's uproar.²⁸³ Löwith wanted, in following Nietzsche's footsteps, to re-open the classical moral debate on history between the ancient Greeks and the fathers of the Church. For Löwith the question of history was not one of legitimacy but one of moral health and it is not chance that he includes a discussion of the eternal as a counterpart to the temporal timeline of eschatology in an appendix. As the eternal recurrence is a moral postulate for Nietzsche that, when affirmed, affirms life, the temporal timeline of historicism is for Löwith one that is morally driven:

In terms of the problem of time, what led Zarathustra to his crucial experience [of the eternal] is briefly this: it is a conversion and rebirth to a new "great healthiness" out of an equally great sickness or despair, a sickness unto death. The prophet (*Wahr-sager*) of modern nihilism, whose counterpart is the prophet of the eternal recurrence (for the latter is the exact reverse of the first) describes the sickness of modern man thus: "I saw a great sadness come over mankind. The best turned weary of their works. A doctrine appeared, a faith ran beside it: all is empty, all is alike, all hath been..."²⁸⁴

All in all, the secularization thesis is not Löwith's term but one that was born out of the secondary literature and is nothing less than Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung* used as a hermeneutic tool for investigating the development of the philosophy of history. Löwith's scope, however, was not as far-reaching as Augustine's moral arguments against the eternal recurrence or as far-reaching as Nietzsche's valuation of these morals. His goal was to show eschatologies and modern philosophies of history as being in line in having similar assumptions, thus making the ancient debate on history modern. In a presentation published after *Meaning in History* in 1955 titled, "*Christentum und Geschichte*"²⁸⁵, Löwith explicitly states that the ancient debate on history has, because of the modern belief in progress, again become problematic.

Desgleichen, obschon aus ganz anderen Motiven, war auch das Judentum

²⁸³ The article, "Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate", by Wallace, as the title hints, concentrates firstly on summarizing Löwith's secularization thesis and, secondly, Blumenberg's over-reaction to it as building a foundation for questioning the legitimacy of modernity.

²⁸⁴ "Nietzsches Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence", VI, 419.

²⁸⁵ Held in April of 1955 at the *VIII. internationalen Kongress für Religionsgeschichte* in Rome.

und das ursprüngliche Christentum, deren Schöpfungsglaube die heidnischen Kosmogonien durchbrach, nicht um die Geschichte der Welt besorgt, sondern um das Kommen des Reiches Gottes. Dieser ursprüngliche Glaube hat sich von Augustin bis zu Hegel und von Joachim von Floris bis zu Schelling geschichtsphilosophisch verweltlicht. Die auffälligste und wirksamste Gestalt seiner Säkularisierung ist der moderne Fortschrittsglaube, der aber seinerseits dem christlichen Glauben an eine fortschreitende Erfüllung des Alten Testaments in eine Neuen entspringt. Mit der Erschütterung dieses weltlichen Glaubens an eine fortschreitend fortschrittliche Weltgeschichte ist das Verhältnis von Christentum und Geschichte erneut zum Problem geworden.²⁸⁶

That this debate should once again come to the forefront of modern consciousness was not only because the belief in progress was epistemologically questionable, in lieu of its relationship to Christian eschatology, but because of its relationship to the moral background of eschatology that degraded the present in favor of the future. Löwith blames this hostile attitude toward the present on the idea that both the past and the present are in dire need of redemption (*erlösungsbedürftig*), a redemption that will occur in some indefinite point in the future:

Für den christlichen Glauben ist die Geschichte keine Welt- und Religionsgeschichte, sondern ein Reich der Sünde und des Todes und deshalb erlösungsbedürftig. Was mit der ersten Ankunft von Jesus Christus beginnt, ist für den Gläubigen keine neue Epoche in der Geschichte dieser Welt, sondern der Beginn eines Endes.²⁸⁷

Löwith's critique of philosophies of history could be seen as taking place on the level of epistemology, inasmuch as he shows its foundational premises to be prophetic and not scientific. More importantly, however, is the need to free philosophy from a hostile view of the past and present and to free philosophy from the Christian hope in the future. Finding a new relationship to time is difficult to justify epistemologically – the immediacy of this problem, however, is made apparent when the modern relationship to time is shown to be morally damaging.

5.3 AUGUSTINE AS THE MORAL VOICE AGAINST THE ETERNAL RETURN

It is not by chance that we find the most explicit Christian discussion of this classical *theory* of the *cosmos* in a *theology* of *history* concerned with man's happiness... one may expect in advance that Augustine's

²⁸⁶ “*Christentum, Geschichte und Philosophie*” (1966), II, 438.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

refutation of the theory of eternal recurrence in a *City of God* could succeed only in so far as it concentrated on the moral deficiency of the pagan theory, refuting it practically but not theoretically. Augustine's question is not so much whether the universe is a creation of God or an eternal cosmos divine in itself as it is whether the moral implications of creation and consummation are more satisfactory than those of eternal recurrence without beginning and end (*Meaning in History*, 160).

Augustine has a very specific function within Löwith's writings. He is, for all of Löwith's intents and purposes, *the* figurehead of Christianity. Important to Löwith's writings is the creation of a dichotomy between the thought of the ancient Greeks and that of the Christians. Whereas Löwith accepts it as fact that the ancient Greeks marveled the Cosmos and held the view that time moves in eternal circles, he tries to establish the Christian "turn" or the Christian revolution which separates modernity from the ancients. Investigating the writings of Augustine is, for Löwith, not only to investigate this revolution in thought but is to investigate the origins of a modern philosophy as it is indebted to the Christian tradition. Establishing that Augustine had argued against the ancient concept of time on *moral grounds* was also of great importance for Löwith because it meant that he could put the Christian view of time in question without having to question the epistemological structures of Christianity that lead one to be convinced that time is linear *logically*. Löwith does not address the validity of Christian stories of creation and apocalypse as it is not his intention to open a debate whose scope encompasses a large degree of Christian doctrine. He circumvents this, rather, by addressing the moral arguments against the ancient circular view of time made by Augustine. As he writes in *Mein Leben* he neither wanted to address the question of time positively nor negatively with respect to Christianity as a whole.

Die Zeit als solche ist dem Fortschritt verfallen und nur in den Augenblicken, in denen die Ewigkeit als die Wahrheit des Seins erscheint, erweist sich das zeitliche Schema des Fortschritts wie des Verfalls als historischer Sinn. Doch bleiben die durch Nietzsche und Deutschland gestellten Fragen als solche bestehen. Sie betreffen vor allem das *Christentum* und die aus ihm erwachsene europäische *Humanität*. Indem aber beides für mich ein *Problem* blieb, das ich weder positiv-christlich noch antichristlich auflösen mochte...²⁸⁸

Löwith did not want his readership to think that he, like Nietzsche, completely rejected Christianity in favor of the ancient Greeks, in favor of a Dionysian free spirit. It was,

²⁸⁸ *Mein Leben*, 138.

rather, Löwith's constant battle to maintain that every step forward had to be accomplished through an acceptance of modern thought and a willingness to modify it. His study of Augustine's moral challenge to the Greeks is elucidated in his refutation of the classical view of the world in the ninth chapter of *Meaning in History*.

The refutation, as sketched out by Löwith, has many steps – each of which was needed in order to accomplish a new “view of the world”. Firstly, as has been previously said in this paper, the first step in devaluing the theory of an eternal Cosmos whose order was cyclical was to devalue the Cosmos, or World, itself. The Christian tradition accomplished this by ideologically transforming the World into something secondary, something that was merely a means to the ends of a creator God and Humanity. This shift was, according to Löwith, a shift away from the Greek idea of *theoria*, which “is literally a vision or contemplation of what is visible and thereby demonstrable or capable of being shown” and toward Christian faith or *pistis*, which “is a firm trust in what is invisible and thereby indemonstrable, though capable of being professed by a commitment”.²⁸⁹ Augustine himself, either directly or indirectly, addresses this dichotomy in the fourth chapter of the eleventh book of the *City of God*:

Of all visible things, the world is the greatest: of all invisible, the greatest is God. But, that the world is, we see; that God is, we believe. That God made the world, we can believe from no one more safely than from God Himself. But where have we heard Him? Nowhere more distinctly than in the Holy Scriptures, where His prophet said, ‘In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth’.²⁹⁰

The ancients were convinced of the eternal character of the Cosmos, a conviction that was not reconcilable with the idea that the Cosmos was neither eternal nor autonomous but was relatively young²⁹¹ and dependent on the will of a creator God.

The refutation continues through an argument that the World itself provides evidence for being a created object. For Augustine the perfect and divine are immutable and are always essentially what they are. The World, on the other hand, is something that changes, develops and decays and therefore cannot be an order of the highest degree. Again one sees a call to Christian faith where one is told that a comparison be-

²⁸⁹ *Meaning in History*, 161.

²⁹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, book xi, chapter iv. In this passage Augustine quotes from Gen. i. 1.

²⁹¹ In a footnote Löwith notes that “Augustine follows the chronology of Eusebius, who reckoned 5,611 years from the creation to the taking of Rome by the Goths”. *Meaning in History*, 247, fn. 8.

tween the beauty, greatness and order of the World is not to be made “with the invisible greatness, wisdom and beauty of the eternal God”.²⁹² The natural cycles that the ancient Greeks had taken to be the order of the Cosmos were reinterpreted by Augustine as being a sign that the Cosmos were incomplete and not divine. Augustine elaborates this point more poignantly in chapter 4 of book 11:

But why did God choose then to create the heavens and earth which up to that time He had not made? If they who put this question wish to make out that the world is eternal and without beginning, and that consequently it has not been made by God, they are strangely deceived, and rave in the incurable madness of impiety. For, though the voices of the prophets were silent, the world itself, by its well-ordered changes and movements, and by the fair appearance of all visible things, bears a testimony of its own, both that it has been created, and also that it could not have been created save by God, whose greatness and beauty are unutterable and invisible.²⁹³

If the World is neither eternal nor the highest order but something created from the will of God, the World is something that has a timeline. The only being for Augustine that could be timeless is one which is immutable, namely God. All things created have a distinct beginning, and with the creation of the World, time itself is created – it is necessarily a *temporal* World. These theological arguments of Augustine’s were not, however, ones that had compelled Löwith. That the pagan fascination with the Cosmos was incompatible with Christian scripture and creator God was for Löwith not the reason to re-open the debate on time. That which had motivated both Nietzsche and Löwith to, on the one hand, introduce the eternal recurrence of the ancients to modern consciousness and, on the other hand, question the modern *historical* consciousness, was the moral aspect of Augustine’s refutation.

Augustine’s moral argument against the eternal recurrence is based on hope, is not extraordinarily complicated and is nicely summarized by Löwith in *Meaning in History*.

His final argument against the classical concept of time is, therefore, a moral one: the pagan doctrine is hopeless, for hope and faith are essentially related to the future and a real future cannot exist if past and future times are equal phases within a cyclical recurrence without beginning and end. On the basis of an everlasting revolution of definite cycles, we could expect only a blind rotation of misery and happiness, that is, of deceitful bliss and real misery, but no eternal blessedness – only an endless

²⁹² As quoted by Löwith from *Conf.* xi. 5, in: *Meaning in History*, 162.

²⁹³ Augustine, *City of God*, xi, 4.

repetition of the same but nothing new, redemptive, and final. The Christian faith truthfully promises salvation and everlasting blessedness to those who love God, while the godless doctrine of futile cycles paralyzes hope and love itself. If everything were to happen again and again at fixed intervals, the Christian hope in a new life would be futile.²⁹⁴

The eternal recurrence robs life of a hope for better circumstances, it takes the steam out of wanting to be rewarded for one's actions and damns the miserable to be eternally so. Löwith continues this chapter by describing the Christian experience of misery and happiness. Christian misery is the original sin of the Fall, of being separated from God in paradise, and happiness is deliverance from sin and reconciliation with God. Augustine finds it *morally abhorrent* to think that Christians could not be free from this misery or that they would have to experience this misery eternally (assuming their existence eternally returns). Freedom from this misery through salvation is a *singular* experience and not one that could possibly recur eternally. There can be no cycle in which one is saved and then returned to misery, only to be saved once again. Löwith quotes from Augustine in depicting this fear and the novelty of salvation:

For if the soul, once delivered, as it never was before, is never to return to misery, then there happens in its experience something which never happened before; and this, indeed, something of the greatest consequence, to wit, the secure entrance into eternal felicity. And if in an immortal nature there can occur a novelty, which has never been, nor shall ever be, reproduced by any cycle, why is it disputed that the same may occur in mortal natures?²⁹⁵

That Augustine found the doctrine of the eternal recurrence abominable on grounds of eternal suffering and that he made clear that the eternal recurrence was incompatible with the Christian doctrine of creation was nothing more to compare doctrine to doctrine and show incompatibilities. What decisively makes Augustine's comments on the eternal recurrence a *moral* argument is his not wanting to know the truth if it entails suffering, if it is a burden and if it increases misery. It is on moral grounds that Augustine would rather remain ignorant of the eternal recurrence, should it be true, than accept it because of its epistemological value. In direct reference to the eternal recurrence Augustine writes:

Who, I say, can listen to such things? Who can accept or suffer them to be spoken? Were they true, *it were not only more prudent to keep silence*

²⁹⁴ *Meaning in History*, 165.

²⁹⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, xii, 20.

regarding them, but even (to express myself as best I can) *it were the part of wisdom* not to know them. For if in the future world we shall not remember these things, and by this oblivion be blessed, why should we now increase our misery, already burdensome enough, by the knowledge of them? If, on the other hand, the knowledge of them will be forced upon us hereafter, now at least let us remain in ignorance, that in the present expectation we may enjoy a blessedness which the future reality is not to bestow; since in this life we are expecting to obtain life everlasting, but in the world to come are to discover it to be blessed, but not everlasting.²⁹⁶

It goes without saying that hope in salvation and belief in the creation of the World became dominant in the western world over the ancient concept of an eternally recurring Cosmos. Augustine's moral arguments in favor of this change were analyzed and reinterpreted by Nietzsche with the hope of once again finding support for the eternal recurrence.

5.4 AUGUSTINE, NIETZSCHE AND LÖWITH: THE MORAL QUESTION OF HISTORY

In einem gewissen Sinne gehört die ganze Asketik hierher: ein paar Ideen sollen unauslöschlich, allgegenwärtig, unvergeßbar, "fix" gemacht werden, zum Zweck der Hypnotisierung des ganzen nervösen und intellektuellen Systems durch diese "fixen Ideen" – und die asketischen Prozeduren und Lebensformen sind Mittel dazu, um jene Ideen aus der Konkurrenz mit allen übrigen Ideen zu lösen, um sie "unvergeßlich" zu machen. Je schlechter die Menschheit "bei Gedächtnis" war, um so furchtbarer ist immer der Aspekt ihrer Bräuche; die Härte der Strafgesetze gibt insonderheit einen Maßstab dafür ab, wieviel Mühe sie hatte, gegen die Vergeßlichkeit zum Sieg zu kommen und ein paar primitive Erfordernisse des sozialen Zusammenlebens diesen Augenblicks-Sklaven des Affektes und der Begierde *gegenwärtig* zu erhalten (Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, zweite Abhandlung, §3).

Löwith's life-long fascination with Nietzsche was concentrated on the latter's writings on time and history. Not only in his second meditation does Nietzsche deal with the question of history but his preoccupation with the concept of time can be found underlying many of his works. As Löwith time and again claims, Nietzsche's core concept of the eternal recurrence is a direct challenge to the Christian eschatological view of history. Löwith's preoccupation with Nietzsche's question of time began as early as his Nie-

²⁹⁶ Ibid (My emphasis).

tzsche book written in Rome. The main thesis and following argumentation of the book is that the eternal recurrence is the central theme of all of Nietzsche's work (and not as Heidegger claims, the will-to-power). In this context, it is to be understood that Löwith found Nietzsche's deliberations on time to be essential and primary to his thought as a whole. Löwith does not dedicate a chapter in *Meaning in History* to Nietzsche but attaches a previously published essay of his with the title "Nietzsche's Revival of the Doctrine of Eternal Recurrence" as an appendix. It is almost as if Löwith had made a conscious effort to begin his book with the historian Burckhardt, in favor of Nietzsche, in an attempt to keep Nietzsche out of this dialogue only to later regret it and attach an appendix that does not follow the timeline of the work. This indecisiveness, favoring Burckhardt but not being able to let go of Nietzsche, characterizes Löwith's relationship with the two intellectuals over all.

The appendix, "Nietzsche's Revival of the Doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence", independent of all Burckhardt-Nietzsche debates, does not fit with Löwith's goal in *Meaning in History*. Löwith wishes to expose an unconscious and uncritical occupation with the Christian tradition of eschatology in philosophies of history and ultimately tie them in to the biblical view of history. Nietzsche does not, however, fit this schema as he *consciously* and *critically* challenged the biblical view of history and was Löwith's inspiration for doing the same. In the appendix Löwith, once again, declares that *the* historical significance of Nietzsche is tied into his critique of an Augustinian, linear and forward-looking view of time; inspiring a controversy that Löwith was to continue:

Whether foolish or wise, the doctrine of the eternal recurrence is the key to Nietzsche's philosophy, and it also illuminates his historical significance because it revives the controversy between Christianity and paganism.²⁹⁷

Important for Löwith, however, was not only Nietzsche's having challenged Christian doctrine and its impact on philosophies of history but his having followed Augustine and doing so on moral grounds. Later in the essay Löwith writes:

Here [*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*] the idea [of the eternal recurrence] is introduced, however, not as a metaphysical doctrine but as an ethical imperative: to live *as if* 'the eternal hourglass of existence' will continually be turned, in order to impress on each of our actions the weight of an in-

²⁹⁷ *Meaning in History*, 214.

escapable responsibility.²⁹⁸

The eternal recurrence, in Nietzsche's writings, must not be seen exclusively as an ethical imperative, as Löwith also admits, but it is the aspect of this idea that was foremost and interesting to Löwith and to the present intents and purposes. The relationship between Augustine and Nietzsche was central to Löwith's project in *Meaning in History*.

Nietzsche did not realize, however, that his own *contra Christianos* was an exact replica in reverse of the *contra gentiles* of the Church Fathers. Not only the doctrine of eternal recurrence, which was discussed by Justin, Origen, and Augustine, but all the general topics of Christian apologetics against pagan philosophers recur in Nietzsche's philosophy, with the viewpoints interchanged. If one compares the arguments of Nietzsche with those of Celsus and Prophyry, it is not difficult to see how little has been added to the ancient arguments, except the Christian pathos of being "Antichrist" instead of being a philosopher.²⁹⁹

Like Nietzsche, Löwith wanted to revive the controversy between Christianity and the pagans but not with the same conclusions that Nietzsche had drawn. Nietzsche's conclusion that Löwith had shied away from was the "transvaluation of all values"; namely, that all Christian values needed to be identified and replaced resulting in a *new beginning*. Löwith, although often accused of harboring this Nietzschean tendency to want to wipe the slate clean, was too attached to Burckhardt's goals of preserving a continuity of history. Löwith, rather, wanted to re-open the classical debate between the pagans and the Christians on moral grounds not with the hope that one would conclusively cancel out the other but with the hope that one would become aware of the suppositions of modern consciousness when presented with something foreign – ancient paganism – and better them.

But why was history so tied up with a moral problematic for, amongst others, Augustine, Nietzsche and Löwith? Because, as Löwith explains, of the desire to tie the experience of suffering to something transcendental and, in this case, the historical.

The outstanding element, however, out of which an interpretation of history could arise at all, is the basic experience of evil and suffering, and of man's quest for happiness. The interpretation of history is, in the last analysis, an attempt to understand the meaning of history as the meaning of suffering by historical action.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 216.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 220.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 3.

As Löwith informs his readers a number of times, the ancient Greeks did not attempt to attribute suffering to something transcendental.³⁰¹ This limits the philosophy of history to being a Christian phenomenon that, according to Löwith, was born out of the “attempt to understand the meaning of history as the meaning of suffering.” Giving suffering historical meaning is to redeem and be delivered from it via a future acquisition of perfection. This thesis of Löwith’s is not, however, directly formulated; it is, in Löwith’s passive-aggressive style, left for the keen reader to discover for herself. It is because of this thesis, however, that the question of time and history is a moral one. The moral question can be formulated as follows: does one do her suffering justice through the consolation that things will be better in the future or, perhaps, the afterlife? To which could be added: is it philosophically honest or dishonest to reconcile one’s suffering with the promises of hope? It is as moral statements and possible answers that the contradictory claims that Löwith fills his epilogues with are to be read. Again, Löwith’s passivity leaves the reader quite rightly annoyed and disappointed as Löwith tries to objectively place one claim on the same level as its contradiction:

The view most commonly held in antiquity was that hope is an illusion which helps man to endure life but which, in the last resort, is an *ignis fatuus*. On the other hand, St. Paul’s verdict about pagan society was that it had no hope; he meant a hope the substance and assurance of which is faith instead of illusion. Instead of accepting the Stoic maxim, *nec spe nec metu*, St. Paul asserts that we are saved by hope – in fear and trembling.³⁰²

If he had no other wish than to re-open this debate and re-examine it, if he merely wanted to connect modern ideas of progress to early Christian hopes of salvation, he was successful. This re-examination was to expose an important moral question regarding Humanity’s relationship to history. If the reader is to agree with Löwith that *Meaning in History* examines an idea in history without placing value on its continued progression from speculation to speculation then the book itself loses its philosophical interest. Here Löwith is at his worst and, when one reads Löwith’s other treatments of history apart from *Meaning in History*, one sees to what extent Löwith actually viewed philosophies of history as being intellectually corrupt and misleading. This passivity can at best be explained by Löwith’s wish not to be read as a Nietzschean; his wish that one

³⁰¹ See: Ibid, 4.

³⁰² Ibid, 204.

not misinterpret him as wanting to transvalue all values, or return to a previous mode of thinking. Löwith's motivation for entering the debate on time was not because of a similar kinship he felt for *both* the Church Father, Augustine, and the Dionysus-devotee, Nietzsche, rather it was because of his fondness for the ancient Greeks which he found echoed in Nietzsche's writings. Löwith held Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence in high esteem as a philosophical tool to challenge modernity. In his *Nietzsche* book he writes:

Nietzsches Lehre von der Überwindung der Zeitlichkeit der Zeit zur Ewigkeit der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen ist also weder eine bloße Flucht aus der Zeit noch ein bloßes Lob der Vergänglichkeit.³⁰³

This tool was to point one towards the corruption and misleading aspects of philosophies of history and their origin in the early Christian debates against the pagans and the Christian attempt to give suffering a transcendental purpose. This concentration on the transcendental was for Löwith no longer feasible in an environment that had experienced the revolution in nineteenth century thought and the death of God – it did not belong in the continuity of the German intellectual tradition. One can safely assume that Löwith accepts Nietzsche's assessment of the origins of early Christianity's argumentation for meaning in history – his assessment of the extent to which early Christians wanted to give meaning to their suffering under the Romans and through which they were able to transvalue ancient Greek values. In further answering these moral questions it is helpful to continue the Nietzschean investigation of giving meaning to history.

5.5 THE ORIGIN OF GIVING MEANING TO HISTORY: RESENTMENT AND SUFFERING

Sprechen wir sie aus, diese *neue Forderung*: wir haben eine *Kritik* der moralischen Werte nötig, *der Wert dieser Werte ist selbst erst einmal in Frage zu stellen* – und dazu tut eine Kenntnis der Bedingungen und Umstände not, aus denen sie gewachsen, unten denen sie sich entwickelt und verschoben haben... Wie? wenn das Umgekehrte die Wahrheit wäre? Wie? wenn im "Guten" auch ein Rückgangssymptom läge, insgleichen eine Gefahr, eine Verführung, ein Gift, ein Narkotikum, durch das etwa die Gegenwart *auf Kosten der Zukunft* lebte? (Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral, Vorrede*, § 6)

³⁰³ Nietzsche's *Philosophie*, VI, 108.

The rather long and complicated topic of Nietzsche's investigations of the Christian attribution of giving meaning to history will not be investigated in depth as doing so would exceed the scope of the present work. A few famous passages from his writings, however, will be highlighted in order to elucidate one of his concepts that deal with the moral origins of the Christian view of history; namely, *ressentiment*. This elucidation will hopefully bring to light why both Nietzsche and Löwith found the question of history to be a moral one – although for reasons very different than those of Augustine.

Viewing Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral* as relating to a genealogy of meaning in history is uncommon but the two are much more related than they on the surface seem. Important to this thesis is Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* and its function in the creation of morals. *Ressentiment* originated out of the two-class system of the ancients that Nietzsche describes as slave and master. In this system the slaves concentrated on achieving spiritual revenge (*geistige Rache*), they cultivated abysmal hate (*abgründlicher Hass*) and created values out of resentment. This creation of values was a transvaluation of the values of the master class. In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Nietzsche describes the transvaluation as follows:

So allein war es eben einem priesterlichen Volke gemäß, dem Volke der zurückgetretensten priesterlichen Rachsucht. Die Juden sind es gewesen, die gegen die aristokratische Wertgleichung (gut = vornehm = mächtig = schön = glücklich = gottgeliebt) mit einer furchteinflößenden Folgerichtigkeit die Umkehrung gewagt und mit den Zähnen des abgründlichsten Hasses (des Hasses der Ohnmacht) festgehalten haben, nämlich "die Elenden sind allein die Guten, die Armen, Ohnmächtigen, Niedrigen sind allein die Guten, die Leidenden, Entbehrenden, Kranken, Häßlichen sind auch die einzig Frommen, die einzig Gottseligen, für sie allein gibt es Seligkeit – dagegen ihr, ihr Vornehmen und Gewaltigen, ihr seid in alle Ewigkeit die Bösen, die Grausamen, die Lüsternen, die Unersättlichen, die Gottlosen, ihr werdet auch ewig die Unseligen, Verfluchten und Verdammten sein!"³⁰⁴

The origin of this resentment was their suffering and the consequent transvaluation of values was based on the desire to redefine what good and righteousness is. A people who could not achieve the good and righteousness of their peers because they were in society neither noble (*vornehm*) nor powerful (*mächtig*) could also, in this "aristocratic value equation", neither be good (*gut*), beautiful (*schön*), happy (*glücklich*) nor be loved by god (*gottgeliebt*). For the Jews, as for the Christians, what could not be achieved in

³⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, erste Abhandlung, §7.

this world was to be achieved in the next, what could not be achieved in the present was to be achieved in the future. The rejection of their present situation was a rejection of the present itself, for the present, in which they suffered, became secondary to its redemption in the future. This abstraction from the present did not escape Nietzsche's investigations as he calls looking towards the future a comfort against all afflictions of life:

Und wie nennen sie das, was ihnen als Trost wider alle Leiden des Lebens dient – ihre Phantasmagorie der vorweggenommenen zukünftigen Seligkeit?³⁰⁵

The function of *ressentiment* was this very abstraction and negation of the present; it was a denial of the situatedness that had deemed one a slave. For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* was the powerful creative drive behind the slave revolt in morality and as such needed external stimulus to act – it needed to be resentment against something.³⁰⁶

This abstraction from the present and concentration on a future is embodied in the image of Christ. The suffering of Christ on the cross was to embody the suffering of all Christians. His suffering was meaningful not for himself, but for the future and for Humanity as a whole and he was a hero because he was able to do something ultimate and unique out of his suffering. The uniqueness of his suffering and its meaning in history was to be mirrored by the Christian fear that accepting the eternal recurrence would mean the acceptance that they would suffer eternally in the ever returning circle of time. Augustine gives word to this fear in *City of God*:

What pious ears could bear to hear that after a life spent in so many and severe distresses (if, indeed, that should be called a life at all which is

³⁰⁵ Ibid, §14.

³⁰⁶ The full passage is much too long to quote in length but Nietzsche's description of *ressentiment* is much too powerful to not allow it to speak for itself: "Der Sklavenaufstand in der Moral beginnt damit, dass das **Ressentiment** selbst schöpferisch wird und Werthe gebiert: das Ressentiment solcher Wesen, denen die eigentliche Reaktion, die der That versagt ist, die sich nur durch eine imaginäre Rache schadlos halten. Während alle vornehme Moral aus einem triumphirenden Ja-sagen zu sich selber herauswächst, sagt die Sklaven-Moral von vornherein Nein zu einem "Ausserhalb", zu einem "Anders", zu einem "Nicht-selbst": und dies Nein ist ihre schöpferische That. Diese Umkehrung des werthesetzenden Blicks – diese **nothwendige** Richtung nach Aussen statt zurück auf sich selber – gehört eben zum Ressentiment: die Sklaven-Moral bedarf, um zu entstehn, immer zuerst einer Gegen- und Aussenwelt, sie bedarf, physiologisch gesprochen, äusserer Reize, um überhaupt zu agiren, – ihre Aktion ist von Grund aus Reaktion. Das Umgekehrte ist bei der vornehmen Werthungsweise der Fall: sie agirt und wächst spontan, sie sucht ihren Gegensatz nur auf, um zu sich selber noch dankbarer, noch frohlockender Ja zu sagen, – ihr negativer Begriff "niedrig" "gemein" "schlecht" ist nur ein nachgebornes blasses Contrastbild im Verhältniss zu ihrem positiven, durch und durch mit Leben und Leidenschaft durchtränkten Grundbegriff "wir Vornehmen, wir Guten, wir Schönen, wir Glücklichen!" Ibid, §10.

rather a death, so utter that the love of this present death makes us fear that death which delivers us from it,) that after evils so disastrous, and miseries of all kinds have at length been expiated and finished by the help of true religion and wisdom, and when we have thus attained to the vision of God, and have entered into bliss by the contemplation of spiritual light and participation in His unchangeable immortality, which we burn to attain,-that we must at some time lose all this, and that they who do lose it are cast down from that eternity, truth, and felicity to infernal mortality and shameful foolishness, and are involved in accursed woes, in which God is lost, truth held in detestation, and happiness sought in iniquitous impurities? and that this will happen endlessly again and again, recurring at fixed intervals, and in regularly returning periods?³⁰⁷

Christ's role in this new interpretation of suffering was also duly noted by Augustine in response to Ecclesiastes 1:9 which could possibly be interpreted as supporting the ancient Greek eternal recurrence:

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

To which Augustine responds:

God forbid that we should believe this. For Christ died once for our sins, and rising again, dies no more.³⁰⁸

That Christ's suffering was unique was important to the suffering Christians who themselves wished that their suffering was unique and of higher importance. The suffering heroes of Greek mythology, Prometheus, Sisyphus and Tantalus, unlike Christ, were to suffer eternally without redemption – their suffering was meaningless, was mere punishment and was eternally recurring. Here we find Löwith's thesis that an interpretation of history arises out of the basic experience of suffering and the need to reconcile it supported by Nietzsche's thesis that it was suffering and the accompanying resentment that led to the rejection, or transvaluation, of the eternal recurrence; i.e., the *meaningless* recurrence of time. The rejection of the eternal recurrence in favor of eschatology was, at the same time, a rejection of the present in favor of a redeeming future.

It has hopefully become clear to what end Löwith was concerned with the question of history and of a historical consciousness. Becoming himself involved in this debate, Löwith was moved by both Augustine's and Nietzsche's moral arguments for and against eschatology and he pushed towards a modernization of this debate by relating

³⁰⁷ Augustine, *City of God*, xii, 20.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, xii, 13.

Christian eschatologies to modern ideas of progress. *Meaning in History* is, however, in many ways an incomplete work and undershoots the above stated goals. Whether this reservation of Löwith's was caused by his desire to be understood by his colleagues at the so called "kindergarten for impoverished Protestantism", or by a strict doctrine of intellectual honesty as stated in his foreword ("this apparent lack is, however, a real gain if it is true that truth is more desirable than illusion") can only be conjectured. It is, however, likely that Löwith's reservation in personally drawing out the consequences of the connection between Christianity and modern philosophy was because of his desire not to associate himself with radical character of Nietzsche's philosophy. Löwith was neither interested in an ability to forget, nor a new beginning. Although he felt it necessary to put the authority of philosophies of history and the worth of a historical consciousness in question, he was not interested in replacing them but in having a relationship to them that took into account their history, connectedness and dubious nature.

Löwith saw philosophies of history as sacrificing the present for the hope of a future. The idea that everything was essentially complete and noble was replaced by the idea that everything will become complete and noble at some point in time. The ever-present and essentially quintessential World and its immediacy were devalued in favor of an imperfect world which was to be saved by a distant transcendental God. The eternal World with eternal cycles of rise and decline was replaced with a temporal historical world that redeemed all past and present suffering through a continuous improvement in the future. The best modern example that justifies Löwith's secularization thesis can be found in the writings of Marx. For the proletariat in Marx's philosophy to admit that the World is complete and moves eternally in cycles is to affirm their eternal suffering under the bourgeoisie – a thought both Marx and Augustine found morally abhorrent. Returning to Nietzsche's second meditation one can newly ask, what disadvantages does history have for life? The disadvantage Löwith was concerned with was the abstraction away from the immediacy of the eternal Cosmos. With this abstraction western Humanity abstracted itself from the natural order as it began to see itself as the chosen people marching down history in accordance with a transcendental plan of redemption. This degradation of the present is at the same time a complacency towards the present, leaving one rather complacent with one's sufferings and disregarding the immediacy of overcoming them. The proletariats were merely taking part in an ordered history of con-

flict with the bourgeoisie the resolution of which could be found in a historical revolution. The immediate problems of one worker were transformed into the transcendental problems of a working class, ever distancing the individual from his or her immediate situation. With the fall of the belief in a transcendental plan in philosophy with its parting from theology, Löwith put to question the transcendental claims of philosophies of history with the hope of regaining an immediate relationship with the World.

CHAPTER 6

RETURNING TO GERMANY AND CONFRONTING HEIDEGGERIAN PHILOSOPHY

6.1 HEIDELBERG PROFESSORSHIP

In 1949 Löwith left the Hartford Seminary for the New School for Social Research in New York with the hope of finally finding a University in which he could settle down, and finally put an end to his endless wandering. It was not, however, meant to be. Löwith described New York as consumptive (*verzehrend*) and complained that it was a terrible place where one could never speak in peace with one's friends.³⁰⁹ His time in New York lasted until 1952 where Löwith returned to Germany with the help of Gadamer. This move to the city of Heidelberg was not necessarily meant to be a permanent one. Although Löwith did much to complain about his time in the United States he was afraid of losing his newly acquired US citizenship.³¹⁰ Having already fled three different countries, even if the United States did not offer a comfortable academic setting for Löwith, it did offer a sense of security and welcomeness. Already in Heidelberg, Löwith wrote to Strauss³¹¹ and Voegelin asking what his chances were of receiving yet another offer from an American university as he could not continue to teach in Germany and retain his American citizenship. He was without a doubt uncertain about returning to a country that had denied his existence and whose racial laws had driven his mother to

³⁰⁹ Löwith describes the overall situation at the New School in a letter to Voegelin: "*Seine Stelle (von Felix Kaufmann) wird wegen finanzieller Schwierigkeiten nicht wieder besetzt; Riezler ist im 2. Term in Chicago, sodass ich nun plötzlich allein mit H. Kallen (!) das Dept. darstelle und xerlei Geschäft und Dr. Arbeiten aus Kaufmanns Nachlass übernehmen muss. Dazu das verzehrende New York*". Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated Feb. 11, 1950. And, in a letter to Leo Strauss written in all likelihood in 1952 (the letter is not dated) Löwith writes: "*Aber New York ist ein schrecklicher Ort, man kann niemals seine Freunde in Ruhe sprechen*". Löwith, letter to Strauss, 677.

³¹⁰ "*Beruflich geht es mir hier gut, die Fakultät ist sehr anständig zusammengesetzt, die ganze Atmosphäre eine Wohltat nach dem Warenhaus der New School, die mich so schlecht behandelt hat, was wesentlich Simons eigenste Schuld war. Sehr peinlich und fatal ist aber die Unlösbarkeit der **Citizenfrage**, da es nicht genügt ein oder zwei Semester wieder in USA zu unterrichten um sie zu bewahren.*" Löwith, letter to Strauss dated Nov. 25, 1953, 679. Unfortunately it remains unclear as to whether or not Löwith was able to retain his citizenship. That he never returned to the United States for an extended period of time, however, most likely had the consequence of him losing his rights as a citizen.

³¹¹ "*Werde ich innerhalb der nächsten zwei Jahre ein offer von USA bekommen?*" Löwith, letter to Strauss dated Aug. 25, 1952, 678.

suicide.³¹² He was also understandably uncertain about teaching at a university that had banned and burned at least one of his books. Despite feeling much more comfortable in the academic atmosphere in Heidelberg, Löwith was not interested in becoming once again a German national. The supposed unfortunate conduct of the New School with respect to Löwith left him waiting in Heidelberg for an offer from any university in the United States – of which he was only to receive one proposition.³¹³ Löwith left the United States bitter, disappointed and waiting. If nothing else, he was torn between his attachment to his American citizenship and his desire to pursue philosophy in comfortable surroundings. Löwith admits to Voegelin that he would have chosen to return to the United States if he had been given the chance:

Um Ihre Fragen zu beantworten nur rasch Folgendes: die Verhältnisse an der New School haben mir den Entschluss für Heidelberg wesentlich erleichtert – ob es für dauernd oder gastweise ist, das lässt sich noch nicht sagen + wenn ich in den kommenden 2-3 Jahren etwas Vernünftiges in USA angeboten bekommen sollte, würde ich wahrscheinlich wieder zurück gehen, schon allein weil ich die citizenship nicht verlieren will + nicht vorhabe wieder deutscher Staatsbürger zu werden. Rein berufl. und akademisch gesehen ist meine Situation hier natürlich viel angenehmer + befriedigender als an irgend einem amerik. College.³¹⁴

Part of his wanting to return to the United States despite his disdain of American universities was the extent to which Germany had become something ultimately foreign and aversive. His return to Germany was far from a pleasant reunion. In the same letter to Voegelin, Löwith writes of his negative impressions of his old homeland:

Sozial und innenpolitisch ist der Eindruck sehr viel weniger erfreulich – alte Ressentiments, Abschieben aller eigenen Unzulänglichkeiten auf neue Sündenböcke, moralische Verantwortungslosigkeit und völliges Fehlen allgemeiner Gesittung + des *sensus communis*. Dem deutschen Spiesser in kurzen Lederhosen + den zahllosen Kraft durch Freude Bus-touristen sieht man allenthalben nach wie vor an, *wie gut* der Nazismus zu ihnen gepasst hat.³¹⁵

Heidelberg, however, became a permanent residence for Löwith in 1954 as the New

³¹² See: Gadamer, *Nachruf auf Karl Löwith*: “Als ob nichts geschehen wäre: Löwith hatte seine Mutter auf schreckliche Weise verloren – sie nahm sich das Leben, als sie nach Theresienstadt abgeholt werden sollte”. In: *deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach*.

³¹³ “Ausserdem hat mir, trotz vieler Versuche und Schreibereien, noch keine Institution etwas angeboten; nur ein junger Colorado College Professor der mir von H.W. Schneider, Columbia, empfohlen war, wäre bereit zu einem exchange, der zwar für ihn sehr günstig, für mich aber alles andere als günstig wäre.” Löwith, letter to Strauss dated Nov. 25, 1953, 679.

³¹⁴ Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated June 6, 1952, 793.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

School decided against allowing Löwith to return to a full position.³¹⁶

The opportunity to teach in Heidelberg and successfully continue his philosophical career was exclusively thanks to the help of Gadamer. In 1933, when the Nazis were taking over the university system in Germany and beginning to suspend Jewish Professors, Löwith sought out Gadamer's friendship and advice. After his father's death in 1932 Löwith had discovered documents in his inheritance, documents that could prove that Löwith was, in the eyes of the National Socialists, only half Jewish. The documents betrayed that Löwith's paternal grandfather was not of blood relation and that his actual grandfather was an Archduke who had a liaison with a Jewish woman – his grandmother. He confided this information to Gadamer and posed the question of whether or not he should make the documents public in an attempt to be allowed to continue teaching in Germany; to which, in the words of the Gadamer biographer, Jean Grondin, Gadamer responded:

Gadamer war von Löwiths Vertraulichkeit gerührt, gab ihm aber den Rat, doch das Stipendium der Rockefeller-Foundation für einen Aufenthalt in Italien anzunehmen... Denn, so argumentierte Gadamer, die noch mögliche Ausnahmeregelung zu nutzen und in Deutschland zu bleiben, sei für ihn und seine Stellung nicht ehrenvoll. Ferner wäre die Revision seines Falles mit sehr vielen Querelen verbunden.³¹⁷

To Löwith's benefit, he followed Gadamer's advice and went to Italy. Gadamer, was convinced that there would soon be a way for Löwith to regain his position in an honorable manner – without having neither to spoil his family's name nor draw more attention from the National Socialists. Grondin describes Gadamer's advice as a promise, a promise that Gadamer would help Löwith return to Germany and return to his position as professor. Both Gadamer and Löwith had hoped that this promise would be fulfilled at a much earlier date as neither had believed in the lasting qualities of the Third Reich. It would, however, take Gadamer another twenty years to make good on his promise and offer Löwith a position at the University in Heidelberg. According to Grondin, Gadamer had offered Löwith the usage of the informal form of "you" (in German: *du* instead of *Sie*) after this conversation and Löwith would be one of the few friends of

³¹⁶ "Die New School Affaire ist nun endgültig negativ entschieden. Die New School hat sich mir gegenüber abermals genau so skandalös benommen wie vor drei Jahren." Löwith, letter to Strauss dated March 18, 1954, 681.

³¹⁷ Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 200.

Gadamer's who would have this privilege.³¹⁸ Löwith was an enormous help to Gadamer in Heidelberg as Gadamer himself was struggling with the number of students wanting to study philosophy at the University.³¹⁹

Löwith's philosophical pursuits during his time in Heidelberg were driven two-fold. On the one hand Löwith spent a considerable amount of time disputing Heidegger's philosophy; from his polemic, *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, to his reconciliation with his teacher in the Festschrift occasioning Heidegger's eightieth birthday. On the other hand Löwith was busy in reconstructing his mapping of the history of Western philosophy. Whereas his earlier philosophy used Hegel and his opponents as a starting point in understanding the contemporary world, his later philosophy was to take a step backwards in the history of philosophy and begin with Descartes and his opponents – including Giambattista Vico and Paul Valéry – as hermeneutic tools in understanding the present. The motivation driving the investigation of the proliferation of the historical following Hegel and ending with Nietzsche, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, was replaced by a motivation to investigate the vanishing of the concept of the natural World in *Gott, Mensch und Welt*. These two directions, one with Heidegger and one with Descartes in the center, were directed by Löwith's insatiable hunger for wanting philosophy to take a natural concept of World seriously. And, although Löwith himself did not much bother with the following discussion, his time in Heidelberg is also marked by the Löwith-Blumenberg debate, a debate started by his older work, *Meaning in History* and continued by Hans Blumenberg and his supporters.

6.2 DESTITUTE THINKER IN A DESTITUTE TIME

Man vergilt einem Lehrer schlecht, wenn man immer nur der Schüler bleibt. Und warum wollt ihr nicht an meinem Kranze rupfen? Ihr verehrt mich; aber wie, wenn eure Verehrung eines Tages umfällt? (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* I, *Von der schenkenden Tugend*, § 3 – as quoted by Löwith in: *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 125).

Und ich habe ja auch nicht erst nach meiner Rückkehr aus der Emigrati-

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ “Es war immer noch zu viel für einen, mit den Studentenzahlen fertig zu werden, und erst, nachdem es mir gelungen war, Karl Löwith zur Rückkehr nach Deutschland und für Heidelberg zu gewinnen, konnte ich meinen Unterricht und meine eigene Arbeit wieder einigermaßen koordinieren.” Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 171

on gerupft, sondern schon in meiner Habilitationsschrift (*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*, VIII, 278).

To say that Löwith was hurt by Heidegger's blatant participation in the Third Reich and by his shameless wearing of the swastika while meeting Löwith in exile is to say little. The relationship between the mentor and the student during the 1920s in Marburg was one of debate, of conflicting ideas and of respect.³²⁰ Löwith's challenge to *Sein und Zeit* in *Das Individuum* was made on philosophical grounds and in direct discussion with Heidegger himself. During and shortly after the Second World War, however, Löwith's critique of Heideggerian philosophy became personal and driven from a want to retaliate against the forced and emotionless alienation from his once friend and mentor. Strauss, in a letter to Löwith written in 1950, sums up the overall bitterness and disappointment felt by Heidegger's Jewish ex-colleagues in Marburg:

Heidegger ist der stärkste heute lebende Geist. Einen Philosophen will ich ihn nicht nennen – er selbst will ja kein Philosoph mehr sein – ich weiss nicht, ob ein wahrer Philosoph ein Mensch guten Willens sein muss – aber das weiss ich, dass ein schlechter Wille das Philosophieren zerstört und Heidegger ein schlechter Kerl ist: der Kontrast zwischen der noblesse Nietzsches und der genialen Muffigkeit H.' ist erschlagend.³²¹

It was with this head of steam that Löwith published a series of collected essays³²² under the title, *Heidegger, Denker in dürftiger Zeit*. Gadamer describes the motive behind this work of Löwith's as follows:

Und doch reizte ihn [Löwith] noch immer die Philosophie und Heidegger zu erbittertem Widerspruch, und zu diesem Widerspruch wurde er um so mehr gereizt, als Heidegger damals, in eine Art zweiter Welle, die

³²⁰ Hans Jonas in his book, *Erinnerungen*, recalls the intriguing nature of the philosophical atmosphere in Freiburg and the confrontation between Löwith and Heidegger's philosophy: "Und da kam es zur ersten Begegnung mit Karl Löwith, der mir damals weit voraus war und bereits promovierte. Der hielt einmal bei Heidegger einen Vortrag, der an Unverständlichkeit mit Heidegger wetteiferte, aber denselben Eindruck von Tiefsinn machte. Löwith... sprach mit leiser Stimme, aber in ähnlicher grüblerischer Weise wie Heidegger. Ich weiß noch, wie dieser ihm mit großer Aufmerksamkeit und Achtung zuhörte und sich dann zu seinem Vortrag äußerte. Das alles überstieg mein Verständnis, doch etwas davon ging durch meine Seele, nämlich die Überzeugung: Das ist Philosophie auf dem Wege – mein Ohr war Zeuge der philosophischen Bemühungen, während mein Bewußtsein Zeuge der philosophischen Resultate war", 83.

³²¹ Strauss, letter to Löwith dated Feb. 23, 1950, 674.

³²² According to the appendix to volume VIII of the collected works written by Bernd Lutz, *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, is compiled of Löwith's following essays: *Heideggers Kehre*, which becomes the chapter "Zu sich selbst entschlossenes Dasein und sich selber gebendes Sein", *Martin Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, which becomes the chapter "Geschichte, Geschichtlichkeit und Seinsgeschick", *Heideggers Auslegung des Ungesagten in Nietzsches Wort "Gott ist tot"*, which retains its title and *Der Denker Martin Heidegger*, which becomes the chapter titled "Zur kritischen Würdigung von Heideggers Wirksamkeit". VIII, 292f.

dem Welterfolg der späten 20er Jahre jetzt, nach dem Kriege, trotz allem offiziellen Verdikt, gefolgt war, auf geradezu unheimliche Resonanz bei der akademischen Jugend stieß. So schrieb Löwith damals ein scharfes polemisches Pamphlet ‘Denker in dürftiger Zeit’ und fand erst, als die Heidegger-Welle abgeebte war, langsam ein gelassenes und würdiges Verhältnis zu seinem einstigen Lehrer und Freunde.³²³

It was, as Gadamer noted, Löwith’s aim to break the uncritical acceptance of Heidegger’s philosophy by his supporters with the hope of lowering Heidegger’s influence within philosophical circles.³²⁴ In 1941 Löwith took one of his first blows at Heidegger’s character when he dedicated his work, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, to Husserl, who had recently passed away. The dedication ends with the following sentence:

Die Freiburger Universität hat Husserls Tod ignoriert, und der Nachfolger auf Husserls Lehrstuhl [Heidegger] hat seine “Verehrung und Freundschaft” dadurch bezeugt, daß er kein Wort verschwendet oder gewagt hat.³²⁵

The student with whom Heidegger had spent the most time and the one colleague who helped read through and correct *Sein und Zeit* and whose *Habilitation* which would be the only one Heidegger would mentor became for him the stranger, as he would later write, who hated philosophical thinking (*Denken*). The deterioration of their relationship from being one of mutual respect to being one of mutual disdain is shown by Heidegger’s responses to Löwith’s two main works that were challenges to Heideggerian philosophy, *Das Individuum* and *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*. In his essay commemorating Heidegger’s eightieth birthday Löwith recalls Heidegger’s reaction to *Das Individuum*:

Und zwei Jahre später, als ich einmal befürchtete, Sie hätten mir meine Divergenz übelgenommen, schrieben Sie mir: “Wie sollte ich Ihnen dergleichen übelnehmen! Dann hätte ich am bequemsten und ohne große Schwierigkeit Ihre Habilitation unterbinden können. Suchen Sie einen unter den regierenden Bonzen, der einen Schüler mit einer solchen *entgegengerichteten* Arbeit habilitiert! Ich rechne mir das nicht als Ver-

³²³ Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 176.

³²⁴ In the foreword to the second edition of *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, Löwith writes: “Der Verfasser glaubt sich nicht zu täuschen, wenn er annimmt, daß die erste Veröffentlichung (1953) dieser kritischen Würdigung ihre Absicht insofern erfüllt hat, als sie dazu beitrug, den Bann eines betretenen Schweigens und eines sterilen Nachredens von seiten einer gefesselten Anhängerschaft zu brechen.” VIII, 124.

³²⁵ Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* was, in the editions from 1927 and 1935, dedicated to Husserl with the words “Verehrung und Freundschaft”. The dedication was left out of the edition published in 1941 – hence Löwith’s reaction to Heidegger’s attempt to distance himself from Husserl. Löwith excluded these remarks to his dedication in the second printing of 1950.

dienst an, aber ich wundere mich [...], wie wenig Sie mich in meiner Haltung [...] verstehen, wenn Sie, wie Ihre Bemerkungen andeuten, eine Verärgerung vermuten”.³²⁶

Heidegger’s reaction to *Denker in dürftiger Zeit* was, however, negative as this opposing work (*entgegengerichtete Arbeit*) was both philosophical *and personal*. In a private letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1954 Heidegger writes:

Vom Denken hat er [Löwith] keine Ahnung, vielleicht haßt er es. Wie mir denn nie ein Mensch begegnet ist, der so ausschließlich aus dem Ressentiment und dem ‘Anti-’ lebt.³²⁷

One instance of Löwith’s later criticism revolved around Heidegger’s concept of facticity and its ties to his political involvement in the Third Reich. Heidegger, in his politically infused speech as rector at the University in Freiburg under the National Socialists mentions the existential predicament of abandonment (*Verlassenheit*), of complete responsibility for one’s being via the “death of a creator God”. Löwith quotes from the speech in the collected essays concerning Heidegger:

Ein erster Hinweis auf Nietzsches Wort “Gott ist tot” findet sich in Heideggers Rektoratsrede von 1933. Mit dieser “Verlassenheit des heutigen Menschen inmitten des Seienden” müsse man Ernst machen. Worin besteht dieses Ernstnehmen der Gottverlassenheit, wenn es sich dabei um eine Seinsverlassenheit inmitten des Seienden handelt?³²⁸

Heidegger did not mention the abandonment of modern Humanity without attempting to provide a solution; namely, *the affirmation of one’s historical and political situatedness*. For everything Heidegger’s philosophy of *Destruktion* accomplished in critically appraising the history of Western philosophy, it is dangerously inept at critically appraising the now – the factual, the present and the political.

It is this uncritical acceptance of affirming one’s facticity and *Geworfenheit* that Löwith saw as tying Heidegger’s philosophy to his participation in the Third Reich. This “finite metaphysics of finiteness” (i.e. temporal metaphysic of *Dasein*) fails to pull one out of the nihilism of the aforementioned “homelessness” but, rather, sets one up to be susceptible to it and to affirm it – as is the case with Heidegger and his rectorship in

³²⁶ “Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage”, VIII, 279.

³²⁷ Heidegger, letter to Elisabeth Blochmann dated Jan. 19, 1954. In: *Martin Heidegger – Elisabeth Blochmann Briefwechsel 1918-1969*, 103. This was, according to Grondin in his Gadamer biography, Heidegger’s response to *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*. See: Grondin, *Gadamer*, 301. Heidegger’s choice of words here is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s description of a Jewish moral as being driven by *ressentiment* and being *anti-noble*, making this critique of Löwith a not very well hidden anti-semitic remark.

³²⁸ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 211.

Freiburg.

Das Ja zu Hitlers Entscheidung schien ihm [Heidegger] identisch mit dem zum “eigenen Sein”. Der Wahlauf Ruf, den er als Rektor ergehen ließ, ist ganz im nationalsozialistischen Stil und zugleich ein populärer Auszug zu Heideggers Philosophie. Der Wortlaut war: “Deutsche Männer und Frauen! Das deutsche Volk ist vom Führer zur Wahl gerufen. Der Führer aber erbittet nichts vom Volk. Er gibt vielmehr dem Volk die unmittelbarste Möglichkeit der höchsten freien Entscheidung: ob es – das ganze Volk – sein eigenes Dasein will oder ob es dieses nicht will”.³²⁹

In *Mein Leben* Löwith continues to help the reader understand to what extent Heidegger understood the connection between historicity – understood by Löwith as facticity – and his affirmation of the Third Reich. He does this by showing to what extent this concept had close ties to Heidegger’s personality and personal philosophical endeavors and to what extent Heidegger felt his factual being-there-in-the-world was a “necessity” or “destiny”:

daß er [Heidegger] immer wieder betonte, es komme nur darauf an, “daß jeder das macht, was er kann”, auf “das je eigene Sein-können” oder die “existenzielle Beschränkung auf die eigene, historische Faktizität”. Dieses Können nahm er zugleich als ein Müssen in Anspruch oder als “Schicksal”. Er schreibt mir 1921: “...Ich arbeite aus meinem ‘ich bin’ und meiner geistigen, überhaupt faktischen Herkunft. Mit dieser Faktizität wütet (sic!) das Existieren.”³³⁰

This quote from Löwith helps show to what extent Heidegger *uncritically* took his historical and factual background and affirmed it as his fate. That Heidegger was thrown into the world and that he was thrown into a certain time period and into a certain place, may it be a National Socialist State or a nomadic tribe in Africa, was beyond his control. What was under the control of Heidegger and is under the control of every factually existing *Dasein* is the decision to affirm one’s given surroundings as “one’s own being” (*als je eigenes Dasein*). For Löwith, taking the step from affirming one’s factual existence to affirming one’s national and ethnic existence, is, if not a natural consequence of Heidegger’s philosophy, no far stretch. Löwith continues with this line of thought after having quoted the above letter from Heidegger:

Wer von hier aus [1921] vorausblickt auf Heideggers Parteinahme für Hitlers Bewegung, wird schon in dieser frühesten Formulierung der geschichtlichen Existenz die spätere Verbindung mit der politischen Ent-

³²⁹ *Mein Leben*, 37.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

scheidung angelegt finden. Es bedarf nur eines Heraustretens aus der noch halb religiösen Vereinzelung und der Anwendung des “je eigenen” Daseins und seines Müssens auf das eigene “deutsche Dasein” und dessen geschichtliches Schicksal, um den energischen Leerlauf der Existenzkategorien (“sich zu sich selber entschließen”, “vor dem Nichts auf sich selbst stehen”, “sein Schicksal wollen” und “sich selbst überantworten”) in die allgemeine Bewegung der deutschen Existenz überzuführen und nun auf politischen Boden zu destruieren.³³¹

Heidegger’s speech as newly appointed rector and his participation in the Third Reich have inspired an incredible number of books and critical essays. Whereas some try to distance Heidegger and his philosophy from National Socialism others, like Löwith, see Heidegger’s decisions during the Second World War as being a consequence of his philosophy. It is not the aim of the present work to do other than present Löwith’s particular critique of Heidegger,

Were it, however, not for the outbreak of the Second World War Heidegger and Löwith would have continued to be colleagues and would have most likely continued their philosophical discourse and writing with the advice of the other – from which both would have undoubtedly benefited. Heidegger’s aloofness at the fortunes of his Jewish colleagues during the Nazi period and his short participation in the Third Reich made enemies out of friends. Gadamer notes, however, that despite their differences Löwith did help in the creation of a Festschrift to Heidegger’s sixtieth birthday³³² and continued to participate in the publishing of Festschriften commemorating the life and works of Heidegger. Löwith had most notably attempted to reconcile the differences between himself and Heidegger in an essay occasioning Heidegger’s eightieth birthday, “*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*”, in which he writes of the distance that had grown between the philosophical interests of the two and of his indebtedness to his once mentor:

Das erste, was ich bei dieser einmaligen Gelegenheit sagen möchte, ist mein persönlicher Danke dafür, daß ich mit dabei sein darf, obwohl ich nicht zu den Schülern gehöre, die in der von Ihnen [Heidegger] eingeschlagenen Richtung weitergedacht haben. Wenn ich mich trotzdem als Ihren Schüler empfinde, so liegt der Grund dafür nicht in der positiven

³³¹ Ibid, 30.

³³² “Es gelang mir, gegen einigen Widerstand, in den fünfziger Jahren Heideggers Aufnahme in die [Heidelberger] Akademie durchzusetzen. Das war fast ebenso schwer wie seinerzeit meine erfolgreiche Bemühung, Heidegger zu seinem 60. Geburtstag eine Festschrift vorzulegen. Damals erhielt ich die erstaunlichsten Absagen und Zusagen und hatte es am Ende der entschlossenen Unabhängigkeit von Karl Löwith zu verdanken, daß auch andere Freunde und Schüler Heideggers den Mut fanden, sich zu beteiligen.” Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 193

Aufnahme Ihrer Frage nach dem Sein, sondern darin, daß Sie der einzige Lehrer waren, der mich erfahren ließ, was eine philosophische Vorlesung an Eindringlichkeit und Konzentration bieten kann...³³³

The tone and style of this essay, both critical and respectful, is not far from that found in *Das Individuum* and shows to what extent Löwith had not only hoped to reconcile his differences with Heidegger but continue to debate Heideggerian philosophy on philosophical grounds.

The question remains as to what extent Heidegger's thought had influenced Löwith and his philosophy after the publishing of *Das Individuum*. It is the case that Löwith spent considerable amount of time with both Heidegger's earlier and later works as he continued to publish numerous articles on Heidegger and his philosophy throughout his life – but to what extent did Löwith integrate Heideggerian concepts, problems and solutions into his own writing? Upon returning to Germany, Löwith had even held a joint seminar with Gadamer on Heidegger³³⁴ where he was, according to Gadamer, outright critical. Löwith's relationship to Heidegger's philosophy from beginning to end was essentially critical. From 1928 with the publishing of *Das Individuum* to 1968 with the publishing of “*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*” Löwith never stopped critiquing and disputing everything Heideggerian. Rather than incorporating Heideggerian concepts, problems and philosophical style, Löwith treated them as something needed to be overcome and swept under the rug. As Löwith writes in the above quotation, he felt himself to be a student of Heidegger's not because he positively received and worked on the same problems as Heidegger but because of what he learned in didactically presenting philosophy.

To what extent Löwith was aware of a positive role of Heideggerian philosophy in his own writings is not clear. In his philosophical goals of returning to a natural World and overcoming the historicization of Western philosophy, Heidegger had a dubious role. None of Löwith's histories of philosophy, however, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche, von Descartes bis zu Nietzsche* and that in *Meaning in History* (i.e.; from Nietzsche/Burckhardt to the Bible) could have been extended to include the work and influence of Heidegger. Löwith's aims in these histories were to show the development of an anthropo-centric historicized philosophy – a development which was to find its proper

³³³ “*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*”, VIII, 276.

³³⁴ Gadamer, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, 176.

opponent and conclusion in the philosophy of Nietzsche. Rather than continuing beyond Nietzsche, Löwith's places Heidegger in line with Hegel's students of the nineteenth century. A summary of this critique can be found in *Denker in dürftiger Zeit* where Löwith explicitly draws the connection he sees between the philosophy of Heidegger and the historicism that arose out of Hegelianism:

Es ist das Neue an Heideggers Denken, daß er aus dem historischen Relativismus die letzten Konsequenzen zog, indem er die Wahrheit des Seins zunächst an der Endlichkeit des existierenden Daseins und dessen Seinsverständnis festmachte und schließlich die Wahrheit selbst und das Sein selbst als ein geschichtliches Wahrheits- und Seinsgeschehen faßte.³³⁵

Placing the truth of *Being* in the finitude of *Dasein* (“*die Wahrheit des Seins an der Endlichkeit des existierenden Daseins festmachen*”) and understanding truth and Being as historical truth- and being-events could not have been further from Löwith's own personal philosophical goals. He called Heidegger's reformulation of historicism a “finite metaphysic of finiteness”³³⁶ – a this-worldly metaphysic within the horizon of time. In *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche* Löwith describes the terms “finite” and “infinite” in terms of speculative philosophy:

Das Unendliche der Religion und Philosophie ist und war aber nie etwas anderes als irgendein *Endliches* und darum *Bestimmtes*, jedoch mystifiziert, d.h. ein *Endliches* mit dem Postulat: nicht endlich, d.i. *unendlich* zu sein. Die spekulative Philosophie hat sich desselben Fehlers schuldig gemacht wie die Theologie, nämlich die Bestimmungen der endlichen Wirklichkeit nur durch die Negation der Bestimmtheit, in welcher sie sind, was sie sind, zu Bestimmungen des Unendlichen gemacht zu haben.³³⁷

The mystification of a finite particular which enabled the postulation of its being infinite was annulled or “secularized” by Hegel's students.³³⁸ The infinite *Weltgeist* that was extrapolated out of Human-historical action was negated and became *Zeitgeist* which described particular finite Human-historical circumstance. The consequent relativity of the *Zeitgeist* became, in Heidegger's philosophy, the randomness of *Geworfenheit* or one's *faktische Situation* and, instead of retaining its relativity, was responsible for determining the truth of Being. Heidegger's philosophy of facticity and *Dasein* which em-

³³⁵ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 194.

³³⁶ See: “Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism” VIII, 105.

³³⁷ *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, VI, 90.

³³⁸ See chapter 2.2 of the present work.

phasizes the finite was unattractive to Löwith who, rather than being interested in a “finite metaphysic of finiteness”, was interested in a “finite metaphysic of infinity” – i.e.; a this-worldly metaphysic of an infinite cosmos or World.

As much as they fundamentally disagreed on many differing topics, they did agree on the importance of the philosophy of Nietzsche and his analysis of the history of philosophy. But in his critique of Heidegger as belonging to the tradition of Hegel and his students, Löwith makes clear that he also found Heidegger to have misunderstood Nietzsche.

6.3 ON THE GENESIS OF NIHILISM: COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF NIETZSCHE

Seit Kopernikus scheint der Mensch auf eine schiefe Ebene geraten –er rollt immer schneller nunmehr aus dem Mittelpunkt weg – wohin? Ins Nichts? Ins “durchbohrende Gefühl seines Nichts”? (Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral, dritte Abhandlung*, §25)

It can be said with confidence that that which fundamentally separates and binds the philosophies of Löwith and Heidegger finds its genesis in their readings of Nietzsche, wherein Löwith drew consequences relevant to the question of Humanity’s relationship to history and, Heidegger, the possibility of metaphysics. It is in this context that one finds Löwith’s best written discussions of Heidegger, discussions which concentrate on Heidegger’s concept of facticity, its ties to existentialism and their origin in his interpretation of Nietzsche’s phrase, “God is dead”. Published under the heading, *Holzwege*, is an essay written by Heidegger from 1943, “*Nietzsche’s Wort ‘Gott ist tot’*”, to which Löwith published a response ten years later, “*Heideggers Auslegung des Ungesagten in Nietzsches Wort ‘Gott ist tot’*”. Heidegger’s essay analyzes Nietzsche’s relationship to the tradition of metaphysics and nihilism and attempts to show his transvaluation of values as being nothing less than an inversion of values. The essay, and Löwith’s response, is critical in understanding the intricate differences between Heideggerian and Löwithian philosophy.

Nietzsche presented the Western world with a dilemma – or with an awareness – of a crisis in Western metaphysics. Both Heidegger and Löwith were to react to this dilemma in their writings and it would, by and large, motivate both of their philoso-

phies. These two men remain connected because of their affiliation with Nietzsche's writings but remain irreconcilable because of their understanding thereof. At the center of these interpretations is the famous quote from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* that "God is dead". For Heidegger this quote signifies *an awareness of the nihilism that has driven philosophy thus far* and, for Löwith, it signifies *the beginning of a nihilism and crisis of meaning that is to be dealt with by modernity*. These interpretations were to have much larger consequences for their respective philosophies as a whole and they help in clarifying the divergences of the two thinkers.

Heidegger's understanding of the proclamation that "God is dead" is not literal and theological but philosophical where "God" not only depicts the Christian God of the Bible but the tradition of metaphysics as a whole. To proclaim then that "God is dead" is to proclaim the end of metaphysics:

Das Wort "Gott ist tot" bedeutet; die übersinnliche Welt ist ohne wirkende Kraft. Sie spendet kein Leben. Die Metaphysik d.h. für Nietzsche die abendländische Philosophie als Platonismus verstanden, ist zu Ende.³³⁹

This apparent end was, however, positively interpreted by Heidegger. Not only had the Western tradition held the transcendental world to be the one and only true world but the totality of the history of metaphysics *was essentially driven by nihilism* and what Heidegger calls "a forgetfulness of Being".³⁴⁰ The tradition of metaphysics had to go under in order to open up the possibility of being free from this nihilistic historical movement and to break this tradition of "forgetfulness".

Heidegger explains Nietzsche's use of the word "nihilism" as depicting a historical process in which the highest values become devalued:

Nach dieser Aufzeichnung [W.z.M.A.2] begreift Nietzsche den Nihilismus als einen geschichtlichen Vorgang. Er interpretiert diesen Vorgang als die Entwertung der bisherigen obersten Werte. Gott, die übersinnliche Welt, die Ideale und Ideen, die Ziele und Gründe, die alles Seiende und das menschliche Leben im besonderen bestimmen und tragen, all das wird hier im Sinne von obersten Werten vorgestellt.³⁴¹

This devaluation of the highest values does not, according to Heidegger's reading, produce nihilism but is the consequence of an ever-existing nihilistic process in Western

³³⁹ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 217.

³⁴⁰ See: *Ibid*, 216 and 218.

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, 222.

history. The implications of this claim are not to be ignored; namely, the devaluation of over two thousand years of philosophical history as a nihilistic process in which Being, apparently, is not spoken of. Löwith challenges this interpretation and sees it as nothing less than an attempt to tie Nietzsche's concept of nihilism into Heidegger's own concept of the "forgetfulness of Being".

Heideggers Auslegung geht weit darüber hinaus und dahinter zurück, indem er Nietzsches Wort aus der Seins- und Weltgeschichte von zwei Jahrtausenden interpretiert; denn das Wort vom Tod Gottes sei innerhalb der gesamten, metaphysisch bestimmten Geschichte des Abendlandes "immer schon unausgesprochen" gesagt worden. *Wieso?* ... wogegen für Nietzsche umgekehrt der Nihilismus eine Folge davon ist, daß wir den christlichen Gott getötet haben, beziehungsweise daß der Glaube an ihn unglaublich geworden ist.³⁴²

That Löwith was dumbfounded by Heidegger's extrapolation of nihilism onto the whole of Western history is expressed by his simple question of "why" (*wieso*) Heidegger wanted to force his concept of "forgetfulness" on Nietzsche's philosophy. Unlike Heidegger, Löwith does not devalue the last two thousand years of history but rather talks of a dimming of the modern mind as a result of nihilism and in comparison to both ancient Greek *and* Christian thought.

Heidegger continues his discussion with Nietzsche's transvaluation of all values and the concept of an incomplete nihilism. He understands the transvaluation (*Umwerten*) of all values to be a response and attempt to overcome nihilism and the values that have themselves become nihilistic. The devaluation (*Entwertung*) of transcendental values demands, in turn, a new positing of values (*Wertsetzung*) and is a process designated as the "transvaluation of values". To ignore this consequence of nihilism and not transvalue old values is to not bring nihilism to completion and is to ignore it as a historical phenomenon or *process*. Heidegger quotes Nietzsche from the posthumous collection *Wille zur Macht* on this problem of an incomplete nihilism:

Der *unvollständige* Nihilismus, seine Formen: wir leben mitten drin. Die Versuche, dem Nihilismus zu entgehen, *ohne* die bisherigen Werte umzuwerten: bringen das Gegenteil hervor, verschärfen das Problem.³⁴³

It is at this point that one can see one of the similarities between Heidegger and Löwith; namely, in how earnest they considered it to be to deal with the consequences of nihil-

³⁴² *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 214f. (My emphasis).

³⁴³ Nietzsche, *Wille zur Macht*, *Fernere Ursachen des Nihilismus*, §28.

ism. A connection can be made between this idea of an uncompleted nihilism and Löwith's secularization thesis formulated most extensively in 1949, six years after the original publishing of Heidegger's article. The secularization thesis is nothing less than a critique of philosophies and traditions that try to avoid the consequences of nihilism by not transvaluing old values. The act of the mere secularization of eschatology into philosophy of history is to accept the goal-oriented nature of history provided by the tradition of eschatology but ignore the values that had set up the structure for ever believing in the ever-progressing nature of history. What Löwith describes as "secularization" Heidegger understands as a replacement (*Ersetzen*) of values and, in both, the consequences of nihilism are not taken into account but avoided, thus accentuating the problematic. Heidegger accentuates this point in his article:

Der unvollständige Nihilismus ersetzt zwar die bisherigen Werte durch andere, aber er setzt sie immer noch an die alte Stelle, die als der ideale Bereich des Übersinnlichen gleichsam freigehalten wird.³⁴⁴

The "avoidance" of nihilism in philosophy is to hold transcendental values, it is to avoid, in Heidegger's words, that with the death of God the transcendental world has met its end. To respond to nihilism is to transvalue the transcendental values, to create new values but no longer in the realm of the transcendental but in the this-worldly realm of the liveliest (*Lebendigste*).

Die Wertsetzung bedarf eines anderen Bereiches. Das Prinzip kann nicht mehr die leblos gewordene Welt des Übersinnlichen sein. Deshalb wird der auf die so verstandene Umwertung zielende Nihilismus das Lebendigste aufsuchen. Der Nihilismus wird so selbst zum "Ideal des überreichsten Lebens".³⁴⁵

Heidegger follows the consequences of this thought in an attempt to define what life is for Nietzsche and what it would mean to value the this-worldly. It is at this point that Heidegger presents Nietzsche's philosophy as a "metaphysics of values" wherein the main aspect (*Gesichtspunkt*) of value is the aspect of the preservation and cumulation of life; i.e., the *will to power*. It is this interpretation of Nietzsche's concept of the "will to power" and its ties to the "death of God" that most differentiates Heidegger's interpretation from Löwith's.

The connection Heidegger builds between Nietzsche's concept of value and the

³⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 226.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

“will to power” is haphazard and is based on his reading of the collection of aphorisms published after Nietzsche’s death, *Der Wille zur Macht*. Heidegger uses the following quotation as his point of departure for his arguments:

Der Gesichtspunkt des ‘Wertes’ ist der Gesichtspunkt von *Erhaltungs-, Steigerungs-Bedingungen* in Hinsicht auf komplexe Gebilde von relativer Dauer des Lebens innerhalb des Werdens.³⁴⁶

The act of the transvaluation of all values pertaining to the transcendental is meant to be a valuing of the this-worldly. The aspect (*Gesichtspunkt*) of this outcome and of these new values relate to the motivating force of life, the “will to power” – the preservation and accumulation of life and becoming (*Werden*). Life, as defined by the “will to power”, is kept within the horizon of time and contained within the continuous drives of preservation and accumulation. Life is thus defined *not* as a natural World but as a finite existence – the new values are to be created in the realm of a historical existence and not in terms of an eternal Cosmos. One of the critiques Löwith often makes of Heidegger’s interpretation is that he often reads his own theories into the works of Nietzsche.³⁴⁷ One sees in this interpretation of Nietzsche, Heidegger’s own interpretation of

³⁴⁶ Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht, Theorie des Willens zur Macht und der Werthe*, §715.

³⁴⁷ “Nietzsches geschichtsphilosophische Konstruktion des Zerfalls der übersinnlichen Werte (‘Wie die ‘wahre Welt’ zur Fabel wurde’) wird bedingungslos übernommen und nur nochmals umschrieben.” *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 208. See also *Ibid*, 215, 217 and 221. That Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche was a forced interpretation is an opinion that many Heidegger scholars would later concede. Löwith’s critique is even named the “starting point for the history of the reception of Heidegger’s works on Nietzsche” by Tracy Colony. See: Tracy Colony’s essay, “Die deutschsprachige Rezeption von Heideggers Nietzsche-Interpretationen” in: *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 2; Heidegger und Nietzsche: “In Bezug auf die Methodologie kritisierte Löwith Heideggers Versuch, Nietzsche über seine eigentlichen Texte hinaus zu interpretieren und seine Fragestellungen danach zu ordnen, was Heidegger als das ‘Ungesagte’ in Nietzsches Text bezeichnete”*. Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation*, 117: “...whereas Derrida’s reading clearly appropriates Nietzsche’s text and puts it to its own use, the Heideggerian reading tends to expropriate or disposses Nietzsche’s thought by reading into it an ‘essential truth’ which does not appear to fit with this text... Heidegger’s hermeneutic results in *eisegesis*, reading out of the text (*Aus-lesen*) only what it has itself already read into the text (*Hinein-lesen*)”. Wolfgang Müller-Lauter, *Heidegger und Nietzsche*, 70f: “Die beeindruckende Selbst-Auslegung Heideggers durch Nietzsche-Texte ist nach Löwith (dem ich hierin zustimme) sowohl durch subtile Eindringlichkeit wie durch robuste Gewaltbarkeit gekennzeichnet, durch welche ‘in jeweils verschiedenem Ausmaß’ der interpretierte Text getroffen und verfehlt wird”. Heidegger reacted to Müller-Lauter’s first characterization of Heidegger’s Nietzsche interpretation from 1971 in a letter to H. Wenzel: “In einem Brief an H. Wenzel schreibt Heidegger am 10.7.1973 in bezug auf mein Nietzsche-Buch von 1971: ‘Die Kritik (sc. an Heideggers Nietzsche-Deutung) mag vieles in meinen Auslegungen als unrichtig und ‘gewaltsam’ feststellen; solange keine grundsätzliche und zugleich **positive** Auseinandersetzung mit meinen Schriften zur Bestimmung der Metaphysik vorliegt, von wo aus meine Darstellung Nietzsches geleitet wird, bewegt sich die Kritik auf einer unzureichenden Ebene””, *Ibid*, 74, fn. 35. Gadamer, however, defended Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche: “Ferner sieht er [Löwith] nicht, daß die Gewaltbarkeit, die bei vielen Heideggerschen Interpretationen auftritt, keineswegs aus dieser Theorie des Verstehens folgt. Sie ist vielmehr ein produktiver Mißbrauch der Texte, der eher einen Mangel an hermeneutischer Bewußtheit verrät... Heideggers ungeduldiges Verhal-

the horizon of time in which a *Dasein* is to be analyzed; namely, its historicity and becoming from birth unto death. His reading of Nietzsche is one that over-emphasizes becoming and the historical:

“Das Werden”, das ist für Nietzsche “der Wille zur Macht”. Der “Wille zur Macht” ist so der Grundzug des “Lebens”, welches Wort Nietzsche oft auch in der weiten Bedeutung gebraucht, nach der es innerhalb der Metaphysik mit “Werden” gleichgesetzt worden ist. Wille zur Macht, Werden, Leben und Sein im weitesten Sinne bedeuten in Nietzsches Sprache das Selbe.³⁴⁸

It is perhaps Heidegger’s concentration on the work *Der Wille zur Macht* that led to his overseeing of Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return, a concept, as has been said, that Löwith took to be the most important for Nietzsche’s philosophy. It comes then as no surprise that Löwith takes direct issue with Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept of life.

Das “Leben”, das Nietzsche zum Kriterium des Nutzens und Nachteils der Historie nimmt, ist keine geschichtliche “Existenz”, sondern der *physis* des *kosmos* verwandt... und die “Weisheit”, auf die Nietzsche hinauswollte, ist kein geschichtliches Verstehen. Nietzsches letztes und erstes Problem, das schon in den zwei Schüleraufsätzen über “Geschichte”, beziehungsweise “Willensfreiheit”, und “Fatum” bezeichnet, in der zweiten Unzeitgemäßen Betrachtung weiter entwickelt und im *Zarathustra* durch eine “Erlösung” von allem “es war” gelöst wird, ist nicht *Sein* und *Zeit*, sondern *Werden* und *Ewigkeit*.³⁴⁹

This comparison between the two Nietzsche interpretations does not find its worth in achieving a more complete understanding of Nietzsche; rather, the two respective readings are important because of their relation to both Heideggerian and Löwithian philosophy as a whole. Having correctly read Nietzsche was not just a matter of being a better Nietzsche scholar but a matter of having correctly interpreted the then present state of philosophy. Correctly understanding nihilism and the transvaluation of values was to correctly understand the correct point of departure for new philosophical endeavors. It is no accident that Heidegger’s understanding of “life” in terms of Nietzsche’s philosophy resembles his emphasis on the facticity of a *Dasein* in *Sein und Zeit* and it is no accident that Löwith’s understanding thereof resembles his fondness for an ancient Greek under-

ten zu überlieferten Texten ist so wenig die Folge seiner hermeneutischer Theorie, daß es vielmehr dem der großen Fortbildner geistiger Tradition ähnelt, die vor der Ausbildung des historischen Bewußtseins sich die Überlieferung ‘unkritisch’ anverwandelten”. *Wahrheit und Methode*, Band 2, 382.

³⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 230.

³⁴⁹ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 207.

standing of an eternal Cosmos (*Werden und Ewigkeit*).³⁵⁰

The Western metaphysic of the other-worldly (*jenseitig*) has either always been nihilistic because of its forgetfulness of Being or has become nihilistic because of the “death of God”. In both cases there arises a need to transvalue metaphysics in terms of the this-worldly (*diesseitig*). It is, however, entirely unclear to what extent Heidegger wished to retain the outcome of Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values as a new valuing of the liveliest. He saw this transvaluation as nothing less than an inversion (*Umkehrung*) of old values and an entanglement with the values it had hoped to overcome.

Allein, jede Umkehrung dieser Art bleibt nur die sich selbst blendende Verstrickung in das unkenntlich gewordene Selbe.³⁵¹

On the other hand, his philosophy of Being (*Sein*) and Thought (*Denken*) seem to follow this pattern of transvaluation via a valuing of the liveliest; only Heidegger changes vocabulary and speaks of closeness (*Nähe*) and nearness (*Nächste*):

Das Denken überwindet die Metaphysik nicht, indem es sie, noch höher hinaufsteigend, übersteigt und irgendwohin aufhebt, sondern indem es zurücksteigt in die Nähe des Nächsten.³⁵²

Heidegger judges Nietzsche’s attempt to overcome metaphysics as nothing less than a mere inversion of metaphysical doctrine and as unsuccessful.³⁵³ This inversion is problematic for Heidegger’s particular reading of Nietzsche. To escape from continuing or inverting the nihilism of the Western philosophical tradition one would either need to create something entirely new or return to a way of thinking independent from this tradition. Thus Heidegger does not wish to resolve the forgetfulness of Being within the philosophical tradition but from without via a returning (*zurücksteigen*) to pre-Platonic Greek thought – putting him in a precarious relationship to the history of philosophy. This does not, however, keep Löwith from reading Heideggerian philosophy as being quite dependent on the tradition it had hoped to avoid.

³⁵⁰ The difference in emphasis in the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger is at the same time a fundamental difference separating the philosophical interests of Löwith and Heidegger. It is worth noting that this is another expression of Löwith’s interest in a World-centric philosophy or Cosmology and Heidegger’s Human-centric philosophy of temporality and being.

³⁵¹ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 230.

³⁵² Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 44. Being and its relationship to the “closest” (*Nähe*) is first mentioned on page 25: “Das Einzige, was das Denken, das sich in ‘S. u. Z.’ zum erstenmal auszusprechen versucht, erlangen möchte, ist etwas Einfaches. Als dieses bleibt das Sein geheimnisvoll, die schlichte Nähe eines unaufdringlichen Waltens. Diese Nähe west als die Sprache selbst”.

³⁵³ See chapter 6.6 of the present work.

As mentioned, there is an irreconcilable difference between Löwith's and Heidegger's interpretation of the phrase "God is dead", the consequent nihilism and to what extent nihilism is to be viewed as the basic-process (*Grundvorgang*) determining history. Claiming that Nietzsche saw nihilism as the law of Western history, Heidegger writes.

Allein, für Nietzsche ist der Nihilismus keineswegs nur eine Verfallerscheinung, sondern der Nihilismus ist als Grundvorgang der abendländischen Geschichte zugleich und vor allem die Gesetzlichkeit dieser Geschichte.³⁵⁴

Löwith, however, interprets *nihilism as being a product of the "death of God"* – what Heidegger calls a mere manifestation of decline (*Verfallerscheinung*) – and exclusively being a problem of modernity. For Löwith, the overcoming of nihilism does not have to occur outside of the Western philosophical tradition because the tradition in its totality is not imbued by a continued crisis of meaning or forgetfulness. The two traditions in which Löwith saw meaning as being secure, in ancient Greek philosophy and Christian theology, are, however, no longer timely; they have *become* nihilistic to the modern mind. It is to this extent that Löwith does not negatively speak of a transvaluation of the highest values because of, on the one hand, the necessity of continuance (also via inversion) of past traditions, and, on the other hand, of hopefully regaining some of the clarity of these past traditions.

Man wundert sich, wieso ein Denker [Heidegger], der selbst eine "Kehre" vollzog, der auf der Zirkelstruktur alles Erschließens und Verstehens besteht und die formal-dialektischen Widerlegungen, zum Beispiel des Skeptizismus (*Sein und Zeit*, 229), als bloße "Überrumpelungsversuche" beiseite schiebt, nicht anerkennen kann, daß auch ein Versuch zur Überwindung des Nihilismus nicht voraussetzungslos und geschichtslos, diesseits des Nihilismus, beginnen kann, sondern, wie Nietzsche wußte und sagte, das zu Überwindende in sich aufhebt. "Es gibt vielerlei Weg und Weise der Überwindung: da sieh *du* zu! Aber nur ein Possenreißer denkt, 'der Mensch kann auch *übersprungen* werden'" (VI, 291).³⁵⁵

This process of the transvaluation of values and Heidegger's critique of it as being nothing else than an inversion of values is reminiscent of Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*. Transvaluation is, in Hegelian terms, both an annulment and a preservation inasmuch as it annuls the transcendental but preserves the tradition. Transvaluation does not mean a

³⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 223.

³⁵⁵ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 217.

freedom-from but an inversion of emphasis. Löwith agrees with both Nietzsche and Heidegger that philosophies of the transcendental have become untimely and that their emphasis on the other-worldly needs to be transvalued into an emphasis of the this-worldly, the liveliest (*Lebendigste*), the nearest (*am Nächsten*). The success or failure of this project of transvaluation relies on the avoidance of a mere replacement of values – a mere secularization of the other-worldly values – and achieving a this-worldly meaning-giving tool, may it be called life (*Leben*), World (*Welt*) or Being (*Sein*).

Löwith saw Heidegger's philosophy as not only being a failure to return to pre-Platonic thought but as also a failure in the attempt to transvalue metaphysics and the Human-God duality. Heidegger's emphasis on Being and *Dasein* – and the shared emphasis on existence by existentialism – is critiqued by Löwith as being a mere secularization of the Christian understanding of creationism.³⁵⁶ Löwith uses Heidegger's critique of Nietzsche – namely, that Nietzsche failed to overcome tradition – and uses it against Heidegger himself.

6.4 THE FAILURE OF EXISTENTIALISM

Was aber allem von Heidegger je Gesagten hintergründig zugrunde liegt und viele aufhorchen und hinhorchen läßt, ist ein Ungesagtes: das *religiöse Motiv*, das sich zwar vom christlichen Glauben abgelöst hat, aber gerade in seiner dogmatisch ungebundenen Unbestimmtheit um so mehr diejenigen anspricht, die nicht mehr gläubige Christen sind, aber doch religiös sein möchten (*Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 233).

In 1948, Löwith wrote an essay titled, “Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism”, in which not only the emergence of existentialism as a reaction to nihilism is described but the origin of what Heidegger called the “homelessness” (*Heimatlosigkeit*³⁵⁷) of Humanity. According to Löwith, “we are all existentialists” inasmuch as we are caught up in the “predicament of being modern”. This “predicament” is defined as being the “dissolution of a natural and social order in which man was supposed to have a definite nature and place”.³⁵⁸ In this essay he describes the problem of nihilism

³⁵⁶ When the secularization thesis is discussed in the secondary literature on Löwith it is in terms of *Meaning in History* and Löwith's critiques of philosophies of history. This thesis is, however, a running theme in many of his writings and is an expression of a failure to consummate either Nietzsche's concept of transvaluation or Hegel's concept of *Aufhebung*.

³⁵⁷ See: Heidegger, “Über den Humanismus”, 31.

³⁵⁸ “Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism”, VIII, 104.

as not being successfully reconciled by either Heidegger or existentialism but as being brought to the forefront of philosophy through an emphasis of *Dasein* and of being-in-the-world. The continued nihilism of existentialism is attributed by Löwith to the failure to transvalue the Christian concept of existence. In escaping modern nihilism many existentialists attempted to escape modernity.

I think it would be very difficult to refute the so-called “nihilism” of existential ontology, on theoretical as well as moral grounds, unless one believes in man and world as a creation of God or in the cosmos as a divine and eternal order – in other words, unless one is not “modern”.³⁵⁹

This either/or calls back to both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s own solutions to overcoming existential nihilism; the former wanting to return to a more original form of Christianity and the latter wanting to re-translate Humanity into nature. Löwith returns to these two philosophers again towards the end of the essay and identifies the source of existentialist nihilism as being a problem of Being and the problem of a continued, yet devalued, Christian concept of existence:

Either choice would be indeed persuasive since one cannot wish to remain forever nailed on the cross of contingency, absurdity, and total displacement. But choosing between the one or the other “project” or *Weltentwurf* would still be an existential attitude and decision and therefore contradictory to the nature of the chosen world-view. [...] We would have to overcome in principle the modern attitude as such toward the whole of Being if we are to overcome existentialism.³⁶⁰

The contradictory nature of wanting to return to one of these projects (*Weltentwurf*) is that neither are timely – one cannot merely make ancient doctrine relevant by choosing it as a replacement to modern problems of meaning. Hence Löwith’s commitment to transvaluation and *Aufhebung* which both critiques modernity and carries it forward.

Löwith comes dangerously close to sounding like his mentor when he describes the problem of modernity as being one in which originates out of Humanity’s “attitude toward Being”. He is not, however, describing something in line with Heidegger’s forgetfulness of Being in which the ontological difference between Being and beings in the history of metaphysics is ignored, rather, he is defining something particularly modern that arises out of the *secularization of creationism into existentialism*. And, it is Heidegger’s philosophy of *Dasein* that Löwith sees as being the best expression of the

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 110f.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, 122f.

problem of nihilism and of the need to reform Humanity's view of Being.

Kann überhaupt das Wesen des Seins erfragt werden, abgesehen von einem Seienden als dem zu Befragenden, sei dieses, wie in "Sein und Zeit", der fragende Mensch, oder ein Mensch und Welt erschaffender Gott, oder ein das Menschliche und das Göttliche tragender Kosmos? Und da Heidegger den Versuch einer Fundierung des universalen Seins im auf sich vereinzelt Dasein des Menschen selbst umgekehrt hat, bleibt nur die Wahl, das Sein entweder christlich theologisch oder griechisch kosmologisch zu erhellen. Eine Ontologie ohne Kosmologie ist wie ein menschliches "Dasein" ohne Natur und Geschlecht.³⁶¹

In response to this crisis of meaning Löwith sees existentialism, not only explicitly in the writings of Sartre but in the philosophy of Heidegger,³⁶² as unsuccessfully transvaluing the Platonic dictum that essence precedes existence by conjoining the two; namely, essence becomes existence with the result of making essence *finite*. Making essence finite is to make the other-worldly this-worldly, it is to secularize Greek and Christian concepts of the immutable. This secularization merely replaces the values of being-*brought-into-the-world* via creation with existentialist values of being-*thrown-into-the-world*. His argumentation to this end is simple and, as in all things Löwithian, involves a comparison between the ancient Greeks and Christian theology. To this extent Löwith includes in his essay a short analysis of both the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

On the one hand, for Aristotle, "essence and existence are both manifest to the same kind of thinking" and he is not concerned "with the sheer factuality of existence in general or with the contingency of human existence in particular, but with essential existence" because of the inseparability of "whatness" and "thatness" (*being of the World*).³⁶³ This is in blatant contrast to Löwith's reading of Thomas Aquinas for whom all being is foremost a creation. With the presence of a creator God beings had not always essentially existed but were rather brought into existence at a specific time (*being brought into the World*). The two, essence and existence, are no longer to be thought together, rather, *emphasis falls on the predicament of being brought into existence* through the will and, in accordance with, the plan of a Creator. Löwith feels he can jus-

³⁶¹ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 152.

³⁶² Heidegger attempted to distance himself from Sartre's formal emphasis of existence over essence but Löwith saw his philosophy of *Dasein* to still be within this tradition. See: "Über den Humanismus", 20.

³⁶³ "Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism", VIII, 114.

tifiably attribute this emphasis on existence to the Christian tradition of creationism as a whole and pinpoints it as the starting point for the Heideggerian and existentialist predicament of being-*thrown-into-the-world* (*in die Welt geworfen sein*). The emphasis on existence of creationism finds its secularized form in the emphasis on existence in the existentialist tradition. Being *thrown* into the World is merely a form of being *brought* into the World and both emphasize the predicament of not being *of the* World – existence and essence are not thought together.

It is because of this emphasis on existence that existentialists, who have thrown away their creator, can ask the following questions concerning essence and not be able to answer: “Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?” (*Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?*³⁶⁴) and, accordingly, “who or what cast me into existence?” According to Löwith this question would have never occurred to a Greek philosopher “for whom existence as such – that there is something – was an unquestionable element within the essential structure, order, and beauty of an always existing cosmos without beginning and end, including the existence of rational animals called men”.³⁶⁵ The Christian answer to Heidegger’s metaphysical question, as to why anything exists and, the secondary question of responsibility for one’s *Dasein*, is nothing less than the *will* of a creator God. The secularization of this question by Heidegger and the subsequent inability of the existentialist tradition to answer is evidence for Löwith of the dimming of the modern mind in comparison to the brilliance and autonomy of the ancient Greek and Christian worldviews. Humanity is no longer a natural and necessary part of a greater Cosmos nor the creation of a God but a *Dasein* whose relative factual and historical existence was to determine the truth of Being.

In existentialist philosophy Humanity suffers from this secularization in its independence and responsibility, needing to first posit its own death – i.e., one’s temporality – in order to be able to affirm its existence. The secularization of creationism results in a “metaphysics” wherein the horizon of time defines the facticity of a *Dasein*. This does not result in the positive creation of a feasible worldview in which Humanity finally achieves its proper place within the natural and social order. It is, rather, the continuation of a fallacious worldview in which one asserts a conclusion of the Christian tradi-

³⁶⁴ Heidegger, “*Was ist Metaphysik?*”, 38. This question of Heidegger’s is a translation of Leibniz’s query: “*pourquoy il y a plutôt quelque chose que rien?*”

³⁶⁵ “Heidegger: Problem and Background of Existentialism”, VIII, 115.

tion, namely, that existence precedes essence, but leaves out the driving predicate that had emphasized this conclusion – a creator God. The secularization of being brought into the world into the Heideggerian being thrown into the world brings along with it the underlying Christian value that emphasizes existence over essence. With the presence of this underlying value, modern philosophy has a difficult time of thinking of Humanity as being *from* the world and continues, rather, to posit Humanity as something not of this world. It is, in essence, the continued problem of the idea that a *Dasein* is an *animal rationale* – that is, as being both natural (*animal*) and unnatural (*rationale*).

6.5 THE NATURAL AND UNNATURAL IN HUMANITY: HEIDEGGER'S

FREEDOM UNTO DEATH

Ich hatte nebeneinander Philosophie und Biologie studiert und schon auf dem Gymnasium einen inspirierenden Biologieunterricht gehabt. Hier ging mir bei den mikroskopischen Untersuchungen der Protoplasmaströmung in den Staubfäden einer Blüte und der Bewegung einzelliger Algen und Infusorien erstmalig auf, was für ein Wunder an Organisation die Lebendigkeit eines Organismus ist. Was ich demgemäß an der existenzial-ontologischen Fragestellung vermißte, war die Natur – um uns herum und in uns selbst (*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*, VIII, 280).

More striking to Löwith than the possible political implications of Heidegger's philosophy of facticity was his omission of the natural World in his philosophy. Löwith was able to personally confront his mentor, however, with the concerns that in a philosophy centered on facticity and *Dasein*, the natural World was missing.

Wenn aber die Natur fehlt. Dann fehlt nicht ein Seiendes oder ein Seinsbereich unter anderen, sondern das Ganze des Seienden in seiner Seiendheit ist verfehlt und läßt sich nicht nachträglich zur Ergänzung hereinholen. [...] In *Sein und Zeit* schien mir die Natur im existenzialen Verständnis von Faktizität und Geworfenheit zu verschwinden.³⁶⁶

Being-thrown-into-the-world was the existential predicament of having to affirm the social and historical circumstances in which one was thrown. Being-in-the-world, then, did not mean existing within the totality of a Cosmos but existing within the facticity of circumstance. The question concerning the role of an all-encompassing natural World within the question of Being was one that Löwith recalls Heidegger as having provided

³⁶⁶ “*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*”, VIII, 280.

the following answer:

Auf diese meine frühesten Bedenken und Widerstände antworteten Sie [Heidegger] mir: “Die ‘Natur’ des Menschen ist doch nicht etwas für sich und an den ‘Geist’ angeklebt. Die Frage ist: besteht eine Möglichkeit, von der *Natur* so einen Grund- und Leitfaden für die *begriffliche* Interpretation des Daseins zu gewinnen oder vom ‘Geist’ – oder von keinem der beiden –, sondern ursprünglich aus der Ganzheit der Seinsverfassung, worin in begrifflicher Absicht das Existenziale für die Möglichkeit der Ontologie überhaupt einen Vorrang hat. Denn die anthropologische Interpretation ist als ontologische erst vollziehbar auf dem Grunde einer geklärten ontologischen Problematik überhaupt”.³⁶⁷

Whereas Heidegger was cautious of the possibilities the natural World offered in conceptually interpreting *Dasein* (“*besteht eine Möglichkeit, von der Natur so einen Grund- und Leitfaden für die begriffliche Interpretation des Daseins zu gewinnen*”), Löwith found it necessary to presuppose a natural World not only as a backdrop in interpreting Humanity but as encompassing Humanity itself.³⁶⁸

It is at this point where Löwith sees Heidegger’s discussion of *Dasein* as describing an existence that, on the one hand, exists in a natural World but, on the other hand, is independent of it. Löwith calls this a discrepancy (*Zwiespalt*) that begins with one of Heidegger’s concepts that is key to his philosophy of facticity; namely, being-thrown-into-the-world. That a *Dasein* is already *there* (*da*) and lives in the natural World brings about the necessity for Heidegger of having to undertake one’s existence as a thinking being. And, in the act of “undertaking” one’s existence, or in affirming one’s *Dasein*, Löwith claims to have found something very problematic. It is to posit Humanity as an

³⁶⁷ Ibid. Löwith is quoting from a letter written to him by Heidegger on the 20th of August, 1927.

³⁶⁸ Otto Pöggeler, who wrote his *Habilitation* (1964/65) under the direction of Gadamer in Heidelberg, takes note of this discrepancy in his book, *Neue Wege mit Heidegger*, but does not consider Löwith’s critique of Heidegger with respect to the “natural” and “unnatural” aspect of Heidegger’s concept of *Dasein*. See: *Neue Wege*, 397: “*Ganz fern aber liegt es Heidegger, das Zurückgewinnen eines ursprünglich griechischen Bodens durch die (angebliche) frühe Erfahrung der Physis... zu einer Sicht des Menschen, die im Menschen auch nur ein Stück Natur sieht (wie etwa Karl Löwith es nahelegte)*”. See also the essay by Josef Chytrý, *Zur Wiedergewinnung des Kosmos; Karl Löwith contra Martin Heidegger*, published in *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*: “*Gegen Heideggers ‘Geschick der Geschichte’ argumentiert Löwith daher, daß die Philosophie im ersten Fall eben die Entdeckung dieses Kosmos sein muß, eine Entdeckung, die nur gemacht werden konnte wegen des griechischen Verständnisses, daß das eigentliche menschliche, d.h. freie Denken jenseits des Alltäglichen-Praktischen stattfindet. Während Heideggers Weltanalyse durch Umweltorientierung und vergängliche **pragmata** der menschlichen Geschichte in eine Weltgeschichte mündet, steht die ursprüngliche griechische Philosophie fest in dem Sehen und Schauen eines ewigen Kosmos, im **theorein** als der höchsten menschlichen Aktivität*”, 91. Although Chytrý’s essay has a title that promises an interesting discussion and comparison of the philosophy of Löwith and Heidegger, he does not move from the surface of Löwith’s writings and rather abstracts away from the topic at hand to discuss an ancient Greek understanding of Cosmos.

animal rationale,³⁶⁹ as an *animalistic* being that expresses its *reason* in positively undertaking its existence – it is to say that one has to awaken out of the natural state of *being-there*. The best expression of this discrepancy, although not the only one,³⁷⁰ is Heidegger's discussion of death in *Sein und Zeit* in which Humanity is the only existence which can struggle with its natural impulses to stay alive and, on the contrary, its *unnatural freedom* to die.

Die äußerste Weise dieses Zwiespalts [von Animalität und Rationalität] bezeugt sich in der Möglichkeit der Selbstvernichtung: daß der Mensch als einziges Lebewesen nicht nur den *Trieb* zur Selbsterhaltung, sondern auch die "*Freiheit zum Tode*" hat.³⁷¹

Löwith understands this "freedom" as a freedom from the natural World and as the rational expressing its freedom over the animalistic. The freedom unto death is, however, for Heidegger the "highest instance"³⁷² of being-in-the-world, and in Löwith's words, the product of having taken control of one's natural existence:

Der Mensch ist in sein Da geworfen und muß sich darum selbst mit seinem nichtigen Ende "übernehmen", um frei existieren zu können und sich auf seine Möglichkeiten zu entwerfen.³⁷³

Löwith, on the other hand, thinks it faulty to imagine Humanity as being able to be free from its natural existence or to be free unto death (*die Freiheit zum Tode*). In every instance Humanity is bound by the necessity of the natural World and to this extent any particular *Dasein* cannot undertake its own existence, it cannot be "free" in relation to a natural event such as death. Löwith writes of his confusion pertaining to Heidegger's concept of freedom unto death:

Bei diesem zentralen Stück der Analytik des Daseins konnte ich Ihrem Gedankengang nicht folgen, denn auch dann, wenn sich das Dasein selbst übernimmt, sein Ende kann es gerade nicht in derselben Weise übernehmen, weil das wirkliche Ende keine eigenste Möglichkeit ist, sondern eine uns allen bevorstehende *natürliche Notwendigkeit*, in der

³⁶⁹ Löwith notes that Heidegger opposed this designation but feels that Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* nonetheless falls into this category. See: "*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*", VIII, 281.

³⁷⁰ See also: Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 15-18.

³⁷¹ "*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*", VIII, 281 (My emphasis).

³⁷² See: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 50: "*Der Tod ist eine Seinsmöglichkeit, die je das Dasein selbst zu übernehmen hat. Mit dem Tod steht sich das Dasein selbst in seinem eigensten Seinkönnen bevor. In dieser Möglichkeit geht es dem Dasein um sein.*" and § 63: "*Hat das In-der-Welt-sein eine höhere Instanz seines Seinkönnens als seinen Tod?*"

³⁷³ "*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*", VIII, 280.

wir mit jedermann übereinkommen.³⁷⁴

Is Heidegger's reference to death as being the innermost possibility of a *Dasein*³⁷⁵ really at ends with Löwith's counter that death is merely a natural necessity? Heidegger himself speaks of this possibility as being certain³⁷⁶ and that death is merely something that opens up the possibility for undertaking one's existence. Löwith undermines this possibility, however, by calling it only half of the truth – understanding one's existence does not *only* lie in understanding one's temporality. To understand Humanity as belonging to the World is to understand conscious existence – such as the fear of death – in tandem with unconscious existence; i.e., the various ways in which the World necessitates Humanity – such as the phenomenon of death itself.

Die Voraussetzung der Ontologie des Bewußtseins von Descartes bis zu Hegel und darüber hinaus bis zur Existenzphilosophie, daß das seiner selbst bewußte und sich zu sich selbst verhaltende Sein auch für das Verständnis des unbewußt-lebendigen Seins das maßgebliche sei, diese Voraussetzung ist nur die halbe Wahrheit. Wenn man sie für die ganze nimmt, ist sie falsch, denn voraus geht dem seiner selbst bewußten Sein eine Weise menschlichen Daseins, die nicht durch waches Bewußtsein bestimmt ist.³⁷⁷

Löwith's critique of Heidegger's discussion of being free unto death can be narrowed down to his objection to the claim that the fear of death allows for the possibility to exist as a completed potentiality of being (“*als ganzes Seinkönnen zu existieren*”³⁷⁸).

The theme of “freedom unto death” provoked not only criticism from Löwith but two essays titled after the theme, “*Die Freiheit zum Tode*” (1962, 1969), in which Löwith takes Heidegger's particular treatment of the topic in *Sein und Zeit* and focuses on suicide.³⁷⁹ Löwith speaks of the freedom unto death, or the decision to commit suicide, as coming from physical and psychological (i.e., *natural*) motivations. The apparent

³⁷⁴ Ibid, 282 (My emphasis).

³⁷⁵ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 53: “*Der Tod ist eigenste Möglichkeit des Da-seins. Das Sein zu ihr erschließt dem Dasein sein eigenstes Seinkönnen, darin es um das Sein des Daseins schlechthin geht*”.

³⁷⁶ Ibid: “*Die gewisse Möglichkeit des Todes erschließt das Dasein aber als Möglichkeit nur so, daß es vorlaufend zu ihr diese Möglichkeit als eigenstes Seinkönnen für sich **ermöglicht***”.

³⁷⁷ “*Zu Heideggers Seinsfrage*”, VIII, 286.

³⁷⁸ See: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 53: “*Weil das Vorlaufen in die unüberholbare Möglichkeit alle ihr vorgelagerten Möglichkeiten mit erschließt, liegt in ihm die Möglichkeit eines existenziellen Vorwegnehmens des **ganzen** Daseins, das heißt die Möglichkeit, als **ganzes Seinkönnen** zu existieren*”.

³⁷⁹ That Löwith's mother committed suicide undoubtedly made this philosophical problem a personal one for Löwith. He found it difficult to imagine his mother being “free unto death” but much more compelled to commit suicide because of the impending danger of being sent to an internment camp. He was to extrapolate this experience to every experience of suicide and conclude that it is not an “individual” experience but an extreme “social” experience.

Human “freedom” to commit suicide that is not possible for animals or a necessarily existing God is not a philosophical and composed rebellion against one’s being-thrown-in-the-world but something circumstantial. Löwith also argues against the Heideggerian idea that the act or decision to commit suicide is one that puts one in the position of being alone (*auf sich selber gestellt*) but that even in this act of isolation one is still a *Mitmensch* amongst *Mitmenschen* and therewith puts the *individual freedom* of suicide to question. Löwith finds not only the concept of “being-unto-death” but the actual act of suicide as well as being essentially tied into its role in the social world (*Mitwelt*).

Löwith argues to this point from three examples of suicide from the Second World War: the German Jews who committed suicide to escape deportation and gasification, the German officers at the end of the war who committed suicide to escape responsibility and the Japanese statesmen who killed themselves to save their honor and be in solidarity with their conquered people. Löwith uses these as blatant examples of suicide that were committed with regard to the actions or expectations of one’s fellow human beings (*Mitmenschen*). The decision to commit suicide follows only after one is *de-sperans* – without the hope that the *circumstances* in which one lives could change and not because of the freedom to practice reason.

Alle diese Menschen haben sich freiwillig, unter dem Zwang der Verhältnisse, das Leben genommen: frei und gewolltermaßen, weil kein Mensch gezwungen werden kann, sich selbst zu töten, und gezwungenermaßen, weil sich im allgemeinen kein Mensch das Leben nimmt, solange er noch eine Spur von Hoffnung hat, daß sich die Verhältnisse ändern könnten... Es hat zunächst den Anschein, daß es einen nicht verzeifelten, gelassenen, philosophischen Selbstmord und eine echte Freiheit zum Tode nicht gibt und nicht geben könne.³⁸⁰

Löwith continues by quoting Spinoza, in agreement, in saying that is impossible for a healthy human, according to her nature, to strive after her own destruction. One is not “free” to choose suicide but is coerced by external causes.

What remains unspoken in this discussion of Löwith’s is the over-arching critique of Heidegger’s philosophy; namely, that it is Human-centric. It denies a natural conception of Humanity (World-Humanity) and also attempted to distance itself from the Christian tradition (God-Humanity) thus placing Heidegger’s philosophy in line with Hegel’s students of the nineteenth century and the first transformation of *Geist*.

³⁸⁰ “Töten, Mord, und Selbstmord: Die Freiheit zum Tode” (1962), I, 403.

6.6 THE LONGEST ERROR: PART II

Nietzsches geschichtsphilosophische Konstruktion des Zerfalls der übersinnlichen Werte (“Wie die ‘wahre Welt’ endlich zur Fabel wurde”) wird [von Heidegger] bedingungslos übernommen und nur nochmals umschrieben. Zwar spricht Heidegger nicht so eindeutig wie Nietzsche von einer Geschichte des längsten “Irrtums”, der mit einem “Incipit Zarathustra” endet; aber der Sache nach kommt auch seine Stellung zur gesamten bisherigen Überlieferung auf einen Neubeginn und eine Umwertung des längsten Irrtums hinaus, als habe man das Sein selbst bedacht, wenn man das Seiende als Seiendes dachte (*Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 208).

Löwith’s accusation that Heidegger had merely rewritten Nietzsche’s analysis of “how the true world became fable” in his understanding of the forgetfulness of Being is not entirely a criticism that Löwith himself was free from. It is unarguable that Löwith favored the meaning-giving structure of the ancient Greek Cosmos in which the essence of Humanity was thought together with the order of the natural World. It is also unarguable that Löwith thought that the natural World was essential in understanding Humanity and that the World was being continually neglected in modern philosophy. Löwith does not call this a forgetfulness (*Vergessenheit*) or the longest delusion of philosophy (*der längste Irrtum*) but a loss (*Verlust*). Löwith describes this loss most eloquently in an essay published in 1960, “*Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*”.

Wenn die Geschichte des Denkens ein kontinuierlich oder auch sprunghaft fortschreitender Fortschritt wäre, der die jeweils vorangegangenen Weisen des Denkens unwiderruflich aufhebt und überholt, dann könnte man *nach* Kants Kritik der kosmologischen Ideen nicht mehr *vorkritisch* denken und weiterhin nach Hegels Kantkritik nicht mehr *vorhegelisch*. Wer jedoch nicht davon überzeugt ist, daß die Weltgeschichte das Weltgericht ist und daß die Geschichte des Denkens schon als solche der Wahrheit der Dinge fortschreitend näher kommt, wird sich der Möglichkeit offenhalten, daß die Geschichte auch ein fortschreitender Verlust von wahren Einsichten sein könnte und daß also Kants Fortschritt zu einer transzendental philosophischen Reflexion von der Welt auf uns selbst und unser Welterkennen auch in *dem* Sinn ein “Fortschritt” sein könnte, daß er sich vom physischen Kosmos fortschreitend entfernt, indem er ihn als eine kosmologische “Idee” unserer regelgebenden Vernunft zu erweisen versucht, der keine Realität entspricht. Der Sache nach begegnen sich Nietzsche und Heraklit in einem ursprünglichen Anblick der Welt. Dieser Anblick ist im Übergang vom griechischen Kosmos zum christlichen Saeculum für das allgemeine Bewußtsein aus dem Gesichtskreis

verschwunden, indem die Welt beargwöhnt und verachtet und dann bezweifelt und verweltlicht wurde.³⁸¹

What is it then that conjoins and separates Heidegger's emphasis on Being and Löwith's wish for a concept of the natural World in philosophy?

The starting point in answering this question needs to be in relation to the previous discussion of their shared understanding of Nietzsche's concept of the transvaluation of all values. It was said that a transvaluation of the other-worldly was to be a reversal and a valuation of the this-worldly, the liveliest, the immediate. That Heidegger was against the transvaluation of metaphysics did not stop him, however, from defining Being in terms of this transvaluation; namely, as being proximate (*das Nächste*) and this-worldly.

Doch das Sein – was ist das Sein? Es “ist” Es selbst. Dies zu erfahren und zu sagen, muß das künftige Denken lernen. Das “Sein” – das ist nicht Gott und nicht ein Weltgrund. Das Sein ist wesenhaft weiter denn alles Seiende und ist gleichwohl dem Menschen näher als jedes Seiende, sei dies ein Fels, ein Tier, ein Kunstwerk, eine Maschine, sei es ein Engel oder Gott. Das Sein ist das Nächste.³⁸²

Löwith's own consideration of this transvaluation did not drive him to create pseudo-religious terms for describing the World and is much more complex, although more incomplete and dispersed amongst his writings, than Heidegger's ever was. His valuation of the this-worldly was firstly to devalue philosophies of history for which the future had replaced the transcendental, thus devaluing a forward-looking historical consciousness that necessarily denied the essence of beings from being complete via their nature as being in a process of progressing towards a goal. Anticipation and expectation for the fruits of the future were replaced by Löwith in his philosophy of the this-worldly via a philosophy of eternity at midday; i.e., via a philosophy of timeless eternity. Löwith did, however, make a strong distinction between the secularization of devalued religious concepts and their transvaluation. Their mere secularization was only an exchange of vocabulary wherein the underlying nihilistic values of these concepts were retained. The problems of existentialism were, therefore, necessarily Christian problems as it worked within the same conceptual framework of its predecessor but stripped itself of the meaning giving tool of the other-worldly. It thus gave itself problems it could not possibly

³⁸¹ Löwith, “*Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*”, 22f.

³⁸² Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 23.

solve as it unwittingly searched for meaning within a nihilistic structure. Properly dealing with the problems of existentialism for Löwith meant finding a different conceptual framework; i.e., through their transvaluation. As Heidegger notes, this is no new beginning as every reversal is still a movement within tradition, it is, however, a movement away from the framework that had become problematic.

Devalued Concepts:

Existence —————>

- as being-brought-into-the-world
- as being spiritually connected to God

Eschatology —————>

- history has a *telos*

Their Secularized Versions:

Existentialism

- as being-thrown-into-the-world
- as *ek-sisting* in the World

Philosophies of History

- history is a story of improvement

Devalued Concepts:

Strong Human-God relationship —//>

- as being closely bound to the other-worldly

Eschatology —//>

- oriented towards the future

As Transvalued:

Strong Human-World relationship

- as being-of-this-world

The Eternal Return

- oriented towards the present

Löwith's understanding of the natural World is similar to that of both Heraclitus and Nietzsche; as being an eternal order not determined or created by a God or Humanity.³⁸³

Am Ende ist aber die Welt selbst... eine kosmische Ordnung, die kein Gott und kein Mensch gemacht hat, "dieselbe für alles und alle", ein immer lebendiges Logosfeuer, "aufflammend nach Maßen".³⁸⁴

Heidegger, on the other hand, understood the World to be the openness of Being (*die Offenheit des Seins*) and the opening of Being (*die Lichtung des Seins*):

"Welt" bedeutet in jener Bestimmung überhaupt nicht ein Seiendes und keinen Bereich von Seiendem, sondern die Offenheit des Seins. Der Mensch ist und ist Mensch, insofern er der Ek-sistierende ist. Er steht in

³⁸³ See: fragment 30 of Heraclitus.

³⁸⁴ Löwith, "Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie", 22.

die Offenheit des Seins hinaus, als welche das Sein selber ist, das als der Wurf sich das Wesen des Menschen in “die Sorge” erworfen hat. Dergestalt geworfen steht der Mensch “in” der Offenheit des Seins. “Welt” ist die Lichtung des Seins, in die der Mensch aus seinem geworfenen Wesen her heraussteht.³⁸⁵

These two concepts of World are irreconcilable and Löwith’s concept of World and Heidegger’s concept of Being are irreconcilable. A philosophy of the proximate meant for Löwith a translation of the essence of Humanity back into the natural World – a translation back into the all encompassing natural Cosmos whose immediacy is even discernable “in the wasteful gatherings of manure”.³⁸⁶ The process of Nietzsche’s transvaluation, that Löwith himself was to adopt and continue, was already formulated by Löwith in his Nietzsche book of 1935. Each of the predicates presumes the need for transvaluation via the degeneration of the other-worldly and thus shows the importance of the valuation of the Worldly.

1. daß es ausschließlich auf das Sein der *Welt* ankommt – wenn der Glaube an *Gott* als den Schöpfer der Welt nicht mehr lebendig ist.
2. daß das *Sein* dieser immer schon seienden Welt eine aus sich selber bewegte, ursprüngliche *Physis* ist – wenn das Sein nicht wunderbarer Weise aus dem *Nichts* entspringt.
3. daß die physische Welt *ewig* ist – wenn sie keinen ursprünglichen *Anfang* und kein zielvolles *Ende* hat.
4. daß die Ewigkeit einer *immer*-seienden physischen Welt eine ewige *Zeit* ist – wenn sie nicht die *zeitlose Ewigkeit* eines überweltlichen und übernatürlichen Gottes ist.
5. daß der *Mensch* von *Natur* und von der *Welt* ist – wenn er nicht eines übernatürlichen und überweltlichen Gottes *geschaffenes Ebenbild* ist.
6. daß die Frage nach dem Verhältnis des *immerwährenden* Seins der physischen *Welt* zu dem *endlichen* Dasein des Menschen nicht zu umgehen ist – wenn die Antwort auf das Verhältnis von Mensch und Welt nicht schon durch den Glauben an die *gemeinsame* Schöpfung und Zuordnung von Welt und Mensch durch Gott gegeben ist.
7. daß der *Zufall* alles faktischen Da-seins notwendig Problem wird, wenn der Glaube and die *Vorsehung* und deren saekularisierte Formen nicht mehr glaubwürdig ist.
8. daß das Rätselhafte des Zufalls “Mensch” keine Lösung findet, wenn der Mensch nicht in das ewige Ganze des von Natur aus Seienden

³⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 42.

³⁸⁶ Löwith quotes in German from Heraclitus’ 124th fragment which reads: “*wie ein wüst hingeschütteter Misthaufen ist die schönste, vollkommenste Welt*” (“*Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*”, 22). Because of the problems pertaining to this passage I have translated the version Löwith uses into English.

eingefügt ist.³⁸⁷

A philosophy of proximity meant for Heidegger, however, asking the primordial question of what it means to say that something “is”. Heidegger’s answer to nihilism has its origin in his not wanting to be wrapped up in the philosophical tradition; he was not interested in transvaluing old values but returning to something primordial. In doing so he did not draw out the natural consequences of nihilism as Löwith lists above but was stuck asking his primordial question in quite a modern fashion; i.e., using secularized Christian conceptual tools.

The question of Being has the requirement of a questioner, an *Ek-sistenz* that is capable of being concerned with and responsible for its own being. To begin the knowledge of Being with the questioning of *Ek-sistenz*, or *Dasein*, is to ground the knowledge of Being in the consciousness of an individual. This is, according to Löwith, not only akin to but dependent on the last two thousand years of Christian philosophy that Heidegger had hoped to bypass and that begins with the “I” and philosophizes outwards.

Auch bei Husserl, Jaspers und Heidegger handelt es sich nicht um die natürliche Welt an ihr selbst, sondern um den “Totalhorizont” unseres intentionalen Bewußtseins und seiner “Leistungen”, oder um “Weltorientierung” im Hinblick auf die Erhellung der eigenen Existenz, oder um unser je eigenes “In-der-Welt-sein”. Sie alle bewegen sich, trotz ihrer Kritik an Descartes, noch wie dieser innerhalb der christlichen Überlieferung, für *die nicht der Kosmos das alles Umfassende ist...*³⁸⁸

To all differences between Löwith’s concept of World and Heidegger’s concept of Being both agree that language acts as a kind of mediator between, on the one hand, Humanity and World and, on the other, Humanity and Being. The similarities do not, however, warrant a comparison of the role of language in their respective philosophies, rather, their approach to theories of language was inspired by a need to redefine Humanity in relation to something greater – World or Being. The direction in which Löwith was to take his writings on language was one in which he was to define Humanity in contradis-

³⁸⁷ Nietzsche *Philosophie*, VI, 338.

³⁸⁸ Löwith, “*Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*”, 7 (My emphasis). See also page 12: “*Nichts, meint Augustin und meinen auch wir, fühle der Mensch tam intime als sich selbst. Dieses intime Selbst, das meta-physisch gedacht in Descartes’ cogito me cogitare und in Kants transzendentelem Ich und in Husserls reinem Ego und in Heideggers Dasein, dem es in seinem Sein um es selbst geht, wieder erscheint ist, ist nach Augustin zugleich dasjenige, durch das wir auch “alles Übrige” – etiam caetera – empfinden.*”

tion to the Heideggerian idea of an ek-sisting *Dasein*. It was this Heideggerian idea of a historical existence that Löwith saw as keeping Heidegger from regarding the natural World.

Der Grund aber, weshalb Heideggers Seinsfrage das lebendige Sein der von Natur aus bestehenden Welt außer acht läßt und nur als einen “Entwurf” kennt, ist die existenziale Verengung der natürlichen Welt auf Weltgeschichte und Menschenwelt, im Ausgang vom Menschen als einer geschichtlichen Existenz.³⁸⁹

In criticizing the notion of a historical existence Löwith attempts to understand Humanity within the totality of World.

6.7 THE NATURE OF HUMANITY; WORLD, EK-SISTENZ, AND LANGUAGE

Dieser dem Tier abgründig verwandte Mensch war einstmals festgestellt gewesen, nämlich durch den Glauben an eine oberste göttliche Autorität, welche ihm sagte, was er ist, und ihm befiehlt, was er sein soll. Mit dem Wegfall dieser Autorität, welche bisher die Menschennatur überhöht und bestimmt hat, verliert der Mensch seine feste Stellung zwischen Gott und Tier. Er befindet sich nun, auf seinen eigenen Willen gestellt, vor der Möglichkeit eines Aufstiegs zum Übermenschen oder eines Herabsinkens zum Herdentiermenschen (*Natur und Humanität des Menschen* (1957), I, 276).

Important for Löwith in valuing the this-worldly was a transvaluation of the idea of Humanity as a whole. Again, showing his loyalty to Nietzschean philosophy, this transvaluation of Humanity resembles Nietzsche’s construct of the *Übermensch* who is the meaning of the earth (*der Sinn der Erde*). Being the meaning of the earth is rather a belonging to the meaning of the earth or, rather, to be inseparable from the earth/World.

Der Übermensch ist der Sinn der Erde. Euer Wille sage: der Übermensch sei der Sinn der Erde! Ich beschwöre euch, meine Brüder, bleibt der Erde treu und glaubt Denen nicht, welche euch von überirdischen Hoffnungen reden! Giftmischer sind es, ob sie es wissen oder nicht.³⁹⁰

Löwith was to take this idea, that the Christian concept of Humanity was something to be overcome and transvalued, and expanded on it. In opposition to the tradition of Christianity, the ancient Greeks did not philosophize from consciousness outwards.

Kein griechischer Philosoph ist auf den Gedanken verfallen, daß man,

³⁸⁹ *Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, VIII, 152.

³⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Vorrede, §3.

um das Eine und Ganze alles von Natur aus Seienden zu erforschen, vom Selbstbewußtsein des Menschen oder vom eigensten Dasein ausgehen müsse.³⁹¹

Modern philosophy has been driven primarily by the investigation of one's surroundings with the starting point of a self-consciousness. Löwith sees this placement of emphasis on self-consciousness already in the writings of Augustine.

Entsprechend dieser Abwendung von der äußeren Welt in der Zuwendung zum eigenen Selbst, das alles in seiner memoria behält, analysiert Augustin das Phänomen der Zeit nicht mehr nach aristotelischem Vorbild im Hinblick auf die sichtbare Bewegung der Himmelskörper, sondern in der Re-flexion auf die innere Bewegung der menschlichen Seele.³⁹²

Heidegger's concept of Dasein is one that Löwith often uses to signify the continuation of a very Christian and Cartesian philosophy of self-consciousness. Heidegger was, however, aware of the need to transvalue the modern concept of Humanity but *because he thinks of Being and Dasein separately* his transvaluation of Humanity does not have the same outcome as his transvaluation of Being – i.e., *Dasein* is not to be defined in terms of the *liveliest (Lebendigste)* but in terms of Being.³⁹³ This is, for Löwith, not an attempt to redefine Humanity into the natural World but to *recreate* a relationship akin to that between the Christian God and Humanity, wherein one is made in the image of the other, via a pseudo-religious relationship between Being (*Sein*) and *Dasein*. *Dasein* is not to be seen as an image of Being but, in its *Ek-sistenz*, it is the only being who can “stand in the clearance of Being” (*das Stehen in der Lichtung des Seins*).

Löwith's goal, however, was to think of World and Humanity together, as one belonging to the meaning and essence of the other. It is to this extent that Löwith does not philosophize about a particular *Dasein* but about Humans (*Menschen*) who are essentially fellow-Humans (*Mitmenschen*) and as such can never be thought as existing free from their social context. This social context, however, can never be thought of as existing free from its natural context which itself can never be thought of as being free from the greater order of the Cosmos. These distinctions (Cosmos/World/society/fellow-

³⁹¹ Löwith, “Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie”, 7.

³⁹² Gott, *Mensch und Welt*, IX, 12, fn. 17.

³⁹³ See: “Natur und Humanität des Menschen” (1957), I, 261: “In einem denken aber Heidegger, Haecker und Scheler doch gleichsinnig: sie halten sich nicht an die Natur und Humanität des Menschen, sondern an Gott, beziehungsweise das Sein, die beide das Menschsein bestimmen sollen und übertreffen.” and Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 21.

human/human) are not necessary distinctions nor are they true in the sense of a transcendental truth, they are distinctions that make up the abstract concept of Humanity. To hold these distinctions as truths, or, to hold the distinction between Humanity and the order of the World to be true is to preserve the placeless (*ortlos*) and homeless (*heimatlos*) nature of a nihilistic concept of Humanity.

Mit diesem Einstieg in die Innerlichkeit, der ein Heraustreten aus der den Menschen umfassenden Ordnung der Welt entspricht, geschieht zweierlei: der Mensch wird ortlos und heimatlos im Ganzen der Welt, eine kontingente und schließlich absurd, man weiß nicht wie und von woher in sie hineingeworfene Ek-sistenz, und er wird sich gerade durch diese, dem Ganzen des Seienden entfremdete Sonderstellung in ganz besonderer Weise wichtig. Wie verschieden auch immer das *se ipsum* in der nach-christlichen Philosophie von Descartes bis zu Heidegger ausgelegt wird, die Konsequenz für das Weltverständnis bleibt doch dieselbe: *die Welt ist nicht mehr das Erste und Letzte, alles Umfassende und unbedingte Selbstständige*, sondern über Gott auf den Menschen bezogen, zuerst als Krone der Schöpfung, und sodann als selbstbewußtes Subjekt.³⁹⁴

The translation of Humanity into the natural order of the World is not, however, just a consequence of wanting to transvalue nihilism and not just a reversal of philosophies of the other-worldly via a philosophy of the this-worldly.³⁹⁵ That the other-worldly became nihilistic³⁹⁶ and needed to be overcome provided the guideline for both Nietzsche's and Löwith's translation of Humanity into the natural World. This translation finds its worth in dissolving the placelessness and homelessness of Humanity and in dissolving the illusion of a created Humanity, standing at the center of creation.

A philosophy which excludes a natural World is a philosophy which forgets that Humanity is a natural creature and to mistake natural instinct for reason. Löwith compares the philosopher who ignores the World to a migratory bird who perceives itself to

³⁹⁴ Löwith, "Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie", 12f (My emphasis).

³⁹⁵ "Und sofern der Mensch kein extramundanes Geschöpf und Ebenbild Gottes ist, bedarf die philosophische Anthropologie der Kosmologie zu ihrer Begründung." "Natur und Humanität des Menschen", I, 266.

³⁹⁶ Emil Angehrn aptly places Löwith's critique of philosophies of history in line with his wish to transvalue the nihilistic and translate Humanity back into the World. See: *Geschichte und Identität* (1985), 352: "Sofern Löwith vom geschichtlichen Tätigsein zu dem zurückgehen möchte, was wir als Glieder des natürlichen Kosmos 'sind', sofern er unserem Willen den Willensverzicht und das zustimmende Sichzurücknehmen in den ewigen Kreislauf entgegengesetzt und darin den eigentlichen Kern menschlichen Würde sieht, stellt er in ähnlichem Sinn eine Gegenposition zum Geschichtsdenken dar, wie jene früher erwähnten, am Gedanken der Entindividualisierung oder des Ansiehhaltens orientierten Subjektivitätskonzepte sich mit dem Begriff historischer Identität als unvereinbar erwiesen". This translation or transvaluation is the realization that Humanity *has* a history but is not fundamentally a historical being. See Burkhard Liebsch, *Verzeitlichte Welt*, 107: "Löwith bezweifelt auch nicht, daß man 'Geschichte **hat**', sondern nur, daß man von Grund auf Geschichte bzw. geschichtlich **ist**."

be orienting itself to the sun out of its free will.

Sie [*die Welt*] braucht aber auch gar nicht als existierend bewiesen zu werden, denn sie weist sich alltäglich und fortwährend aus, obwohl wir von unserer Weltgemäßheit zumeist so wenig wissen wie die Zugvögel, die sich auf ihrem Flug am Strand der Sonne orientieren.

Löwith gave himself the complicated task of trying to explain self-consciousness in the context of a World-philosophy and of also having to deal with the question of the possibility of knowing the extent of Humanity's being conditioned by the World (*Weltgemäßheit*).

According to Löwith, Humanity belongs to an ordered and natural Cosmos but is also a being that functions via a distancing (*Abstand*) from its surroundings. Self-consciousness is the height of this distancing inasmuch as it culminates in the "creation" of an individual. This distancing is at the same time an objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) and a process of division and detachment. It is possible for a person to describe his or her pain but only through an objectification of the body. Other animals can react to and express pain but not describe it as they are unable to make it an object from which they can distance themselves. This process of objectification and division is at the same time an alienation (*Entfremdung*). The aforementioned example of the arbitrary divisions of Cosmos from World, World from society, society from fellow-humans and fellow-humans from a human is an example of degree of alienation. This is a degree of alienation (at least to the level of fellow-human) that is necessary for Humanity to be Humanity and not a being on an equal level as a plant, for which differentiating is impossible. The division between subject and object cannot then be overcome but belongs to a process of the alienation of a subject from the World.³⁹⁷ As Löwith writes:

Die vielbeklagte und angeblich überwundene oder doch zu überwindende Subjekt-Objekt-Spaltung ist also nichts zu Beklagendes und zu Überwindendes, sondern konstitutiv für das Menschsein.³⁹⁸

Humanity therefore alienates itself from the order of the Cosmos, resulting in a objecti-

³⁹⁷ Mihran Dabag makes the mistake of calling this conception Humanity an anthropology whereas it was incredibly important for Löwith to differentiate between Cosmology – or understanding Humanity as an abstraction of a greater Cosmos – and anthropology – as an understanding of the Cosmos from the standpoint of Humanity. This misunderstanding of Dabag's led him to erringly extrapolate on a Löwithian anthropology. See: Dabag, *Löwiths Kritik der Geschichtsphilosophie und sein Entwurf einer Anthropologie* (1989), chapter 5, "Kritische Einschätzung der philosophischen Anthropologie Löwiths".

³⁹⁸ "Zur Frage einer philosophischen Anthropologie" (1975), I, 333.

fication of a self, a *Da-sein*, but is no less a part of it. The tool of this objectification and alienation from the World is language.

Der Mensch lebt mit den Dingen der Welt so, wie sie ihm die Sprache zuführt, und weil auch sein Empfinden und Handeln von seinen Vorstellungen abhängt, lebt er sogar ausschließlich im Umkreis der Sprachwelt.³⁹⁹

The question for Löwith that remains is the extent of the function of language as a mediator between Humanity and World, between the subject and the “objects” it names.

Löwith did not construct an extensive philosophy of language; rather he saw the work in this field, from Descartes, Locke, Leibniz and up to Wittgenstein and its motivation for clarity, vividness and scientific precision to be unjustly put under critique from Heidegger. He emphasizes Locke’s analysis of language in an essay titled “*Hegel und die Sprache*” for which words do not represent the “objects” that they name but ideas of the understanding.

Und wir können uns weder darauf verlassen, daß die Ideen, welche *wir* von etwas haben, genau dieselben sind wie die, welche andere haben, die das gleiche Bedeutung immer eine allgemeine ist, für die je individuelle Wirklichkeit der Dinge eintreten. Unsere wörtlichen Bezeichnungen sind Hervorbringungen unseres Verstandes, und sie betreffen nur das nominelle Wesen (*nominal essence*) und nicht das reale Wesen einer Sache, das uns völlig unzugänglich ist.⁴⁰⁰

This idea of language fits in nicely with Löwith’s concept of Humanity inasmuch as both are a distancing and alienation from and an objectification of one’s surroundings. This distancing between a subject and the subject’s surroundings is nothing other than the act of naming. To ask the question of the essence of an object is senseless because it is to ask for something non-arbitrary, something not alienated from its original form – the question of essence, therefore, goes beyond the limits of language.

Es sei deshalb ein sinnloses Bemühen, z.B. feststellen zu wollen, was das wirkliche Wesen des Menschen ist, und die Definition des Menschen als *animal rationale* sei darum ebenso gut und brauchbar wie die, daß er ein zweibeiniges Lebewesen ohne Federn sei. Worauf es zum Zweck der Verständigung ankomme – und sie ist der hauptsächlichste Zweck und Ursprung der Sprache –, sei keine illusorische Entsprechung zum wirklichen Wesen einer Sache, sondern die möglichst genaue, d.i. eindeutige

³⁹⁹ “*Die Sprache als Vermittler von Mensch und Welt*” (1958), I, 360.

⁴⁰⁰ “*Hegel und die Sprache*” (1965), I, 379.

Bestimmung des Wortgebrauchs.⁴⁰¹

Löwith critiques Heidegger's use of language and his over-usage of metaphors and opposes it to the philosophical tradition and its goals of precision and clarity. To say, for example, that language is the "house of Being"⁴⁰² is not to say something that can be discussed or argued upon, rather it is meant to act as a signpost directing one to actual truths. Heidegger had hoped in "*Weg zur Sprache*" to overcome the tradition that strove for scientific clarity in language and replace it with, in Löwith's words, a tradition of metaphorical hints (*Winke*) to the truths themselves.

Eine anspielungsreiche, figurative Rede, wie sie der Dichtung eigentlich ist, ist nach Locke ein Mißbrauch der Sprache für ernstliche Zwecke und beweist, wie alle Äquivokationen, einen Mangel an Perfektion, d.h. an Präzision. Heideggers Sprachkunst, die von der Geschichte zu Geschick als Seinsgeschick hinüberspielt oder vom "es gibt" (Sein) zum Sichgeben oder vom "was heißt" (Denken) zum Geheißensein oder vom "Satz" (vom Grund) zum Sprung, könnte vor Locke und Leibniz so wenig bestehen wie vor Carnap und Wittgenstein. Denn "dry truth" und "real knowledge" vertragen sich nicht mit der unterhaltameren Sprache der Anspielung und Einbildungskraft. Philosophie ist nicht Rhetorik, sie will nicht überreden, sondern lehren und informieren.⁴⁰³

Instead of searching for the meaning of Being in the use of language, Löwith saw it as a Human construct and a tool of individuation – not as a tool for investigating the outside World or picking out individual "objects". He understands Humanity as also using language to individuate and objectify itself away from the World through the arbitrary creation of, for example, societies, fellow-humans and, lastly, the individual. The longest error of philosophy for Löwith is making this individuated existence absolute.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² "Der Mensch aber ist nicht nur ein Lebewesen, das neben anderen Fähigkeiten auch die Sprache besitzt. Vielmehr ist die Sprache das Haus des Seins, darin wohnend der Mensch existiert, indem er der Wahrheit des Seins, sie hütend, gehört." Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, 25.

⁴⁰³ "Hegel und die Sprache", I, 380.

CHAPTER 7

GOD, HUMANITY AND WORLD

7.1 INDIVIDUATION AND ALIENATION

In irgend einem abgelegenen Winkel des in zahllosen Sonnensystemen flimmernd ausgegossenen Weltalls gab es einmal ein Gestirn, auf dem kluge Tiere das Erkennen erfanden. Es war die hochmütigste und verlogenste Minute der "Weltgeschichte": aber doch nur eine Minute. Nach wenigen Atemzügen der Natur erstarrte das Gestirn, und die klugen Tiere mußten sterben. – So könnte jemand eine Fabel erfinden und würde doch nicht genügend illustriert haben, wie kläglich, wie schattenhaft und flüchtig, wie zwecklos und beliebig sich der menschliche Intellekt innerhalb der Natur ausnimmt. Es gab Ewigkeiten, in denen er nicht war; wenn es wieder mit ihm vorbei ist, wird sich nichts begeben haben. Denn es gibt für jenen Intellekt keine weitere Mission, die über das Menschenleben hinausführte. Sondern menschlich ist er, und nur sein Besitzer und Erzeuger nimmt ihn so pathetisch, als ob die Angeln der Welt sich in ihm drehten. Könnten wir uns aber mit der Mücke verständigen, so würden wir vernehmen, daß auch sie mit diesem Pathos durch die Luft schwimmt und in sich das fliegende Zentrum dieser Welt fühlt. Es ist nichts so verwerflich und gering in der Natur, was nicht, durch einen kleinen Anhauch jener Kraft des Erkennens, sofort wie ein Schlauch aufgeschwellt würde; und wie jeder Lastträger seinen Bewunderer haben will, so meint gar der Stolzeste Mensch, der Philosoph, von allen Seiten die Augen des Weltalls teleskopisch auf sein Handeln und Denken gerichtet zu sehen (Nietzsche, "*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*", III, II, 370f.).

Understanding Humanity's alienation from the World via a process of individuation is key to understanding the breadth and direction of Löwith's philosophy. According to Löwith, the greatest feat for philosophy is to understand Humanity's relationship to the different steps of this alienation – his own *Habilitationschrift* shows the interconnectedness and dependency of an individual to his or her fellow-humans, the last act of distancing in the creation of a self – and his later works try to show the need for exploring the interconnectedness and dependency of an individual to the World. For Löwith, the importance of Humanity's relationship and affiliation with the natural World was not to be underestimated even though it was ignored by many modern philosophers. In his essay, "*Welt und Menschenwelt*" he writes:

Der Mensch mag noch so sehr aus der Natur herausstehen, ek-sistieren, transzendieren und reflektieren, er ist von dieser Zugehörigkeit und Zu-

ordnung zum Ganzen der Naturwelt nicht ausgenommen, auch wenn er unmittelbar nichts davon weiß.⁴⁰⁴

The task for philosophy is to concentrate on a totality, the World, and not busy itself with the contingencies of Human constructs. In an interview with the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, Löwith explains what he considers the occupation of philosophy to be:

Um sie von den hochspezialisierten Wissenschaften grob zu unterscheiden, kann man sagen, daß die Philosophie... in der Tat nur möglich ist, wenn sie sich um das “Ganze” kümmert.⁴⁰⁵

The beginning of understanding this interrelationship was to first understand the uttermost consequent of individuation via the “creation” of individuals and the concept of Humanity.

Abstand nehmen besagt, daß man die fraglose Vorgegebenheit seiner selbst und der Welt preisgegeben hat, indem man sich von der Welt und sich selbst *entfernt* hat. Ohne eine solche entfernende Abstandnahme gibt es keine Welteröffnung. Jede menschliche Handlung setzt als ein Verhalten zu... eine Entfernung von... voraus. Dies unterscheidet auch tierische Kundgabe von menschlicher Mitteilung.⁴⁰⁶

The idea that Humanity was essentially an individuating existence is something Löwith had borrowed from Nietzsche and his discussion in the essay, “*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*”. Nietzsche describes the process of alienation from the World as the creation of an intellect and the intellect itself acts as a tool to secure the “survival of an individual” (“*der Intellekt, als ein Mittel zur Erhaltung des Individuums...*”⁴⁰⁷). The instinct (*Trieb*) to form an intellect and conceptualize one’s surroundings via metaphors – via a naming as if objects individually and necessarily existed with the consequence, for example, of a leaf being distinguishable from a branch – is not just a tool for survival but the tool for the fundamental existence of Humanity; for, without it, there would be no individuated existence called Humanity.

Jener Trieb zur Metapherbildung, jener Fundamentaltrieb des Menschen, den man keinen Augenblick wegrechnen kann, weil man damit den Menschen selbst wegrechnen würde, ist dadurch, daß aus seinen verflüchtigten Erzeugnissen, den Begriffen, eine reguläre und starre neue Welt als eine Zwingburg für ihn gebaut wird, in Wahrheit nicht

⁴⁰⁴ “*Welt und Menschenwelt*” (1960), I, 296.

⁴⁰⁵ “*Wozu heute noch Philosophie?*”, 204.

⁴⁰⁶ “*Natur und Humanität des Menschen*”, I, 285.

⁴⁰⁷ Nietzsche, “*Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne*”, III, II, 370.

bezwungen und kaum gebändigt.⁴⁰⁸

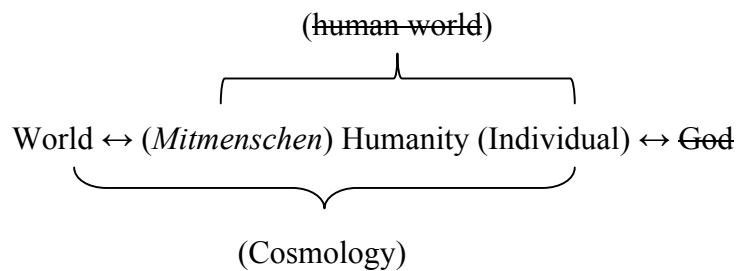
Important, however, for both Nietzsche and Löwith is recognizing that this tool is not an unnatural power of reason or connection to the spiritual but a *natural* tool. The construction of an individual intellect is as natural an aspect of Humanity as the construction of honeycombs is natural to honey bees.

Als Baugenie erhebt sich solchermaßen der Mensch weit über die Biene: diese baut aus Wachs, das sie aus der Natur zusammenholt, er aus dem weit zarteren Stoffe der Begriffe, die er erst aus sich fabrizieren muß.⁴⁰⁹

This individuation not only creates individuals but a community of individuals (*Mitmenschen*) in which language, history and intellectual activity takes place; it is the creation of a Human-world (*Menschenwelt*). Löwith's main concern was that this Human-world was treated as absolute and not as a mere alienation from a greater totality.

Der übermenschliche physische Kosmos gerät in Vergessenheit, und die Welt wird von Grund aus vermenschlicht. *Die Welt wird zur Menschenwelt*. Zugleich mit diesem Schwund der Welt verflüchtigt sich die menschliche Natur in eine geschichtliche Existenz.⁴¹⁰

Because Löwith wanted philosophy to concentrate on the relationship between Humanity and the World he felt that the Human-world and its contingency should be critically viewed in philosophy. Ideally, philosophy would continue in the investigation of the reversal of this alienation and move not just from an individual to its *Mitmenschen* but further to the connections of Humanity to World, creating a cosmology:



Not only had Löwith felt himself too unqualified to attempt such a cosmology but he was overall skeptical of the possibility of successfully doing so. When asked in his interview with *Der Spiegel* how it could be possible to make assertions about the universe, or World, his response listed non-philosophical qualifications.

Dazu möchte man wissen, was in der Physik, Astronomie, Weltraumfor-

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 381.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 376.

⁴¹⁰ “*Welt und Menschenwelt*”, I, 302 (My emphasis).

schung und dergleichen vor sich geht. Ich kenne unter sämtlichen Philosophen, die zu meiner Zeit noch gelebt haben, einen einzigen, der kompetent war, weil er zugleich ein bedeutender Mathematiker und Physiker war, ein Mitarbeiter von Bertrand Russel: nämlich Alfred Whitehead. Whitehead⁴¹¹ konnte es noch riskieren, in seinem großen Werk eine Kosmologie zu entwickeln, die nicht einfach in der Luft schwebt, sondern exakte Kenntnisse in der Physik und Mathematik zur Voraussetzung hat. Die deutschen Philosophen dagegen, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, hatten keine produktive Berührung mehr mit den Fachwissenschaften.⁴¹²

Löwith, instead of struggling to build a cosmology, concentrated on his tradition of critique and continued to search out narratives and valuations of the Human-world in his further attempt to critique its overvaluation. It is in this vein that Löwith analyzes the works of, amongst others, Giambattista Vico, Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes in his essay, “*Vicos Grundsatz: verum et factum convertuntur*”. And it is in this vein that Löwith was heavily criticized by Hans Blumenberg and his supporters.

7.2 THE HUMAN-WORLD, FATE AND PROVIDENCE

The parallels Löwith finds in his writings of the Human-world and Vico’s writings of the *mondo civile* or *mondo delle nazioni* is the principle that Humanity is responsible for its own truths.⁴¹³

Die Wahrheit, die Vico entdeckt zu haben glaubt und die man in keiner Weise bezweifeln könne, ist, daß dieser “mondo civile” oder auch “mondo delle nazioni” ganz gewiß von den Menschen gemacht worden ist und daß folglich auch das entfernteste Altertum – seine Sprache und Rechtsverfassung, seine Kulte, Götter und Heroen – als eine Abwandlung unseres menschlichen Geistes verstanden werden könne und müsse.⁴¹⁴

Löwith’s own formulation of the interchangeability of the true (*verum*) and the made (*factum*) can be found in a discussion of meaning and purpose in *Meaning in History*:

⁴¹¹ Unfortunately Löwith does not go into more detail concerning Whitehead’s attempt in creating a cosmology in the work, *Process and Reality: an Essay in Cosmology* (1929). What Löwith approves of, however, is Whitehead’s goal in these lectures as described in the preface: “The lectures are intended to state a condensed scheme of cosmological ideas, to develop their meaning by confrontation with the various topics of experience, and finally to elaborate an adequate cosmology in terms of which all particular topics find their interconnections”, xii.

⁴¹² Löwith, “*Wozu heute noch Philosophie?*”, 204.

⁴¹³ “*Gegen Ende seines Werkes, wo Vico das Prinzip seiner Wissenschaft wiederholt, führt er aus – und auch dies ist für ihn unbestreitbar –, daß diese Welt einem Geist entspringt.*” “*Vicos Grundsatz: verum et factum convertuntur. Seine theologische Prämisse und deren säkulare Konsequenzen*” (1968), IX, 207.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid*, 195.

It is not by chance that we use the words “meaning” and “purpose” interchangeably, for it is mainly purpose which constitutes meaning for us. The meaning of all things that are what they are, not by nature, but because they have been created either by God or by man, depends on purpose. A chair has its meaning of being a “chair”, in the fact that it indicates something beyond its material nature: the purpose of being used as a seat. *This purpose, however, exists only for us who manufacture and use such things.* And since a chair or a house or a town or a B-29 is a means to the end or purpose of man, the purpose is not inherent in, but transcends the thing. If we abstract from a chair its transcendent purpose, it becomes a meaningless combination of pieces of wood.⁴¹⁵

The difference between a combination of pieces of wood and a chair is the existence of a meaning and purpose giving Humanity. The examples Löwith gives, of the chair, house, town, B-29 and their figurative relevance to history are comparable to the examples he provides with respect to Vico: language, constitutions, cults, gods, heroes (*Sprache und Rechtsverfassung, seine Kulte, Götter und Heroen*). All of these constructs are formless and empty without the existence of a meaning and purpose giving Humanity and thus unable to provide for absolute, transcendental truths.⁴¹⁶ This appears to attribute to Humanity a god-like capacity for creation – the creation of a *Human-world* of houses, languages, B-29s and heroes. The question that was important for Löwith was the extent of which this capacity for creation of a Human-world was solely dependent on the Humanity that created it.

It is in addressing this question that Löwith approached Vico’s philosophy and found two points of departure. First was Vico’s critique of the Cartesian attempt to found physics, a study of the World, in mathematics, a construct from the Human-world.⁴¹⁷ Mathematical truths are “true” because of their dependency on a larger and Human-made mathematical construct. These truths do not correspond to anything outside of the “mathematical world” in which they exist and in which they were created, thus making them a dubious partner in constructing a “true” physics.⁴¹⁸ Rather than

⁴¹⁵ *Meaning in History*, 5 (My emphasis). It is very likely that Löwith had Vico in mind while writing this passage from the introduction to *Meaning in History* as his use of the word “manufacture” is a play on the word “factum”.

⁴¹⁶ “Die Geschichte kann den Menschen nie lehren, was wahr und was falsch ist.” Löwith, “*Christentum und Geschichte*,” 147.

⁴¹⁷ See: “*Vicos Grundsatz*”, IX, 197f.

⁴¹⁸ See: Peter König, *Giambattista Vico*, 65: “Der Fehler von Aristoteles und Descartes liege darin, daß beide nicht streng genug zwischen der Physik und der Metaphysik unterscheiden. Wenn Descartes erklärt, daß er aus der Ausdehnung und Bewegung das ganze Universum konstruieren könne, setzt er

translating this Human capacity for creation to the natural World, as Descartes would have liked, Vico emphasized these creative capacities with respect to the historical.⁴¹⁹ Humanity is not only responsible for the creation of the Human-world and its truths but for their historical development as well – appearing to make Humanity the director of history. Humanity’s capacity for creation within the Human-world is, however, restricted and not entirely free from non-anthropological influence.

According to Löwith, Vico’s thesis, *verum et factum convertuntur*, was no new principle of the time but a “topos of scholarly theology”.⁴²⁰ The second point of departure Löwith found in Vico’s writings, therefore, does not simply lie in this thesis but rather in Vico’s Christian presuppositions supporting it. The interchangeability of the true and the made and its consequences for the Human- and historical-world is not reliant on the spontaneous, indiscriminate, random or even rational actions of Humanity but on the *providence* of God.

Das eigentliche Prinzip der Neuen Wissenschaft ist daher nicht schon die Konvertibilität des *verum* und *factum*, d.i. die Wahrheit der vom Menschen geschaffenen Welt, sondern die göttliche Vorsehung, der allein es zu verdanken ist, wenn sich das Menschengeschlecht nicht selbst zugrunde richtet, sondern erhält.⁴²¹

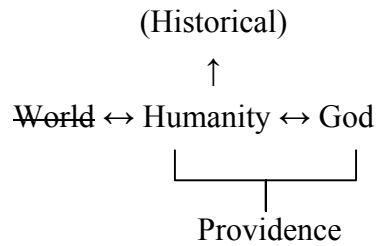
This relationship between Humanity and God in Vico’s writings and the dialectical relationship between the two in the creation and progress of the historical is one Löwith found to be not all too entirely different from his own emphasis on the dialectical relationship between Humanity and World. For Vico, Humanity’s relationship to the historical, i.e. Human-world, was one that was directed and bound to God and providence.

voraus, daß diese Eigenschaften der physischen Dinge basalen Charakter haben und keiner Erklärung bedürfen”.

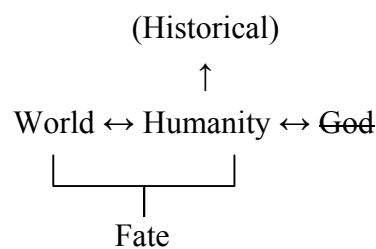
⁴¹⁹ See: Stefanie Woidich and her work, *Vico und die Hermeneutik*, where she describes this distinction as follows: “Dem Menschen bleibe es versagt, die Natur der Dinge (*natura rerum*) zu erkennen – er hat diese nicht gemacht und ist nicht im Besitz ihrer Elemente (*non intra se habet*). Der Mangel des menschlichen Geistes besteht nach Vico darin, daß er den Elementen der Dinge äußerlich gegenüber steht (*extra se habet omnia*). Doch besitzt der Mensch die Fähigkeit, nach dem Vorbild Gottes, *tamquam ex nihilo*, ein eigenes intellektuell-geistiges Universum zu schaffen, eben durch sein *verbum mentis improprium*”, 63.

⁴²⁰ See: “*Vicos Grundsatz*”, IX, 198: “An und für sich ist dies freilich kein neues Prinzip, sondern ein *Topos der scholastischen Theologie*”. For detailed information concerning the history of this principle see: Woidich, *Vico und die Hermeneutik*, 38, fn. 62.

⁴²¹ “*Vicos Grundsatz*”, IX, 206.



Important for Löwith was not Vico's emphasis on the theological, but the idea that Humanity is not completely sovereign in its creation of the Human-world. In Löwith's philosophy it is not God and providence that steer the Human-world but the natural World and fate.⁴²²



Löwith clearly uses the word "fate" to describe the relationship between Humanity and World and the progress of history in *Meaning in History*. Defining fate in this sense would be to create the aforementioned cosmology and is, again, something Löwith did not attempt. What he was convinced of, however, was the human dependency on the World.

Die Welt ist so umfassend, daß sie sich nicht einfassen läßt und zugleich so zusammengefaßt, daß sie in jedem Stern oder Sandkorn oder Lebewesen anwesend ist. Wie immer wir uns auf die Welt beziehen und zu ihr verhalten und ein bestimmtes Weltverhältnis "konstituieren", bezieht sie sich auch schon immer von sich aus auf uns und bestimmt sie unser Verhalten zu ihr, obschon wir von dem Bezug der natürlichen Welt auf uns meist nichts wissen.⁴²³

Fate is something that marks the influence of the World on human history and, whereas Löwith does not deny that Humanity is responsible for the creation of history and the Human-world, he does claim that while Humanity is the creator, the World is the regulator.

History, instead of being governed by reason and providence, seems to

⁴²² See: Ibid, 207. "Er begriff den Lauf der Geschichte sehr viel sachgemäßer, nämlich als eine vom Menschen geschaffene Welt, die aber zugleich überspielt wird durch etwas, das der Notwendigkeit des Schicksals näher ist als der freien Entscheidung und Wahl".

⁴²³ Löwith, "Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie", 20.

be governed by chance and fate.⁴²⁴

It is imaginable that any and all historical events that came to pass could have occurred differently – that history “seems to be governed by chance and fate” is a result of the multitude of failed attempts to find an order within history. Not concerned with developing anti-Christian arguments against the concept of providence and in favor of a classical notion of fate, Löwith continues by emphasizing the subservient nature of Human intention by placing providence and fate on the same level. Whether one names the course of history providence or fate and its director God or the World is of secondary concern to Löwith. Primary was the debasement of the idea that Humanity is independently responsible for history.

In the reality of that agitated sea which we call “history”, it makes little difference whether man feels himself in the hands of God’s inscrutable will or in the hands of chance and fate. [...] If fate means a supreme power not at our disposal, which rules our destinies, then fate is comparable to providential divinity. There is indeed a common ground of fearful reverence and free submission to fate, or providence, in ancient antiquity and ancient Christianity, which distinguishes both of them from profane modernity and its belief in progressive manageability.⁴²⁵

It is in this vein that Löwith ends his discussion of Vico with a short critique of Benedetto Croce’s popular reading of *Scienza Nuova*.

7.3 THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE HUMAN-WORLD

The modern mind has not made up its mind whether it should be Christian or pagan. It sees with one eye of faith and the other of reason. Hence its vision is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or Biblical thinking (*Meaning in History*, 207. My emphasis).

In Croce’s reading of Vico, Humanity is solely responsible for the creation and course of history. The intentions and aims of Human endeavor in history are, however, seldom if ever brought to fruition. According to Löwith, Croce calls this a paradox – that Humanity is responsible for the course of history and yet never quite achieves its desired historical outcome – a comedy of errors (“*eine menschliche Komödie der Irrungen*”⁴²⁶).

⁴²⁴ *Meaning in History*, 199.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, 199f.

⁴²⁶ See: “*Vicos Grundsatz*”, IX, 208. Löwith is referencing a phrase used in Croce’s work, *Die Geschichte als Gedanke und als Tat* (1938), 332: “*In dieser Erforschung [of history] kann nur die Vernunft leiten, die überall unter den verschiedensten Gestalten sich selbst erkennt und wiederfindet; und daher muß*

It is this particular idea that only Humanity is responsible for the process of history that Löwith too wished to avoid and it is because Vico denied this possibility that Löwith admired him as a philosopher. What Croce is missing in his interpretation of the human comedy of errors is the dialectical element present in both Vico's and Löwith's work.⁴²⁷ Whether it be God or the natural World, Löwith found it critical that Humanity's loftiness and power over the Human-world was tempered by an outside force. Unfortunately, the idea that Humanity was sovereign in its philosophical endeavors was one that dominated modernity and one that Löwith found as early as in the writings of Bacon⁴²⁸ and Hobbes. One such consequence of these philosophies that Löwith saw is that philosophy began treating Humanity not only as the master of history but as the master of the surrounding natural World.

Ohne Rücksicht auf Vicos fromme Wissenschaft und die theologische Prämisse seines Prinzips wurde der Grundsatz von der Reziprozität des Wahren und des Gemachten in der Folge immer mehr in einer Weise betont und zur Geltung gebracht, die den Menschen als *homo faber* zum Herrn der Natur und damit zugleich der Geschichte macht...⁴²⁹

The principle of the interchangeability of the true (*verum*) and the made (*factum*) can be found in the philosophies of Bacon and Hobbes for whom philosophy was to be

vor einer Methode gewarnt werden, die in der Untersuchung und Darstellung der Beziehungen zwischen der religiösen Geschichte und der philosophischen und bürgerlichen Geschichte gern angewendet wird und die darin besteht, eine Reihe von Verbindungen und Übergängen darzulegen, durch welche man zu gewissen Wahrheiten und gewissen bürgerlichen Ordnungen gelangt wäre, gleichsam wie in einer Komödie der Irrungen und in einer sonderbaren, nicht logischen, sondern psychologischen Dialektik." This claim is a reference to Croce's work on Vico from 1927 in which he states the following: "Es ist eine allgemeine Beobachtung, daß ein Faktum hervorbringen und ein hervorgebrachtes Faktum erkennen zweierlei ist. Zur Erkenntnis dessen, was wirklich Faktum ist, gelangt man im Leben des Individuums manchmal nach einigen Jahren, im Leben der Völker nach einigen Jahrhunderten. Selbst die unmittelbaren Urheber eines Faktums haben von ihm gewöhnlich keine oder doch nur eine sehr unvollkommene und trügerische Kenntnis..." *Die Philosophie Giambattista Vicos*, 95.

⁴²⁷ For further discussion concerning Croce's interpretation of Vico see: Woidich, *Vico und die Hermeneutik*, chapter 3.1.1.1, "Immanenz und Transzendenz: Croce und der frühe Auerbach zum *verum-factum-Prinzip*".

⁴²⁸ König notes that Vico himself claimed to have been influenced by the philosophy of Bacon. See: *Giambattista Vico*, 44: "Am wirkungsmächtigsten von Vicos Formeln hat sich zweifellos die 'der vier Autoren' erwiesen: als 'einzigartig vor allen übrigen' habe er Platon, Tacitus, Bacon und Grotius bewundert, ihnen schreibe er den größten Einfluß auf sein Denken zu". König notes further that this influence was based on Bacon's attempt to restore science and his turn towards the "empirical realm of facts": "Die besondere Auszeichnung des englischen Philosophen liegt darin, daß er eine umfassende Restauration der Wissenschaften anstrebt, zu diesem Zweck eine systematische Vorgehensweise empfiehlt und als Ausgangspunkt dafür die empirische Welt der Tatsachen wählt", 46. See also *Francis Bacon* by Perez Zagorin and his discussion of "maker's knowledge" (i.e., the *verum et factum convertuntur* principle), 37-39.

⁴²⁹ "Vicos Grundsatz", IX, 209.

less theoretical-speculative and more practical-operative and was used to make nature subservient to Humanity.

Bacon setzt, wie nach ihm Vico, voraus, daß wahre Erkenntnis ein Wissen der Ursachen ist und ein solches am meisten verfügbar ist, wenn wir die Macht haben, den Effekt zu verursachen oder selber hervorzubringen. Wissen ist als Verursachen oder Machenkönnen geradezu Macht, nämlich über die Kräfte der Natur mittels der Naturwissenschaft.⁴³⁰

The knowledge of a truth was, in this respect, interchangeable with the ability to create the desired effects. Science can claim that it knows something if and only if it can produce or recreate that which is claimed to be known. Knowledge became a power over nature and science became a tool in this attempt to bring the complicated nature of the World under the power of Human reason.⁴³¹

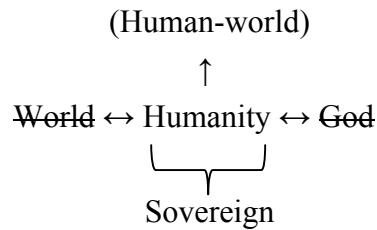
The World itself could be subdued by Humanity because it was formless, empty and without *logos*,⁴³² and, as such, slowly became Humanized. The aspirations of this modern science, to achieve knowledge as power over nature were not a Cosmology pertaining to the natural World but an egregious overemphasis of the Human-world. The type of philosophy in which the Human-world is *the* context in which truth is sought out and in which Humanity is sovereign in its quest for knowledge is exactly the type of philosophy that Löwith saw as having dominated modernity and as being a “dimming” of philosophy “in comparison with either Greek or Biblical thinking”.⁴³³ Neither appealing to a God or gods nor referencing the Cosmos, modernity’s capacity for philosophy is constrained.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 210.

⁴³¹ See: Zagorin, *Francis Bacon*, 38f: “...the theory of maker’s knowledge [i.e., the *verum et factum convertuntur* principle] is present as an ideal-type or regulatory principle underlying Bacon’s concept of science. By equating science with dominion over nature, Bacon... was proffering a constructivist criterion of knowledge that viewed effective practice, the capacity to manipulate nature in the production of works, as the sole guarantee of scientific truth”.

⁴³² This is in reference to Löwith’s depiction of the Christian concept of the natural World. See: “*Der Weltbegriff der neuzeitlichen Philosophie*”, 12: “*In der Sprache der kritischen Reflexionsphilosophie gesagt: die Welt ist durch unser Bewußtsein von ihr und unser Verhalten zu ihr ‘konstituiert’. Die Wurzel dieser ‘Kopernikanischen Revolution’, die philosophisch schon mit Descartes beginnt, ist die alles verändernde christliche Selbsterfahrung, für welche die Welt ein ‘Übriges’ ist, außerhalb unseres Ich-selbst, und nicht umgekehrt der sterbliche Mensch eine Erscheinung im Ganzen der Welt...*”

⁴³³ *Meaning in History*, 207.

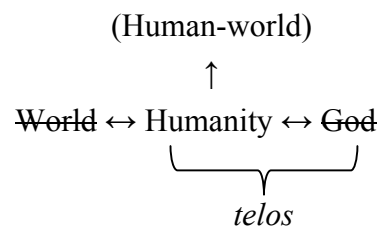


Although it is clear that Löwith valued the ancient Greek worldview over and above those of the Christian tradition, he did find Christian claims to knowledge to be of more worth than those of a modernity in which Humanity was the sole provider for truth. It is at this point that we can answer the question as to what extent Löwith thought that the vision of the modern mind was “dim in comparison with either Greek or Biblical thinking”. Greek thought relied on the eternal laws of the Cosmos for direction and knowledge and Biblical thinking relies on revelation and providence. Both subsume Human endeavor to the laws of something greater in the appreciation that Humanity is not responsible for its own existence. In Löwith’s philosophy of a natural Humanity the Human-world itself can never be a source of true knowledge but only a source of contingent knowledge. Having Humanity be responsible for all knowledge via an independence of the godly or World was to devalue knowledge. This was, however, far from either Vico’s or Löwith’s own aims.

A consequence of Löwith’s argumentation for the dependency of Humanity on the World is the devaluing of the Human-world – including history, language and “truths” – as the overbearing order of the Cosmos and Humanity’s relation to it took precedence. The modern mind approaches knowledge as something solely existing in the Human-world and makes the creative power of Humanity absolute and thus eclipses the natural World (*Naturwelt*) and God with the Human-world (*Menschenwelt*). Defending the legitimacy of the modern age is to defend the Human-world as being a genuine source of philosophical knowledge. Löwith dedicated three lengthy essays with repeating themes and arguments to criticizing the overvaluing of the Human-world: “*Natur und Geschichte*” in 1950, “*Natur und Humanität des Menschen*” in 1957 and “*Welt und Menschenwelt*” in 1960. All are critiques of modern philosophies and their misunderstanding of Human nature and all went unnoticed in the following “debate” on the legitimacy of modernity involving Hans Blumenberg.

7.4 THE LÖWITH-BLUMENBERG NON-DEBATE AND ITS RECEPTION

Not only did Löwith try to discredit modern methodology by expressing the need to include a dialectical relationship with either the World or God in the creation of the Human-world but he discredited the idea that modern Humanity was sovereign. The idea of a sovereign Human-world was challenged by the aforementioned secularization thesis which attempted to show the dependence of modern philosophy to Christian theology; namely in that they not only shared in their definition of Humanity but in their linear and goal oriented view of the process of history and acquisition of knowledge. The following diagram represents how Löwith viewed modern methodology:



Modern Humanity had a false consciousness of itself as being independent of both World and God and thus a false consciousness of being sovereign in the creation of the Human-world. The Human-world, however, was directed by a secularized *telos* in the sense that it was purpose directed and ever improving. This claim that modernity makes false claims of being sovereign in the creation of the Human-world found a rebuttal in the efforts of Blumenberg and his supporters. Robert Wallace nicely summarizes the response to Löwith's depiction of modernity:

What will be the consequences if we accept Löwith's theory? Its most basic implication is that modern thought has a fundamentally false consciousness of itself. While claiming to be an expression of authentically human rationality, modern thought relating to history in fact derives its fundamental pattern of interpretation – that of direction toward a future goal or fulfillment – from theology, from the very dogmas that the Enlightenment and its 19th-century “historicist” heirs were concerned, if not to deny, at least to bracket off from their explanatory endeavors. And this is not just an innocent “borrowing,” as it were, of “terminology” which can readily be separated from the original context from which it is borrowed; in its original context this pattern of interpretation is so tightly intertwined with the concept of faith that the presence of the pattern in a modern context must cast fundamental doubt on that context's characteristic modern claim to elementary human

rationality— once the source of the pattern is recognized.⁴³⁴

Gadamer, acting as Löwith's only supporter in this "debate", downplayed the seriousness in which Blumenberg and his supporters feared for the legitimacy of modernity, underestimating perhaps the consequences of Löwith's philosophy. Both Löwith and Gadamer defended the secularization thesis as a hermeneutic tool without delving into the idea of the "dimming of the modern mind".

Die ausgesprochene Voraussetzung, die schon im Titel des Werkes von Blumenberg [*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*] anklingt ist, daß die geistesgeschichtliche Verwendung des Begriffes der Säkularisation einen Illegitimitätsverdacht einschließt. Dem kann ich nicht folgen. Mir scheint vielmehr, daß dieser Begriff seinerseits eine legitime hermeneutische Funktion ausübt. Er bringt dem Selbstverständnis des Gewordenen und Gegenwärtigen eine ganze Dimension verborgenen Sinnes zu und zeigt auf diese Weise, daß das Gegenwärtige weit mehr ist und bedeutet, als es von sich weiß.⁴³⁵

These two positions, as summarized by Wallace and Gadamer, came to define the Löwith-Blumenberg debate and its reception.

The debate "began" in 1962 when Blumenberg presented a paper against secularization as a hermeneutic tool at the seventh *Deutscher Kongreß für Philosophie* and continued with the publishing of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* in 1966 – seventeen years after the original publishing of Löwith's *Meaning in History*. Two years later, Löwith, along with Gadamer, responded to Blumenberg's critique with individual and critical reviews of Blumenberg's rejection of Löwith's secularization thesis. Blumenberg took much of this critique to heart and revised the first part of his book and re-published it under the title, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*, in 1974.⁴³⁶ Löwith's participation in this debate started with *Meaning in History* and ended with his review of Blumenberg's work. The Löwith-Blumenberg debate took place without much help from Löwith and

⁴³⁴ Robert M. Wallace, "Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate", 67.

⁴³⁵ Gadamer, "'*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*' von Hans Blumenberg", 202f.

⁴³⁶ Blumenberg felt, however, that Löwith had brushed much of his professionalism aside in his very critical and negative appraisal of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*. Blumenberg responded to this book review in a letter to Löwith: "Sie waren so liebenswürdig, mir den Durchschlag eines Manuskriptes zuzusenden, in dem Sie sich mit einem Teil meines Buches "*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*" auseinandersetzen. Inzwischen weiß ich, daß diese Rezension in der "*Philosophischen Rundschau*" erscheinen soll. Für den Betroffenen ist es immer schwierig, zu seiner eigenen Beerdigung die passenden Worte zu finden. Ich würde das auch gar nicht versuchen – zumal es gegen die Spielregeln der Zunft verstößt, zu Rezensionen Erwidern zu geben -, wenn ich nicht das Gefühl hätte, daß die greifbare Geringschätzung, mit der Sie meine Arbeit behandeln, auf einer Verstimmung beruht, die sich durch nochmaliges Lesen einiger weniger Zeilen ausräumen läßt." Blumenberg, letter to Löwith dated Sept. 14, 1967. The letter can be found in the *deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach*.

revolved around the question of the legitimacy of the modern age where clear lines were drawn between the skeptical pessimist, Löwith, and the affirming optimist, Blumenberg. Wallace helped give this debate a name with his article published in 1981, “Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith-Blumenberg Debate” and brought the debate to the English speaking world⁴³⁷ with his translation of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (*The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*) in 1983 in which his introduction includes a discussion of Löwith’s *Meaning in History*. Wallace’s translation inspired many book reviews in which Blumenberg found resounding support against the pessimistic Löwith.⁴³⁸ The quote that Wallace emphasizes in his introduction from *Meaning in History* is the one that begins the last section; namely that the modern mind “is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or Biblical thinking”,⁴³⁹ thus placing the bait for many to jump to modernity’s rescue. Whereas Löwith had intended his work to be a hermeneutical interpretation of the origin of modern historical thinking – i.e., as not being the one and only *true* interpretation – his critics read it as nothing less than a brutal attack on modern consciousness.

Blumenberg words the context of his concerns with Löwith’s arguments in his chapter titled, “*Der neuzeitliche Anachronismus des Säkularisierungstheorems*”:

Legitimität des Ideenbesitzes zu behaupten und zu begründen, ist in der Geschichte das elementare Bestreben des Neuen oder des als neu sich Ausgebenden; solche Legitimität zu bestreiten oder das ihr zugeordnete Selbstbewußtsein zu verhindern oder wenigstens zu erschüttern, ist die Technik der Verteidigung des Bestehenden.⁴⁴⁰

Inasmuch as Löwith denies that modernity is the “legitimate” owner of the idea of progress – in that it is an idea that was unconsciously and newly interpreted – is to place

⁴³⁷ Unfortunately Löwith’s and Gadamer’s rebuttal to Blumenberg’s work have not been translated into English and had, therefore, little impact on the further discussion of this debate.

⁴³⁸ See: Richard Rorty, “*Against Belatedness*” [Rev. of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, by Hans Blumenberg]. *London Review of Books*, Vol. 5, No. 11, 16th of June 1983, 3-5. William J. Bouwsma, *Journal of Modern History*, 56 (1984): 698-701. Martin Jay, *History and Theory*, Vol. 24 (1985): 183-196. Laurence Dickey, “Blumenberg and Secularization: ‘Self-Assertion’ and the Problem of Self-Realizing Teleology in History”, *New German Critique*, No. 41, Special Issue on the Critiques of the Enlightenment (Spring - Summer, 1987), 151-165. Frederick J. Crosson, “Modernity’s Non-Christian Origins”. *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), 625-628. Bernard Yack, “Myth and Modernity: Hans Blumenberg’s Reconstruction of Modern Theory”. *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (May, 1987), 244-261. Günther Rohrmoser, *Emanzipation oder Freiheit*, 15-18. Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 20-22. David Ingram, “Blumenberg and the Philosophical Grounds of Historiography”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Feb., 1990), 1-15.

⁴³⁹ *Meaning in History*, 207.

⁴⁴⁰ Blumenberg, *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung*, 83.

Löwith against modernity and its defender, Blumenberg, and to assume that Löwith wishes to uphold the existing order (*das Bestehende*). Löwith's secularization thesis is then interpreted by Blumenberg, disregarding any and all of Löwith's intentions, as being nothing less than a challenge to the new, to the modern and, as Richard Rorty dramatically phrases it, to be "against belatedness". This is the context in which the following discussions of the secularization thesis took place; Löwith was quickly deemed the pessimist who wanted to undermine modernity and Blumenberg was heralded as trying to justify it. The rather aloof pigeon-holing of Löwith was in part because of the company he kept – being a Nietzsche scholar and an ex-student of Heidegger, Löwith had little chance at being understood other than as a philosopher who wished to take a hammer to modernity. Rorty, in the following colorful quote from his review of Blumenberg's work, does his best to draw the line between the bleak skeptics, Löwith, Heidegger and Nietzsche and the pleasant optimists, Mill, Marx, Dewey and Rawls:

Most intellectuals still think that the most decisive step of all came in the 17th and 18th centuries, when we got out from under prejudice, superstition and the belief in God. Since then we have been becoming freer and freer thanks to the developing natural sciences, the proliferation of new artistic forms, increasingly democratic political institutions, and similar aids to self-confidence, necessary for life in a Godless universe. The alternative, minority view (which has become the majority view among French and German intellectuals in the last few decades) is that the 17th and 18th centuries merely 'secularised' various religious themes. This story dismisses such visions of human progress as Mill's, Marx's, Dewey's and Rawls's as merely anthropomorphised and vulgarised versions of Christian eschatology. This view is nicely summed up by a quote from Karl Löwith, included by Wallace in his very clear and helpful 'Translator's Introduction': 'The modern mind has not made up its mind whether it should be Christian or pagan. It sees with one eye of faith and the other of reason. Hence its vision is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or Biblical thinking.' From this point of view, it does not make much difference whether you prefer Socrates to Christ or conversely, as long as you despise the dim moderns. Löwith here follows Nietzsche, who was equally nasty about both Socrates and Christ, but insisted that either was infinitely preferable to us feeble late-comers. Löwith's view chimes with Heidegger's slogan 'We are too late for the gods and too early for Being,' and with similar slogans in Ortega, Strauss, Adorno etc. Whatever else these people disagree about, they unite in despising the hopes of contemporary liberals.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Rorty, "Against Belatedness", 4.

This lumping together of ideas occurs again in Martin Jay's book review of 1983:

The Legitimacy of the Modern Age is, in fact, directed at a very different challenge to the modern from that posed by the defenders of its alleged successor. It is a challenge that came from German philosophers like Karl Löwith, Martin Heidegger, and Carl Schmitt, who were less concerned with what follows modernity than with what it claimed to replace... Rather than delegitimizing the modern by claiming that it was already being surpassed, these authors attempted to call it into question by reducing it to a disguised version of what went before.⁴⁴²

The consequences of the secularization thesis for Löwith are not the uncovering of an illegitimate and decrepit modernity, as Blumenberg or Rorty would have it, but the failure to deal with a philosophical problem that arose in nineteenth Century philosophy; namely, the exclusion of theology in the philosophical tradition. For Löwith, the consequences of the tradition of historicism and the *Aufhebung* of Christianity in philosophy were not the continued hope in progress, development and social harmony but the revolution of one's own relation to history. That Blumenberg disagrees with Löwith and finds that modern ideas of progress can be withheld independent from their possible point of origin in Christianity does not imply either that Löwith was a pessimist or that he thought modernity was bankrupt. His pessimism did not reach further than the fact that he did not share in the joy positivistic philosophers had in their continued "improvement" of philosophy.

The debate as a whole took a direction so completely independent of Löwith's own aims that going further into the details of the particular reviews would no longer be a discussion of Löwith, but an extensive and distracting discussion of Blumenberg. The main discussion between Blumenberg and Löwith is, however, easily summarized. The first chapter of *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* is devoted to the topic of secularization and Löwith's treatment thereof with respect to historical consciousness. For Blumenberg, modern ideas of progress are not the illegitimate heirs of Christian eschatology but ideas that are self-sufficient, self-assertive and built from experience. It is the goal of the first part of *Säkularisierung und Selbstbehauptung* to deny secularization as a tenable hermeneutic tool for understanding modernity. In the following passage Blumenberg marks the difference between eschatology and ideas of progress as being a difference between an event that disrupts and transcends history ("von einem in die

⁴⁴² Jay, [Rev. of *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, by Hans Blumenberg], 184.

Geschichte einbrechenden, ihr selbst transzendenten”) and an event that is immanent and exists in some fashion in every “now” which is then extrapolated on the future (“*von einer der Geschichte immanenten und in jeder Gegenwart mitpräsenten Struktur auf die Zukunft extrapoliert*”):

Zwischen Eschatologie und Fortschrittsidee bestehen entscheidende, die Umsetzung blockierende Differenzen, die das Kriterium der Identifizierbarkeit des theologischen Moments in der Geschichtsidee problematisch machen. Der formale Unterschied liegt darin, daß die Eschatologie von einem in die Geschichte einbrechenden, ihr selbst transzendenten und heterogenen Ereignis spricht, während die Fortschrittsidee von einer der Geschichte immanenten und in jeder Gegenwart mitpräsenten Struktur auf die Zukunft extrapoliert... Es ist nicht zu sehen, wie aus der einen Einstellung je die andere hervorgehen sollte...⁴⁴³

Löwith directly responded to this passage in his review and questions why Blumenberg would reject the notion that ideas of progress were born out of Christian eschatology – or, at the very least, that the Christian tradition is in some way responsible for modern historical consciousness. Löwith asks the obvious question in his review; of what is to be understood under “secularization” when not the transformation of something transcendental into something immanent and re-states his secularization thesis in *Blumenberg’s words*:

Denn was anders sollte “Säkularisierung” bedeuten, wenn nicht eben die Möglichkeit, einen ursprünglichen transzendenten Bezugssinn in einem immanenten zu verweltlichen und also seinem ursprünglichen Sinn zu entfremden? Das wesentlich Gemeinsame der immanenten und transzendenten Enderwartung ist, daß beide überhaupt in der Hoffnung leben, indem sie die Geschichte auf ein sie erfüllendes Ziel hin denken, das als solches in der Zukunft liegt.⁴⁴⁴

In his review, Löwith gives little effort to support his claims, to revise them or clarify them; rather, the review is full of questions for Blumenberg, questions as to why he was so appalled by the idea of secularization that he felt he needed to defend the legitimacy of modernity. One of Löwith’s main concerns is why one would want to deny that Christianity has had a substantial influence on modern ways of thinking:

Aber auch wenn man seiner Kritik einer substanziellen Geschichtsontologie in gewissen Grenzen zustimmen kann, wer könnte leugnen, daß das Erbe einer wirkungsmächtigen Tradition (und welche Überlieferung ist,

⁴⁴³ Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 23.

⁴⁴⁴ “*Besprechung des Buches die Legitimität der Neuzeit von Hans Blumenberg*” (1968), II, 456.

im Vergleich zu den politischen Autoritäten, innerhalb unserer abendländischen Geschichte durch zwei Jahrtausende wirkungsvoller und stabiler geblieben als das institutionalisierte Christentum?) auch alle relativ neuen Anfänge mitbestimmt.⁴⁴⁵

Löwith identifies a problem of scope, not a problem of having correctly interpreted modernity or of having to attack or defend its legitimacy. The scope of *Meaning in History* reaches back to early Christian teachings but could have, provided the literature exists, continued backwards in history, or conversely, could have started much later with the Enlightenment. The scope of Blumenberg's analysis of the idea of progress reaches back to the scientific discoveries and literary controversies of the seventeenth Century. For Blumenberg to reach back to the seventeenth Century and find evidence for modern ideas of progress is not to disprove any of the claims made by Löwith in *Meaning in History*. Blumenberg's history does not necessarily have to be a competing claim to the development of modernity but, rather, could act as an auxiliary to Löwith's work in helping understand the rather complicated history of an idea. Löwith himself suggests this possibility:

Wenn man sich durch die komplizierte Denk- und Schreibweise des Verf.s durchgearbeitet hat, kommt einem unwillkürlich die Frage: wozu dieser Aufwand an scharfsinnigen Überlegungen, ausgebreiteter historischer Bildung und polemischen Pointen gegen das Schema der Säkularisation, wenn sich die Kritik dieser illegitimen Kategorie am Ende doch aufs engste mit dem berührt, was sie bekämpft, wengleich sie es in differenzierter Weise tut.⁴⁴⁶

There is no reason for these works to not be complimentary histories of an idea as long as Blumenberg does not claim (and as far as I can tell he does not) that modernity *autonomously* and *independently* developed its idea of progress, a claim that Löwith is quick to contradict:

Autonom könnte eine Epoche nur sein, wenn sie wie aus dem Nichts mit sich selbst anfinge und nicht innerhalb und gegen eine geschichtliche Tradition.⁴⁴⁷

Despite the apparent obviousness that a period obtains and develops its ideas in accordance with a tradition, Löwith's version of the history of this idea made modernity, in the eyes of Blumenberg, appear to be a Christian heresy, whereas Blumenberg's history

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, 454.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, 457f.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, 454.

made modernity appear to be the heir of responsible scientific research and development. The main difference in Löwith's style and work is that he neither felt the need to legitimize or delegitimize modernity; he did not start with a goal – the proof of the legitimacy of modernity – and build a history to that purpose. Löwith, in the Hegelian tradition of analyzing the *Aufhebung* of Christianity in philosophy, had no other purpose than to show to what extent the prophecy of the old testament and Christian eschatology of fulfillment made the belief in progress possible:

Denn auch unsere These besagt nicht mehr und nicht weniger, als daß alttestamentliche Prophetie und christliche Eschatologie einen Horizont von Fragestellungen und ein geistiges Klima geschaffen haben – im Hinblick auf die Geschichtsphilosophie einen Horizont der Zukunft und einer künftigen Erfüllung -, das den modernen Geschichtsbegriff und den weltlichen Fortschrittsglauben *ermöglicht* hat.⁴⁴⁸

The secularization thesis as a hermeneutic tool, however, is not what made this a debate between pessimists and optimists and it is not why Blumenberg found so many supporters in the English speaking world. It was, rather, Löwith's claim that the result of this secularizing process was of less worth than its predecessor. Löwith agrees that progress exists but would condition this statement by saying that it only exists for the Human-world, is therefore a contingent "truth" and of little interest for philosophy. And, having experienced two World Wars and two atomic bombings, Löwith was not even sure to what extent progress was to be valued in the Human-world.

Ich bezweifle nicht, daß ein evidentere, unwiderleglicher Fortschritt in der Naturwissenschaften gemacht worden ist, der alle Verhältnisse des gesellschaftlichen und politischen Lebens unserer Zeit mitbestimmt. Ich frage mich nur in bezug auf alle diese Fortschritte im Plural, ob sie heute noch den Optimismus motivieren können, eine fortschreitende Verbesserung des menschlichen Zusammenlebens hervorzubringen.⁴⁴⁹

Löwith came from a tradition of critique both grounded in the philosophy of Nietzsche and in that of his mentor, Heidegger. His philosophical style was his historical consciousness and his oeuvre was motivated by relentless critique. This historical consciousness provided him with an Archimedean point from which he critiqued philosophical movements and philosophers from "outside" of the tradition – from outside of the contingencies of the popular philosophical movements of his time. The Archimedean

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid, 455.

⁴⁴⁹ Löwith, "Wozu heute noch Philosophie?", 207.

point, however, is a lonely one – for this style of critique finds resonance only with others who have similarly attempted to approach the tradition from the “outside”. It is in this sense natural that Löwith found so many critics and opponents who themselves were working from the “inside” of the tradition and had no false consciousness of doing so. It is also in this sense that Löwith could not begin a proper dialogue with Blumenberg. He struggled and failed to find arguments in Blumenberg’s work that contradicted his own. The differences between the two were not, as he was to discover, conflicting theses but differences in the worth one attributed to the “truths” of the Human-world. As long as the World had no role in modern consciousness and as long as the role of God was dubious, the “truth” of progress in the Human-world was of little interest for Löwith. Blumenberg missed the presuppositions of Löwith’s critique of modernity and his interest in the triad of metaphysics – God-Humanity-World – and began a debate that did not begin to scratch the surface of Löwith’s critique of modernity. The secularization thesis, via the claim that modernity has a false consciousness pertaining to history, is the mildest of Löwith’s critiques. His fundamental critique and the one that should have defined his career is that modern Humanity has a false consciousness pertaining to Humanity and its ability to be independent from not only an all-encompassing Cosmos.

CONCLUSION

LÖWITH'S TRADITION OF CRITIQUE

Nach meiner altmodischen Auffassung ist sie [die Philosophie] eine Angelegenheit *für wenige*, einzelne. Wenn sie ernst betrieben wird, verlangt sie eine Konzentration auf das Wesentliche, die den Seitenblick auf unmittelbare zeitgenössische Wirksamkeit ausschließt. Mittelbar kann sie sehr wohl wirken (*“Wozu heute noch Philosophie?”* 209).

Löwith is a storyteller who picks out different heroes in the history of philosophy and uses them as characters in long developed narratives. He wished for himself the advantages of a novelist, the advantage of hiding oneself behind characters and plots – something uncommon for a philosopher but at the same time, genius. At no other point in his writings did he feel a closer kinship to the subjects of his texts as when he described an imperative shared by Burckhardt and Nietzsche:

[Es kam Burckhardt darauf an], immer offener und ehrlicher zu werden, in Übereinstimmung mit Nietzsches Imperativ: Das Schlimme und Falsche soll ans Licht.⁴⁵⁰

For Löwith, philosophical honesty was a historical consciousness of the tradition and an awareness of the history and origins of philosophical doctrines. His honesty was both his unwillingness to try and move philosophy forward and his unwillingness to make truth-claims. Löwith saw a fundamental problem with modern philosophy – namely, in its false understanding of Humanity – but could not himself properly and satisfactorily create a philosophy of a natural Humanity. Not being able to go forward, Löwith concentrated on critique, following the imperative to drag the “bad and the false into the light”. He wanted his critiques to be pure and attempted to hide his personal preferences.⁴⁵¹ Having somewhat achieved this goal in his study on Nietzsche, Löwith was asked by a confused friend, Voegelin, what exactly his position was concerning the value of Nietzsche’s philosophy. He could proudly answer that his position was no position, that he had preferred to “sit on the fence” than instruct philosophers in how they should think. In responding to Voegelin’s letter he writes:

⁴⁵⁰ Jacob Burckhardt, VII, 63.

⁴⁵¹ Manfred Riedel, who wrote his dissertation under the direction of Löwith in 1960, notes that Löwith always attempted, in his lectures and writings, to not reveal himself. *Karl Löwith, der in seinen Vorlesungen und Schriften stets die Maxime befolgt, von sich zu schweigen...* Riedel, “Löwiths Philosophischer Weg,” 120.

Das Sie in m. Buch meine “Position” nicht herausgefunden haben liegt nicht an einem Mangel an Imagination sondern daran, dass meine Reserve auf Grund des vorhin Gesagten [Gewöhnlich werden Probleme bloss dadurch gelöst, dass sie an Interesse und Relevanz verlieren + faktisch in Vergessenheit geraten], die Substanz meiner “Position” ist, falls Sie mir, als Nichtamerikaner, zugestehen können dass “to sit on the fence” auch eine Position ist...⁴⁵²

Whether or not Voegelin agreed with Löwith being successful in his objectivity, he did see this attempt to “sit on the fence” as being descriptive of a generation. Voegelin returned to this idea of sitting on the fence as a philosophical style twenty years later in a lecture held in Montreal in 1965. To sit on the fence was not just the goal of an objective critique but a consequent of being exhausted with ideologies.

Now for the phenomenon of exhaustion. In a sense, ideologies are criticized to pieces. We have in our time a very peculiar generation of scholars who all are clear about it: Ideologies are finished. Each one in his way has taken this or that ideology and criticized it so that nothing is left of it. Nevertheless, he does not quite see what to do afterward, so we have a peculiar fence-straddling generation. These people are very serious; but their having seen that all is wrong still doesn't mean they know what is right. For instance, there is Karl Löwith, author of *Meaning in History* (1949), who has in an earlier work, *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (1941), completely analyzed the problem of German Hegelian historicism and all its inadequacies. Nobody seriously today can any longer be an historicist on the scale of *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, including Löwith himself. It's out; everybody knows that. But that doesn't mean that Löwith now knows what to do. The situation has its comic aspects; but it is very serious for these people because it is not easy to find out how to get out of the mess. [...] The whole sense of utopia is shown up as the non-sense it is.⁴⁵³

It has, however, been the goal of the present work to not just repeat Löwith's various critiques but speak for Löwith when he preferred to be still and provide the subjective background to the objective façade presented in his writings. Nothing differentiated Löwith more from his mentor, Heidegger – who had no use for sitting on top of fences – , than his modesty and unconceited style of philosophy. He was unconcerned with creating a generation of Löwithians nor with making the headlines with philosophical catch-phrases such as: “*Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins*”, “*der Mensch ist der Nachbar des Seins*” or “*nur ein Gott kann uns retten*”. His quiet manner and style demands from his reader an attentiveness, diligence and the ability to not always take his objectivity

⁴⁵² Löwith, letter to Voegelin dated Jan. 7, 1945, 59.

⁴⁵³ Voegelin, “In Search of the Ground”, Vol. 11, 237.

seriously. His subjectivity, personal philosophical standpoints and opinions were always spoken through the mouth of a particular historical philosopher. Löwith was conscious of himself as being a fellow-human or a fellow-philosopher within a philosophical tradition and it is to this extent that Löwith preferred to weave philosophical narratives of interconnectivity instead of expressing himself as an individual.

Voegelin's question and attempt to divulge from Löwith his standpoint is not just the product of frustration after reading one of his works, rather, it is a reaction that Löwith had hoped for by using his neutral style throughout his oeuvre. Looking past this neutrality is to look on the side of the fence that Löwith had always privileged, the side where Nietzsche always made himself comfortable. It is the case, however, that the philosophical theory or ideas that Löwith privileged are not always ones that he found to be practical or applicable – hence his skepticism. Löwith was much too well informed about the development of different philosophical trends to think that any *new* development could be anything but the intensification of already existing lines of thought. It is in this sense that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were working against a historical consciousness when they attempted to bring tradition to a halt. This is, however, Löwith's conundrum; he found certain doctrines and theses to be *ideal* but could not bring himself to break with tradition. He found modern philosophy to have a false consciousness of itself (e.g., the secularization thesis) but found a new beginning or a return to a previous philosophy to be too radical and unreasonable. This is the setting in which the philosophy of critique that defines his oeuvre took place. The dubious modern concept of a Human *telos* in history was pitted against the lucid ideas of history being driven by God and providence or World and fate. Löwith did not want modern philosophy to merely return to these concepts as they had been understood historically by the early Christians or ancient Greeks. He wanted, rather, modernity to bring its theorizing up to the niveau of these past philosophies by ridding itself of its merely secularized concepts and by recognizing the contingency of Humanity against the backdrop of an all-encompassing Cosmos. This is a venture that Löwith himself never undertook but left for later generations.

He felt himself closely tied to, among others, the ancient Greeks, Burckhardt, Nietzsche and any philosopher who could help give the ideal ideas of World and fate proper expression. It is in this sense that Löwith was attracted late in his life to the writings of

Vico and Paul Valéry. His book, *Valéry*, is a work where Löwith highlights philosophical problems that preoccupied Valéry as if to invoke him as a witness to his own personal philosophical tendencies. Most interesting for Löwith was Valéry's preoccupation with the Cartesian problem of properly differentiating between mind and body, or, as Löwith interpreted it, of properly differentiating between the Human and natural (i.e. the World).⁴⁵⁴

Instead of finding like-minded thinkers amongst his contemporaries, Löwith was forced to find dialogue and discussion of his own way of thinking in the history of philosophy. Experiencing around twenty years of exile, Löwith returned to a Germany and a philosophical climate that was no longer interested in Nietzschean questions of transvaluation or the decline of metaphysics. Upon his return it was clear to him that he belonged to an older generation of philosophers that grew up with the two World Wars and that took the political and social crisis of the time to be one in the same with a philosophical crisis. In a letter to Habermas, Löwith expresses this disconnect between himself and the social interests of the Frankfurt School:

Ich bedauere sehr, wie schon so oft, daß Sie [Habermas] nicht hier sind, wenngleich ich bezweifle, ob Sie noch etwas von mir hätten, denn ich gehöre zu den altmodischen Emeriti, die zwar Nietzsches Kritik der Wissenschaft und der Philosophie von Jugend auf in sich aufgenommen haben, aber trotzdem, wie Nietzsche selbst, nicht bereit sind, die prekär gewordene Philosophie in Methodologie der Sozialwissenschaften und Kritik aufzulösen und die auf das Ganze gehenden Inhalte der Philosophie preiszugeben. Und das Universale ist nun einmal nicht der Mensch und die allzu menschliche Gesellschaft, sondern das Universum, von dem Marx so geringschätzig dachte, weil es ihn als unveränderlich nicht interessierte.⁴⁵⁵

His underdeveloped concept of World was also one that found little support amongst his contemporaries. Almost as if out of frustration Gadamer writes to Löwith that he should re-formulate his question of a natural World to make it more understandable and, in doing so, shows his misunderstanding of Löwith's actual motive (*wirkliche Motive*) for reimagining the Cosmos.

⁴⁵⁴ "Auf diesem Weg, der von Valérys Jugendschrift *Monsieur Teste* bis zu seinem Alterswerk *Mon Faust* führt, kehrt sich die Fragestellung nach dem Verhältnis von Mensch und Welt bzw. Geist und Körper um". Paul Valéry; *Grundzüge seines philosophischen Denkens* (1971), IX, 244.

⁴⁵⁵ Löwith, letter to Habermas dated Nov. 15, 1968. The letter can be found in the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach*.

Du würdest Deiner Sache, deren Bedeutung niemand verkennt, ganz anders nützen, wenn du dich entschlossdest, Deine wirklichen Motive zum Gegenstand Deiner Aussage zu machen. Das aber ist nicht die Welt, sondern unser Verhalten zu ihr. ... Ich fürchte freilich, daß Du Dich innerlich in Deine Gedanken zu sehr verrannt hast, als daß meine Bemerkungen und überhaupt irgend etwas Dich stutzig machen könnten.⁴⁵⁶

It was, namely, not one's behavior (*Verhalten*) towards the World that had interested Löwith, rather, the extent by which one was conditioned by the World. Habermas also rejected Löwith's wish for a Cosmology and, as Gadamer, posed the question of whether or not it was the Human-World which could possibly lead to an idea of a natural World.

Ist nicht die Natur des Menschen notwendig vermittelt durch die zweite Natur, die nur in den geschichtlich ausgebildeten Formen seiner Arbeit, den geschichtlich erworbenen und entworfenen Regeln des Zusammenlebens, Befehlens und Gehorchens, in den geschichtlich entdeckten, sprachlich festgehalten, vorangetriebenen, oder auch verworfenen, verlorenen Weisen des Erfahrens, Deutens und Verfügens, die deshalb auch in den Bildern, welche bestimmte Gesellschaften zu bestimmten Zeiten von sich selber haben, buchstabiert ist?⁴⁵⁷

Löwith, however, had a distaste for philosophies of subjectivity, for philosophies that made the World relative to Human capacities for understanding. It was namely his goal to make clear that it was the Human capacities for understanding that were relative to the World.

What Löwith failed to do and what led to the rejection of his conception of World-philosophy was his unwillingness to clarify what such a philosophy entails. It is in this sense that his heritage remains one not of a systematic World-philosophy but one of critique.

⁴⁵⁶ Gadamer, letter to Löwith dated March 4, 1960. The letter can be found in the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach*.

⁴⁵⁷ Habermas, *Stoischer Rückzug*, 362.

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