Karl Löwith's View of History: A Humanist Alternative to Historicism

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KARL LÖWITH'S VIEW OF HISTORY:
A HUMANIST ALTERNATIVE
TO HISTORICISM

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Reaction to Heidegger</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Historicism as Humanism</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Hegel and Goethe</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Meaning in History</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V History as a Natural Happening</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Conclusion</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autobiographical Statement</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION


For Kant and Lessing no less than for Voltaire and Turgot, the general rather than the particular was the chief concern of historical investigation. "The core is always the same!" as Voltaire stated. In contrast, men like Herder, Hegel, and Ranke placed a great stress upon the concreteness and particularity of individual historical phenomena. Moreover in direct opposition to Voltaire's interest in "that great society of all-wise men which exists everywhere and which is everywhere independent,"\footnote{Quoted in Engel-Janosi, op. cit., pp. 15-16.} they emphasized the importance of the various national units and their unique and peculiar historical development.

But this new historicist orientation did not enjoy a complete triumph in the nineteenth century. Already after the middle of the century,
a serious questioning of its general validity and ultimate value began to appear. One of the earliest manifestations of what we might term anti-historicism can be discerned in Nietzsche's aversion to the enervating and culturally servile academic "historism" of his day especially the Ran- kian variety. Nietzsche argued that the Rankians had emasculated history as a vital source of action by reducing it to a mere passive cataloguing of the minute happenings which taken together constitute a historical event. Thereby they not only fragmented the great event itself but also played down the role of the individual in effecting major or decisive changes. Instead, Nietzsche wanted a historiography which would stimulate man's vital and essentially irrational will impulses for these alone, he felt, gave rise to new and fruitful attempts to master reality.

Jacob Burckhardt, Nietzsche's older contemporary, was also

3Some scholars have recently taken pains to distinguish the terms "historism" and "historicism." Historism is usually applied to the early phase of the development, the Herder, Hegel, Ranke period, wherein the Enlightenment's emphasis upon the normative character of reason and the objective meaningfulness of the universe were still recognized. Historicism, in contrast, is understood as referring primarily to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century relativization of all absolute norms and standards. Since the following study is focused primarily upon the post World War I revolt against historical thought, historicism rather than historicism will be the chief concern. For specific examples of this distinction see George G. Iggers, "The Idea of Progress: a Critical Re-assessment," The American Historical Review, LXXI (1965), pp. 1-17 and Erich Kahler, The Meaning of History (New York: George Braziller, 1964), p. 200ff.

displeased with the general historical scholarship of his day but more specifically with the facile optimism and extreme pretensions embodied in the metaphysical historicism of Hegel. Hegel's historical studies consist almost exclusively in the purposeful investigation and judgment of particular "world historical" individuals such as Caesar and Napoleon and the concrete manifestations of the "world spirit" in the Greco-Roman and Germanic-Christian worlds. In contrast, Burckhardt preferred the aesthetic contemplation of general and eternal types; the "man of the Renaissance," "the Greek of the heroic age," the "creative individual" within the universal historical continuum. 5

Nineteenth century anti-historicism was also evident in the attempt of the positivist thinkers to transform history into a predictable science analogous to the natural sciences. In sharp opposition to the historicist emphasis upon the uniqueness and peculiarity of human life, the positivists argued that human life was in no way fundamentally different from other forms of life. Hence, historical processes were considered identical in kind with natural processes, and the methods of natural science were judged applicable to the interpretation of history. Comte himself proposed that there should be a new science called "sociology" whose initial work,

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the gathering of facts about human life, was to be done by the historian
but whose ultimate goal was the discovery of the causal connections be-
tween these facts. "The sociologist would thus be a kind of super-
historian raising history to the rank of a science by thinking scientifically
about the same facts about which the historian thought only empirically."6

Moreover, as the century drew to a close, many thinkers grew
increasingly sceptical of the ultimate value of the historicist orientation
through its failure to provide a firm basis for an objective ethical system.
In the face of the positivistic onslaught, Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert,
and Simmel had attempted to maintain the autonomy of the historical sci-
ences by bifurcating reality into two unique and specific realms each pos-
sessing its own particular methodology and view of truth: natural sciences
and cultural or historical sciences, Naturwissenschaften und Geisteswissen-
schaften. But, as one astute scholar has pointed out, this bifurcation also
implied that all values were purely cultural phenomena with no reference
to an ultimate unconditioned source of value per se. "All values were
rooted in Weltanschauungen and Weltanschauungen were in the final analy-
sis irrational. Man was thus faced by the ethical irrationality of the world
and the insoluble conflict of the systems of values."7 In other words, his-
tory instead of being viewed as the sole key to value and reason, as in the

6Collingwood, op. cit., p. 128.
7Iggers, op. cit., p. 3.
opening decades of the nineteenth century, was now identified with the relative; and the prospects for attaining to objective ethical knowledge via history seemed virtually hopeless.

However in spite of the existence of these anti-historicist tendencies, primarily in Germany, in the middle and latter decades of the nineteenth century, they did not play a major role in the cultural life of the nation. The tradition established by Herder, Hegel, and Ranke and carried on by men such as Droysen, Sybel, and Meinecke continued to predominate. One of the chief reasons for the failure of these nascent anti-historicist tendencies to come to the fore in the pre-World War I period was the absence of a major socio-political and socio-economic upheaval around which these tendencies could crystallize and assume definite forms. Just as it required the French Revolution and its Napoleonic sequel to provide the stimulus for the works of the founders of historicism, so the "Great War" was needed to precipitate that "crisis of historicism" which has since functioned as a kind of underlying motif in all of the subsequent discussions on the nature and methodology of the historian's craft. Under the emotional impact of World War I and its aftermath, historicism was
severely discredited. Now all values were openly acknowledged as historical, i.e., as relative, and history itself was viewed as a meaningless web spun by what men did, produced, and thought, a veritable "tale told by an idiot" signifying nothing. Furthermore, since Germany had suffered outright defeat on the battlefield and a particularly humiliating peace, a definite opprobrium was attached not only to uniquely Germanic customs and practices but also to the tradition of Historismus which had contributed strongly to the creation of the German national ideal. Accordingly, in the twenties and thirties, Germany became the home of a number of distinct and powerful anti-historicist tendencies.

One of the more exclusive but nonetheless influential of these tendencies appeared in the circle constituted by the followers of the poet Stefan George. Their chief historical spokesman was Friedrich Gundolf. History's sole value, according to Gundolf, was to convey images, arouse the imagination, and develop character through the presentation of great deeds and great men. And he was determined to realize these goals in spite of the new evidence and information brought to light by the entire nineteenth century tradition of historical and philological criticism. In fact, Gundolf's works on such leading figures as Goethe, Heinrich von Kleist, and Caesar are only concerned with transforming the extraordinary man into a life giving heroic myth or legend and often willfully subord-

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dinate actual events to this end. Thus Nietzsche's agitations for a vitalistic or life-promoting historiography had finally borne fruit, although Nietzsche himself with his passionate concern for empirical, i.e., scientific accuracy would hardly have condoned Guldolf's work.

Another strange fruit of the Nietzschean seed was the rise of what has been termed historical and political "decisionism." Given the relativization of all formerly objective norms and standards, a number of thinkers such as Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, and Hans Freyer argued that the only way the resulting spiritual and moral apathy could be overcome was through a complete break with the past. In lieu of the traditional historicist thought forms, these thinkers placed an exclusive emphasis upon the will and its unique capacity for decision and action. As Freyer put it

Already for quite some time, already before and during the war, one could discern a new generation of concepts in the cultural sciences. Concepts such as: the "present," the "moment," "decision," "existence," "responsibility," "encounter," "reality" began to dominate the field. Through these new concepts the emancipation of history from such thought forms as "progress," "development," "dialectic" [i.e., traditional historicist thought forms] was complete. Through them the idea was revived that history is the realm of action.

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A further very important and widespread anti-historicist tendency found expression in Oswald Spengler’s two volume morphology of world history.\(^\text{12}\) Spengler not only sought to record the rise and fall of the major civilizations of the world and to predict the fate of our own Western civilization but, even more important, he attempted to obliterate, as false and arbitrary, the historicist distinction between nature and history. He sought to overcome the relativism in the cultural sciences as juxtaposed to the necessity in the natural sciences by viewing history as a manifestation of a predetermined cosmic necessity. Spengler’s several civilizational cycles experience the same regular seasonal rhythms as those which characterize nature. Moreover the individuals of each civilizational cycle are seen to be as limited in their capabilities and modes of expression as the plants of a particular soil and geographical area. Thus, with Spengler, pre-war historicist optimism as well as post-war historicist pessimism are clearly rejected in favor of an all-encompassing cosmic fatalism. In fact

In its dogmatic tone, in its determinist assumption, in its thoroughly unsophisticated application of natural science terminology to the course of human history, *The Decline of the West* represented a relapse into a naive positivism, at the same time, in its imaginative range in its breath-taking juxtapositions of examples drawn from the most varied aspects of human culture, it surpassed the boldest flights of idealist \([\text{i.e.}, \text{Romantic}]\) thinking.\(^\text{13}\)


But Spengler's amalgamation of positivism and Romanticism was not the only way to overcome the relativism inherent in the historicist orientation. Historicist relativism can also be overcome through the wholesale abandonment of the metaphysical assumptions that make its conclusions so unbearable. And, in the late twenties and early thirties, this was precisely the suggestion of the existential ontologist Martin Heidegger, who, ostensibly, only intended to "further the work of Dilthey."\(^{14}\) For Heidegger man is hurled into an ethically absurd universe in which he is driven by "care" Sorge, and "anguish" Angst and only certain of death. In other words, human existence as an intrinsic "being towards death" a Dasein zum Tode implies that temporality rather than eternity is the true character of existence. In fact given the fundamental temporality of existence, the entire post-Socratic development or traditional substantival thought reveals itself to be a great aberration, one tremendous subjective delusion. Thereby, Heidegger removes the basis of all complaints against historicism; for if there never was an absolute or an eternal substance, then all our fears of its relativization through historicism are, of course, groundless.\(^{15}\)

However post World War I Germany also witnessed the rise of a


\(^{15}\) Ibid., pp. 372-392. Also see below, Chapter I.
less extreme anti-historicist trend, a trend whose origins might even be traced to Jacob Burckhardt. Unlike the radical decisionists, heroic mythologists, cosmic fatalists, and existential ontologists, these particular anti-historicists fully affirm and acknowledge the importance of the traditional historical development. Yet, at the same time, like Burckhardt, they place a renewed emphasis upon the necessity of acquiring a supra-historical or extra-temporal point of reference as the only way of avoiding the dogmatism of arbitrary postulation on the one hand and of overcoming the pernicious relativization of all values on the other. Some sought to avoid the extremes of their contemporaries by reasserting the essential correctness of the Greco-Roman understanding of man and history. Others advocated a return to a specifically Christian view of history, and a few even sought to resurrect the Enlightenment doctrine of an immutable and all-sovereign natural law.16

However the arguments advanced in support of these contentions have not always met with success, and from a strictly logical point of view the entire attempt could be dismissed as a fanciful and neo-Romantic

16Gerhardt Kräger, Die Geschichte im Denken der Gegenwart (Frankfurth/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1947), also Grundfragen der Philosophie: Geschichte, Wahrheit, Wissenschaft (Frankfurth/Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1958); Oscar Cullmann, Christus und die Zeit, die urchristliche Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung (Zürich: Evangélicher Verlag, 1946); Wilhelm Kamlah, Christentum und Geschichtlichkeit (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1951); Non German representatives of this transcendental orientation would be Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1949); Herbert Butterfield, History and Christianity (London: Bell, 1949); and Leo Strauss, op. cit.
flight from reality. But despite its logical weaknesses, the supra-
historical position as such has proven itself more viable than most of
the other forms of anti-historicism. In fact of all the aforementioned
anti-historicist trends only the supra-historical and existential managed to
survive the cataclysmic and "decisive" National Socialist solution of the
German "crisis of historicism." The others were soon absorbed by the
new regime although not before exerting a definite influence upon the
growth of related movements elsewhere, especially in England. For ex-
ample, contemporary English analytical philosophy and Toynbee's theo-
logical cyclical empiricism still bear witness to the influence of some of
these post World War I German developments. 17

In all events, the survival and increasing academic importance of
the supra-historical position, particularly as an alternative to existential
ontology and English analytical philosophy, 18 indicate that a careful study
of this particular trend is in order. The following analysis of the intel-
lectual development of Karl Löwith, a thinker who in the course of his

17 Igers, op. cit., pp. 9-10, has discerned a strong decisionist
strain in analytic philosophy. Moreover Toynbee has himself acknow-
ledged his debt to Spengler. See "My View of History," in Civilization on
Trial and The World and the West (New York: Meridian Books, 1958),
pp. 20-21. Also for an excellent comparison and contrast of analytical
philosophy and existential ontology consult Walter Kaufmann, Critique of
Religion and Philosophy (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1961),
pp. 29-60.

18 Gerhardt Bauer, Geschichtlichkeit, Wege und Irrwege eines
Begriffs (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Co., 1963); Rudolf Bultmann,
History and Eschatology, the Presence of Eternity (New York: Harper
career moved from phenomenology and ontology to historicism and then finally to the supra-historical position, it is hoped, will make a contribution toward such a study.

CHAPTER I

Reaction to Heidegger

Karl Löwith, the son of a German craftsman, was born in Munich, Germany in 1897, and like so many young men of this generation he was called upon to defend the Vaterland before he had any real opportunity to pursue a chosen career. However immediately after the conclusion of the first World War, Löwith began his studies at the University of Freiburg. Initially he studied both biology and philosophy but the latter soon became his chief interest. Also at this time, two figures in particular exerted an important influence upon him, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. From Husserl, Löwith acquired an understanding and appreciation of the phenomenological mode of investigation and interpretation, and a vital impression of an extra-temporal or supra-historical scholar, i.e., a thinker who is apparently unmoved by the upheavals and developments within the socio-political realm. In 1939 in the preface to his book Von Hegel bis Nietzsche dedicated to Husserl, Löwith observed

In those days when one feared Freiburg’s occupation by French troops and the lecture halls became empty, I shall never forget how this great scholar Husserl continued his expositions with an increased calm and surety as if nothing in the world could disturb the seriousness of scientific investigation. And when I visited him for the last time at his home, to which he was now restricted, shortly after the upheaval [1933], it was again the impression of a free spirit attained to wisdom. 19

19 Karl Löwith, Von Hegel bis Nietzsche (1st Edit.; New York/Zürich: Europa Verlag, 1941), p. 5. A second edition of this work with a
But this Husserl impression was soon overshadowed by Löwith's encounter with Martin Heidegger who quickly replaced Husserl as his teacher and in a very short time also became a close personal friend. Heidegger's influence on Löwith is readily discernable in his doctoral dissertation, *a phenomenological and ontological "Exegesis of Nietzsche's Self-Interpretation and of Nietzsche's Interpretations."* Yet in spite of this fascination with Heidegger's ontologizing, Löwith never really became an active disciple. In fact a year after the publication of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Löwith published his first major scholarly work, *The Individual in his Role as Fellow-Man*, which is a critical reexamination of Heidegger's entire understanding of man, nature, and being.


21K. Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen, ein Beitrag zur anthropologischen Grundlegung der ethischen Probleme*, (Munich: Drei Masken, 1928). The Mohr Verlag of Tübingen also published this work in 1928, and in 1962 the Darmstadt Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft procured a special photocopy edition but only for their members.
At first glance, the analysis of Heidegger and Löwith bear a certain similarity in so far as both consciously seek to overcome the Cartesian understanding of reality. Both agree that given the rigid separation between a realm of mere mental consciousness, \textit{res cogitans}, and a realm of sheer physical extension, \textit{res extensa}, the ultimate results of this separation are a fundamental displacement of man and world.

Man as a self conscious "subject" may have the power to "represent" to himself mathematically the specific "objects" of the non-conscious world. But this mathematical-physical access to the world does not really compensate for the loss of his former intuitive grasp nor of the robbing of the \textit{res extensa} of all its qualitative riches and shades.

Heidegger contends that the ultimate roots of the Cartesian conception are to be found in the ancient Aristotelian and Christian scholastic emphasis upon being and essence as eternal, infinite, and perfect in contrast to the transitoriness and finiteness of human existence. In other words, he argues that Descartes has merely secularized the traditional view of man and being. Hence, for Heidegger, the only way the Cartesian dichotomy can be overcome is through a critical destruction of the entire Western metaphysical tradition. Instead of focusing upon the eternal and immutable, he proposes to understand man's being in particular and Being in general from the standpoint of man's essential finiteness or "temporality."

Löwith's rejection of Descartes also stems from a reconsideration
of the Western tradition although by no means as radical as that of Heidegger. Löwith discerns the antecedents of the modern subject-object orientation in the Renaissance and Reformation. Both, he argues, contributed towards the development of the autonomy and self consciousness of the individual. By encouraging a reexamination of the pure classical and Christian sources of Western culture, the Renaissance gave rise to a new understanding and appreciation of nature and of individual potentialities. The Reformation, through its removal of all intermediaries between God and man, laid the foundations for a highly personal and individualistic approach to questions concerning the ultimate nature of things. Thus both, according to Löwith, "motivated the philosophical-historical primacy of the 'I am' and 'I think'."\(^2\)

In any case, when confronted with the Cartesian presupposition of a self sufficient ego or a self consciousness which is juxtaposed to an "objective" or non-conscious world, Löwith as well as Heidegger reacts strongly. Heidegger underscores the sheer factuality of human existence and Löwith the primordial pre-intellectual bond between man, nature, and society. Hence the understanding of reality for both Heidegger and Löwith hinges on man's direct experiential encounter with the world rather than on an apparent sovereign self consciousness. However if Löwith and Heidegger are in agreement on the necessity of beginning from such a fundamental encounter, their understanding and elucidation of this encounter

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 2.
itself diverges sharply.

Heidegger argues that despite the sheer factuality of our existence we are not simply "extant" \textit{vorhanden} like a stone, nor are we merely "functional" \textit{zuhanden} like a tool, i.e., determined by an alien purpose. In distinction to the merely extant and the functional being, man owns his own being, for he is, in effect, thrust upon himself as a self. Thus, while man is not responsible for his "being there," or for existence itself, he alone of the other two modes of being has the unique privilege of accepting or rejecting the fact of his own being. Moreover, human existence is not a fixed quality like the physical being tall or short; rather it is a constant possibility. We can exist in this or that manner, authentically or inauthentically, in an individual or in an average way.

An "average" or inauthentic mode of existence, according to Heidegger, is existence in the form of the impersonal mass-man or the "\textit{man}." Existence as such is \textit{a priori} an existence with others. But only rarely is one genuinely together with others as, for example, with close friends, or with "thous" with whom the "I" has a meaningful relationship. Instead one is generally together with anonymous others with "\textit{man}." "\textit{Man}" is nobody in particular; "\textit{man}" is everyman or mass-man. Life is easy for the anonymous "\textit{man}" for here one can rely on the general anonymity of the mass and avoid all responsibility. Thus the individual by escaping into the "\textit{man}" removes from existence the burden of being a self or of authenticity. 23

\footnotesize{23}Heidegger, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 114-130.
Furthermore, Heidegger argues that one of the key elements in differentiating authentic from inauthentic existence is the acknowledgment of death as the only true certainty of existence. As a sheer factuality the individual has no knowledge of his whence and whither. Heidegger explains this ignorance as a product of our "being thrown into existence," our Geworfenheit. No one has ever freely decided whether he wants to come into existence or not. Hence, it is utterly unintelligible why we have to be. Out of this experience, one not only attempts to escape into the "man" but also undertakes various projects, both individual and collective, to help blot out the uneasy consciousness of being ultimately nothing more than a sheer factual self. However the ultimate "project," Entwurf, which the individual can and ought to undertake is the anticipation and appropriation of his death. For only by anticipating and facing resolutely the possibility of an imminent end can one become an authentic or a "whole and total existence," ganz sein können. Thus by resolutely anticipating death, the individual emancipates himself from the "man" and acknowledges the ultimate finiteness and nothingness, or very simply, the "truth" of existence as such. 24

This ultimate nothingness of our existence is also revealed in an indefinite "anxiety" Angst. For Heidegger anxiety is distinct from a specific fear of this or that. It is not concerned with particular objects in the world but rather with the totality of existence itself. In such an anxiety,

24 Ibid., pp. 235-267.
which may emerge on quite trivial occasions, man suddenly loses his hold on the world. The whole of being seems to drift away into nothingness. But this experience of stretching out into nothingness is in itself a fruitful one, for it gives us the necessary background against which we become aware of Being as such, of the amazing fact that there is something and not nothing. Heidegger refers to it as the "wonder of all wonders." And just because man can experience this "wonder of all wonders," he is an exceptional fatally privileged being, or in Heidegger's ontological term, a Da-sein, a "being there." Moreover as such an ontological being, man is also capable of transcending his own and every other concrete being toward Being as such. He can relate himself to other beings, to everything in the world, and to his own being in it, and thereby he surpasses all these various kinds of concrete beings. In sum then, with the emergence of man or Da-sein amidst all other beings, there occurs an "inroad" which opens the view on Being as such.

In opposition to this exclusively existential and ontological view of man, Löwith proposes an understanding of human existence which is based upon the conviction that "authentic existence" can only be attained by reemphasizing the primordial bonds which exist between the individual and society or what Löwith terms the Mitwelt. "The world is already eo ipso Mitwelt" just as "life in general is already eo ipso a life together with others."25 For Löwith, the Mitwelt is much more than a mere

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25 K. Löwith, Individuum, p. 16. Löwith here also seems to imply
anonymous impersonal mass; it is the world of our fellow-men with whom genuine and meaningful relationships are possible. When we encounter an "other," Löwith argues, we encounter him a priori as a personae, i.e., as a being essentially determined by a particular role such as husband, father, soldier, etc., "within and for the Mitwelt." Thus man in society, as a personae, precedes man as a sheer factuality or as an impersonal, anonymous "man."

Furthermore, since Löwith specifically anchors the meaning of existence in man as a personae, he must also concern himself with the problem of ethics. "One can only be 'egotistical' or 'kind' because of the existence of others to whom one can be 'egotistical' or 'kind.' Egotism as well as kindness are not inner qualities which can exist by themselves but are what they are as expressions of human life," i.e., of the personae-Mitwelt relationship. In contrast, Heidegger's isolated individual is a completely amoral, nonethical being. In fact, by implication, Heidegger seems to be saying that traditional ethics have little or nothing at all to do with the struggle to come to an awareness of existence and Being per se. Thus Löwith's emphasis upon the ethical dimension of existence, while

that Heidegger's juxtaposition of the isolated individual self to the impersonal "man" does not really constitute an overcoming of Cartesian dualism but is merely a contemporary restatement of the old subject-object distinction.

26 Ibid., p. 16.

27 Ibid., p. 51.
not exactly traditional in the sense of resting upon supernatural sanctions, nonetheless indicates a conscious attempt to retain a praiseworthy feature of the old tradition. This tendency to retain certain elements of the tradition, in opposition to Heidegger's truly radical break with the past, is also clearly manifest in Löwith's view of nature and in his conception of time and history.

Human existence, of course, implies the existence of a world. But, for Heidegger, the world is not merely an external sum total of all extant being, nor is it a sheer system of functional beings. It is a universal and yet, at the same time, an existential structure. As indicated, man is not in the world like a stone or a tool but is essentially relating himself to these and other beings in the world. Thus he is from the very outset of his human existence a worldly existence. Furthermore, the world itself is not simply a mere blind mass of being; it, too, is a specific way or state of being. If the world were nothing but a blind mass of being then it would be a sheer chaos. But granted that the world is not a chaos, this does not mean that, as a state of being, it is intrinsically meaningful. All it indicates is that it is intimately related to the existence of man. For it is only to man as the sole being capable of transcending himself and the world that the world actually reveals itself as it really is, i.e., as an ordered totality or a cosmos. Therefore Heidegger regards the existence of the world and man as a "single undivided phenomenon," and the world is, in effect, reduced to the status of a mere existential
structure. Its very existence and discovery is inextricably bound up with the existence of man himself.

But this understanding of the world completely undermines the traditional view of world and man as either an integral part of an all-encompassing nature or as a special creation of a transcendental creator-god. In fact, nature itself, according to Heidegger, cannot elucidate the ontological character of the world and of our existence because it is only another kind of being within our world; we only encounter it in the course of the analysis of man's existence. It is a mere borderline case of the "things in the world." However, in what respect it is such a borderline case is not subject to closer examination. Apparently nature does not enjoy an autonomous existence at all in Heidegger's ontological analysis, vanishing in the vague notion of that which is merely "extant" -- in contrast to the merely "functional."

Löwith, on the other hand, does recognize an autonomous life on the part of nature as well as a strictly natural, i.e., autonomous dimension of human existence. For Löwith, the world, while it is predominately the world of our fellow men, the Mitwelt, is also the world of nature, the Umwelt; and although the Umwelt is subject to a certain degree to the influences of the Mitwelt, it nonetheless retains a self-sufficient or autonomous core which is permanently impenetrable to the Mitwelt. "This primordial independence of nature at first reveals itself to man as that which

23Heidegger, op. cit., p. 65.
can be cultivated no further, trained no further, bred no further, etc."²⁹

Thus nature, while clearly subject to human influence, is not, however, totally constituted by man's existence; hence man and the world are not a "single undivided phenomenon."

But in Löwith's view, it is not only essential that one recognize the fundamental autonomy of nature, a true understanding of reality also entails a recognition of the "ontological dual nature of man." Löwith understands man as a "primordial disunity," i.e., a being neither exclusively natural nor spiritual but rather "ambiguous" and "unnatural." By ambiguous and unnatural he means that in contrast to the rest of organic being, man is the only creature which can commit suicide. "An unambiguous natural creature cannot negate itself because along with lacking the disunity in its being, it also lacks the freedom to itself and therefore also from itself. By existing it already has to be. But man, just because he is alive, does not eo-ipso have to be."³⁰ Yet once man decides to be, i.e., once he willingly accepts that which already is, namely his existence together with others in the Mitwelt and Umwelt, he overcomes his primordial disunity and exists authentically. Thus Löwith's distinction between man and nature and his understanding of man as a being possessing an "ontological dual nature" is, in effect, a contemporary reformulation of the traditional view. For in both the classical and

²⁹Löwith, Individuum, p. 33.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 18-19.
Christian traditions man is also fundamentally a two dimensional or dual being, a strange unity of nature and spirit, a "rational" animal or an immortal soul temporarily imprisoned in a material body.

But if, as Heidegger argues, man is neither exclusively nature, nor spirit, nor a unique combination of the two, and moreover a being for whom nature itself is a sheer existential structure constituted by man's own unique being in the world, what then is the ultimate meaning of existence as such? Given these presuppositions, the only possible answer is in terms of the phenomenon of time or temporality understood as the true character or essence of existence. According to Heidegger, the fundamental limitation of traditional metaphysics is that it understands man and being as either a mere manifestation of a universal cosmos or as a product of a transcendental creator-god. In either case, the point of departure of traditional metaphysics is that which is now present and always present or the eternal. 31 It has little empathy for man's exceptional ontological existence as a Dasein and for the future as the primary horizon of all human projects. Thus what Heidegger calls metaphysics is actually metaphysics in an entirely untraditional sense. Instead of indicating something eternal, infinite, and perfect, it is a "finite metaphysics of finiteness," which seeks to understand Being in general and man's being

31 See the excellent analysis by Helene Weiss of "The Greek Conceptions of Time and Being in the Light of Heidegger's Philosophy," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, I (1941), 173ff.
in particular within the single all-encompassing horizon of time. As a result, man emerges as a one dimensional being rather than as an "ontological dual nature," a sheer factuality, at best existing "authentically" within a total temporality or "historicity" of all things; or as Heidegger puts it, "The historicity of existence is essentially the historicity of the world." 32

For Löwith, existence in the form of the personae-Mitwelt relationship is also implicitly temporal and historical but not, of course, in the radical sense of Heidegger's total historicity of all things. While fully acknowledging the innate temporal dimension of existence, he also takes pains to circumscribe this dimension, and thereby he reveals a further tie to the tradition and in particular to Dilthey. Dilthey was convinced that all philosophical and religious ideas spring from the totality of man's living experience and that they can only be understood in terms of their origins in this living experience. In other words, Löwith understands Dilthey as acknowledging that man is a historical being "'to the unfathomable depths of the self.'" 33 But this does not mean that man is also a sheer temporal determination in the absolute sense of Heidegger. For Dilthey, man as a historical being means that every individual is determined by his contemporaries, i.e., by his historical context.

"Hence the notion of generation [sic] is Dilthey's fundamental

32 Heidegger, op. cit., p. 388.
historical concept. It encompasses both the communal life as well as the temporality of existence." Also, for Löwith, time is not "temporality" an all-encompassing horizon, but a continuum which manifests itself in the succession of the generations, and history is not "historicity," an absolute contingency of all things, but the understanding of the "specific generations of thinking man" within the time continuum.

Yet along with this Diltheyan historicist rejection of Heidegger's notions of temporality and historicity, Löwith was also interested in other alternatives to Heidegger. In fact shortly after the appearance of The Individual in his Role as Fellow-Man, he undertook a careful analysis of what might be termed a "cosmic" approach to historical phenomena.

Löwith's analysis of history as a natural or cosmic happening begins with a general juxtaposition of Burckhardt and Hegel. Burckhardt is viewed as an "anthropological" thinker greatly concerned with extricating the individual from the various entanglements and pressures of his age. Hegel, in contrast, is seen as the "philosophical" or "metaphysical" thinker stressing the ties between individual, fellow man, and the various socio-political embodiments of the universal world spirit. But


Löwith wants a point of view which combines the best of both Burckhardt and Hegel. Like Burckhardt, he favors an approach to history which recognizes man as a free agent not merely passively responding to the vicissitudes of his age. Yet, like Hegel, Löwith wants this free agent to be a personae consciously integrated with his Mitwelt rather than an isolated individual existence. Furthermore he also wants an approach to history which takes cognizance of the specifically natural dimension of existence as expressed in the "ontological dual nature of man."

Löwith seeks to overcome this dilemma by turning to an investigation of the problem of historical causation, since it alone entails the antinomy between freedom and necessity or the antinomy between the conscious and unconscious wellsprings of all action. Löwith begins his investigation by surveying the views of Kant, Schelling, and Tolstoy; and he comes to the conclusion that of all the aforementioned thinkers, Tolstoy best answered the question "what really happens when man acts?"

According to Löwith, Tolstoy viewing human life as a whole or en masse considered it impenetrable to abstract rational apprehension. All "philosophical" attempts to understand reality were foredoomed to failure.

"There are two sides to man's life; a personal life whose degree of freedom is dependent upon the abstractness of his interests and an

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37 Ibid., pp. 733-734.

elementary life, a herd life, in which man without fail fulfills that which is predetermined." Thus "consciously man lives for himself but, unconsciously, he serves as a tool for the attainment of the historical goals of all mankind."\textsuperscript{39}

Viewing man in this fashion, the only explanation for historical action which Tolstoy can offer is impersonal in terms of the "event itself," or in terms of "the natural course of the anonymous happenings." History, he says, is moved by "an 'X', an unknown impersonal factor."\textsuperscript{40} For Tolstoy -- and here too for Löwith -- historical happenings are considered to be as inscrutable yet as inevitable and autonomous as the happenings in nature. History is, in effect, analogous to nature. Just as a vast number of single and minute occurrences in nature ultimately issue in a major natural happening such as a hurricane, tornado, etc., so a vast number of single and minute human happenings ultimately issue in a major historical event such as a civil uprising, a war, etc. Moreover just as a natural happening, once under way, must be allowed to run its course, so too a historical event, once under way, is not subject to reversal or major modification.

In addition, Tolstoy's juxtaposition of the passive almost apathetic General Kutuzov to the active dynamic Napoleon is a symbolical representation of his own "natural" approach to history in comparison to the

\textsuperscript{39}Quoted in Löwith, "Burckhardt's Stellung," p. 737.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., pp. 738-739.
"rational" or "philosophical" view of a Hegel. Kutuzov adjusts and adapts himself to the inevitable, while Napoleon willfully seeks to regulate and govern the course of events. "Unlike Kutuzov Napoleon lacks a genuine insight into the fatefulness of what must happen and what he must therefore do." Also, in sharp contrast to Kutuzov, Napoleon "is not venerable and tragic, instead he is comical because his exaggerated self-consciousness blinds him to the subconscious powers which he has to obey whether he wants to or not."41

This Tolstoyan dual view of man: as a rational self-conscious individual enjoying a free personal life, but as a part of society, "unconsciously serving as a tool for the attainment of the historical goals of all mankind," Løwith judges to be a "remarkably original combination" of the "anthropological" view of Burckhardt and the "philosophical" view of Hegel. In fact he even goes so far as to declare that "it is, to paraphrase Dilthey, as if 'life itself' is reflected in it -- 'humanly' and yet not 'too humanly.'"42

However despite this recourse to Dilthey to sanctify the Tolstoyan "reconciliation" of the Hegelian and Burckhardtian approaches to history, it is obvious that the ties between Tolstoy and Dilthey are at best, highly tenuous, essentially negative rather than positive. One can, of course, point to the fact that both Tolstoy and Dilthey were strongly opposed to

41Ibid., p. 740.

42Ibid., p. 741.
all forms of metaphysical conceptualization that seek to circumscribe
dynamic and creative life forces. But beyond this common opposition to
metaphysics, there is little else to unite the two men. Dilthey's careful
demarcation of the realms of nature and history and his wholesale af-
firmation of historicism as a great liberating force breaking "'the last
chains which philosophy and natural science could not tear apart," is
certainly a far cry from Tolstoy's emphasis upon the essential similarity
between nature and history, i.e., "the natural course of the anonymous
happenings." In any case, Löwith's preoccupation with both the Diltheyan
and Tolstoyan views of history is a further indication that his acknowledg-
ment of the innate temporal dimension of human existence in no sense
entails the absorption of existence as such into a Heideggerian all-
embracing temporality and historicity.

To sum up: in these early works, Löwith reveals himself to be a
strange blend of traditionalism and anti-traditionalism. Initially, like
Heidegger, he sought to make a clear break with the past and overcome
the subject-object bifurcation of reality with its resulting alienation of
man and world. However his emphasis upon the autonomy of nature and
the ontological dual nature of man, together with his Diltheyan and Tol-
stoyan rejection of Heidegger's absolute temporality -- all point to his
basic indebtedness to the metaphysical tradition. Yet on the other hand,

43 Quoted in Hajo Holborn, "Wilhelm Dilthey and the Critique of
his search for the specific meaning of existence solely in terms of the personae-Mitwelt relationship is not, in itself, a strictly traditional concern. For both the classical and Christian thinkers the question of the specific meaning of human existence was far outweighed by other more "fundamental" matters such as the contemplation of the inner workings of the cosmos or the interpretation and realization of the Will of God.

Thus while Löwith may retain the traditional notion of a basic duality of man, his emphasis upon man in his role as a personae is a manifestation of his sincere search for an understanding of human existence which is neither traditional in the strictly classical and Christian sense nor totally new and radical in the sense of Heidegger's one-sided existential and ontological perspective.

However after this estrangement from Heidegger, Löwith's interest also began to shift from the strictly phenomenological and philosophical analyses of the general problems of human existence to an investigation of the origins and development of contemporary thought and, specifically, to the role of historicism in this development. And it is to this new interest and preoccupation that we now should turn.
CHAPTER II

Historicism as Humanism

Löwith's view of the origins and development of contemporary thought is determined by the conviction that Hegel's philosophy constituted a genuine culmination of the Western metaphysical tradition; with Hegel "the destiny of pure philosophy itself was decided." After Hegel, he argues, philosophy could no longer exist as pure spiritual conceptualizing but only as "philosophical historical anthropology," i.e., as an investigation of the "here and now of actual human life." Thus Hegel's death inaugurated "our own true 'intellectual' history" since the common point of departure of most of the post-Hegelian thinkers and the "young or 'left' Hegelians in particular was "no longer a pure 'consciousness' or a pure 'reason' or an absolute 'spirit,' but rather man as such in his sheer naked existence."
Starting with Feuerbach, Löwith finds that he was one of the first to recognize the great discrepancy between the pretentions of Hegelian idealism and the actual socio-historical reality. Given "the thorough commercialization of life in his day," Feuerbach realized that "mind" or "spirit" in its prevailing, i.e., its Hegelian form, had become "groundless." Accordingly, Feuerbach sought to rescue man from the "idealistic morass" into which he had sunk -- a particularly difficult task since "man as such does not play a principal role in Hegel's absolute philosophy." Because of his obsession with the all encompassing "universal spirit," Hegel only knows man in the abstract, as a mere "subject of earthly needs" and an "object of civil legislation." In effect then, Hegel only knows man as a "particularity" rather than as a "totality." And Feuerbach's basic concern was to transform this Hegelian "particularity" back into a "totality" again, by reaffirming the non-metaphysical, i.e., the "sensual-corporeal" or "material" bonds existing between the individual and his fellow men. In fact, in Löwith's opinion, Feuerbach was one of the earliest contemporary thinkers to recognize the importance


49 K. Löwith, "Max Weber und Karl Marx," Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, LXVII (1932), p. 177. This same article, with mention of the current literature and a few minor stylistic revisions, also appears in Löwith's Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Kritik der geschichtlichen Existenz (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960). All following citations of this article refer to the original rather than the 1960 version.

50 Ibid., p. 180.
of a genuine I-Thou relationship. And Löwith also freely acknowledges
his indebtedness to Feuerbach in his own attempt to transform the Heideggerian isolated individual into a personae possessing meaningful ties to
his Mitwelt. 51

Yet Feuerbach was not the only thinker who found Hegelianism in-
compatible with reality. A number of other thinkers were equally dis-
pleased with Hegel's interpretation of man and the world, not the least
of whom was Karl Marx. Marx and Feuerbach, Löwith argues, share
"the judgment that Hegel's philosophy of spirit only includes man as a
particularity but not as a basic human and philosophical totality." 52

However in the attempt to reestablish man as such a "basic totality,"
Löwith finds that Marx goes far beyond Feuerbach's relatively simple
suggestion of reemphasizing the essential ties between the individual and
his fellow men.

Marx seeks to establish man as a "totality" or man's true human-
ity by completely reconstituting the entire socio-economic base of modern
society. For Marx, man is essentially a "species of social being," a
gesellschaftliches Gattungswesen, and as such he "'develops his true

51 K. Löwith, Individuum, pp. 5-13, and "Feuerbach und der Aus-
gang," passim. For some interesting suggestions concerning the "formal"
similarities between the thought of Hegel and Heidegger implied by this tie
between Feuerbach and Löwith, consult Löwith's, "Grundzüge der Entwick-
lung der Phänomenologie zur Philosophie und ihr Verhältnis zur protestan-

nature only within society and the power of his nature cannot be measured by the power of the single individual but only by the standard of society. But in the modern bourgeois-capitalistic order, man is alienated from himself as well as society by virtue of capitalism's tendency to understand everything solely in terms of its commodity value. Marx even compares the man of bourgeois society with a commodity. Just as in its commodity "value form" a thing is worth a certain sum of money and its "natural form" remains completely irrelevant to this commodity value, so in his bourgeois "value form" the individual may play an important role as a banker, general, etc., in comparison to his "rather shabby" role as a plain natural "man as such." And as his bourgeois "value form" increasingly takes precedence over his "natural form" and gradually becomes the standard for the very being and behavior of man, man will necessarily be reified and alienated from himself and his fellow men. Hence only with the destruction of the commodity "value forms" of modern capitalism and its equally artificial bourgeois social order will true humanity be reestablished.

Another thinker deeply concerned with the dangers threatening man in modern capitalistic and industrial society was Max Weber. Both Marx and Weber could be considered advocates of a "philosophical

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sociology of contemporary man. But where Marx confined his analysis to man's "self alienation" as a result of capitalism, Löwith finds that Weber sought to understand all of the various phenomena of modern existence, capitalism included, under the more comprehensive categories of "rationalization" and "demystification."\textsuperscript{55}

According to Weber, since the close of the middle ages Western civilization has been subject to a gradual but steady enervation of its spiritual vigour through the widespread and ever increasing use of rational principles and techniques. The earliest definite manifestations of this process of rationalization he discerned in the appearance of large scale capitalistic enterprises in the fifteenth century (the Medici bank and the Fugger commercial complex) and in the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In addition, Weber was especially concerned with the gradual undermining and dissolution of all of the traditional spiritual standards of value which accompanied this process of rationalization and demystification. In fact, for Weber, one of the greatest dangers threatening twentieth century man was his total absorption into impersonal, objective, rationally organized but inherently "valueless," wertfreie, institutions -- be they governmental, economic, industrial, or scientific in character. An extreme expression of this all-encroaching rationalization was, of course, the "total mobilization," the \textit{totale Mobilmachung} of World War I.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., pp. 60-62.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., pp. 91-99.
Löwith also contends that Weber's only solution to the predicament of ever increasing rationalization and demystification was a conscious rejection of the traditional humanist ideal of the well rounded personality and a commitment to the scientific technological ideal of the "Impersonal expert" or Fachmensch. The expert "commits himself to everything and nothing, involves himself in any given situation, and, at the same time, exists entirely for himself." Thus Löwith finds that Weber offered his contemporaries an "open system of possibilities" in which men are free to create their own standards of meaning.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are also products of the young-Hegelian's "anthropological" reorientation of thought; and they are especially interesting to Löwith because they "originally discovered and coined the two fundamental conceptions of contemporary philosophy: 'life' and 'existence;'' and because they "exposed with exceptional keenness and thoroughness" the problem of nihilism and its overcoming.

Löwith interprets Kierkegaard's preoccupation with nihilism as the product of his urgent desire to effect a revival of the Christian faith as it had existed in the early centuries, in the days when individual martyrdom was the supreme test for the believer. Given this desire,

57Ibid., p. 98.


Kierkegaard was, of course, relentlessly opposed to the social movements of the 1840's and the objective institutions of salvation of his day, particularly the Danish state church. Both, in his judgment, embodied a pseudo rather than a true religiosity and a "mass" rather than an "individual" existence, "a leveling of the . . . individual within the anonymous undertaking." Consequently, Kierkegaard sought to detach the individual from his ties to the collective and make him aware that he was "isolated and impotent," a mere "single existence," an Einzelner who, completely devoid of all support, stands on the edge of the nihilistic abyss.

By arguing in this fashion, Kierkegaard also clearly foreshadows Heidegger's later juxtaposition of the isolated individual Dasein and the impersonal mass-man or "man." But in sharp contrast to Heidegger, Kierkegaard does not leave the individual suspended on the edge of the abyss with the meager consolation that he now exists "authentically" rather than "inauthentically." Instead, for him, once the individual has become conscious of the precariousness of his position, i.e., once he is completely emancipated from the collective, the foundation is laid for his leap back to true religious faith since Kierkegaard is convinced that this state of extreme nihilistic individuation cannot endure. It must issue

60 K. Löwith, Kierkegaard und Nietzsche oder philosophische und theologische Überwindung des Nihilismus (Frankfurt/Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1933), pp. 10-11.

61 Ibid., p. 10.
either in complete negation (suicide) or in complete affirmation (the faith of the fathers and martyrs).

In contrast, Nietzsche's preoccupation with nihilism was not at all motivated by a specific desire to revive the old faith. In fact, for Nietzsche, Christianity constituted a great spiritual "sickness" of Western man, a weakening and stifling sublimation of his heroic, if occasionally brutal, vitalistic will impulses. Thus one of Nietzsche's fundamental concerns was to promote and further the nihilistic process by uprooting and exposing the unconscious and perverted remnants of Christianity which he discerned in the "decadent" music dramas of Richard Wagner and in the general cultural Philistineism of the Second Reich.

However Nietzsche was not unaware of the dangers attending an unbridled nihilism. And in order to help man avoid the blandishments and panaceas of those who know how to manipulate and exploit the fear of the nothing, he also sought to teach man how to live with this nihilism, to master it, and eventually to overcome it. Instead of seeking direction from some form of the supernatural and yearning for impossible spiritual culminations, Nietzsche counseled man to focus upon the joys and burdens of our purely natural existence, i.e., to act heroically and vitally within the great cosmic cycle of eternal recurrence. 62

But if Löwith thus clearly indicates the undeniable "contemporariness" of these young-Hegelian thinkers -- at least in terms of their "anthropo-
logical" and "existential" rather than metaphysical orientation — it is also important to note that only relatively few of them escape his critical searchlight. 63

Feuerbach, for example, one of the trailblazers of the new orientation and, as indicated, a thinker who inspired some of Löwith's own conceptions, is nonetheless judged on the whole to be vague and inadequate. Indeed, in his evaluation of Feuerbach, Löwith, surprisingly, finds himself in complete agreement with the observation of Friedrich Engels that Feuerbach's "humanitarian communism" of the I-Thou relationship is nothing but a sentimental cliché.

"Love is always and everywhere the magical force that helps Feuerbach overcome all of the difficulties of practical life" . . . However in reality, this "love" which is to unite all things finds expression "in wars, quarrels, judicial processes, divorces, and man's exploitation of his fellows. . . . Formally Feuerbach is a realist, he uses man as his point of departure but he has no real comprehension of the world in which this man lives. Hence his man remains the same abstract individual of the old Hegelian philosophy." 64

63 Other important young-Hegelian thinkers such as D. F. Strauss, B. Bauer, and M. Stirner who also made important contributions to the development of contemporary thought are, however, not singled out by Löwith, for specific analysis. Instead their ideas are surveyed in conjunction with their participation in the general critique of religion in the nineteenth century; and, specifically, in so far as they attempted to replace the metaphysical Hegelian "spirit" with such anthropologically motivated concepts as an all encompassing "humanity" (Strauss), or a fully "emancipated man" (Bauer), or even a radically isolated "Einzelnen" (Stirner). K. Löwith, "Die philosophische Kritik der christlichen Religion im 19. Jahrhundert," Theologische Rundschau, V (1933), pp. 131-172 and pp. 201-226.

Comparing Marx and Weber, Löwith finds the Weberian analysis of capitalism and modern industrial society superior to Marx's one-sided economic perspective since Weber "broadened" and "relativized" Marx's theory by fitting it into the wider and more profound "hypothesis of rationalization and demystification." But Löwith's chief objection to Marx centers upon his definition of man as primarily a "species of social being." As we have seen, for Löwith, the social dimension of existence, the personae-Mitwelt relationship, is extremely important, but Löwith is also firmly convinced that "in principle there exists more than one truth about man." And an important aspect of this manifoldness of the human condition is the "ontological dual nature of man."

In contrast, Marx has little if any understanding for man's duality and especially not for the basic reciprocity it implies between man and nature. In fact, for Marx, nature "is only a subordinate precondition of human activity." The only science that Marx recognized was the "science" of history and natural objects like plants, animals, and minerals only interested him in so far as they played a specific role in man's

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66 Ibid., p. 214.

"historical," i.e., commercial and industrial activities. As things in themselves, he found them as interesting and significant as "'some of the recently emerged Australian coral islands."68

Turning to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Löwith again reiterates their importance as the direct forerunners of contemporary existentialism and life philosophy, but he also points out that their thought entails several important deficiencies -- all traceable to their inability to bear the burden of their self imposed isolation and nihilism. To a large extent,

their nihilism was the . . . result of their radical isolation of an alienated unworldly "existence." However the ultimate consequence of this kind of nihilistic isolation was . . . its antipode: an eruption into the open shortly before the end . . . Kierkegaard finally erupted into the world of his time with an absurd attack upon the Danish state church. In the midst of this attack, he collapsed and died. . . . Nietzsche, near the end and already quite deranged, now considered the time ripe to invite the European rulers to a conference in Rome for the purpose of realizing his philosophy politically. . . . With these political eruptions out of their isolation, both demonstrated the inner impossibility of a radically isolated existence -- either before "God" or the "nothing."69

68 Quoted in K. Löwith, "Vom Sinn der Geschichte," p. 44; also quoted in Die Hegelsche Linke, ed. by K. Löwith (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann [Günter Holzboog], 1962), pp. 36-37.

69 Löwith, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche," pp. 65-66. With this rejection of the isolated individualism of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we again come to the core of Löwith's objections to the existential mode of thought itself, namely, its lack of a genuine contact with a fellow man or a Mitwelt. Similar observations on the inadequacies of the existential viewpoint can be found in Löwith's "Existenzphilosophie," Zeitschrift für deutsche Bildung, VIII (1932), pp. 602-613, and in his "Phänomenologische Ontologie und protestantische Theologie," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, XI (1930), pp. 355-399.
Yet Löwith's unwillingness to accept the specific viewpoints of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche or Feuerbach and Marx in no sense entails an implicit rejection of the general effort of these thinkers to understand man socio-historically or "existentially" rather than metaphysically. In fact Löwith is firmly convinced that the "universally human" is "always universal in a historical manner," and that "even the naturalness of man... has its historicalness. What was 'natural' for the Greeks or for Rousseau is no longer equally natural for us." Thus, for Löwith, all of the varied aspects of the phenomenon which is man can only come to light in the realm of history. Man's "essential humanity" seine Menschlichkeit and history are seen as intimately related; therefore the historical approach or the historicism of the young-Hegelians could be considered a contemporary humanist point of view. Moreover once having accepted these fundamental pre-suppositions of the young-Hegelians, if not their specific conclusions, Löwith also soon discovers one of their number with whom he is in complete agreement: Wilhelm Dilthey.

We have already discerned Dilthey's influence upon Löwith in his critique of Heidegger's conception of historicity. Here Löwith views Dilthey as a thinker who strove for a "self-understanding of the 'modern' man of European society," by focusing primarily upon "man as such in

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70 K. Löwith, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche," p. 64.

71 See above, Chapter I.
his different socio-historical situations." Dilthey was interested in "neither in the renewal of an old nor in the creation of a new metaphysics, but rather in an intuitive analysis of actual human life." And this analysis, instead of revealing a single all encompassing realm of timeless logical predicates, brought to light a multiplicity of Weltanschauungen which Dilthey understood as the transient "expressions" of various metaphysical "needs." But if this point of view constituted a definite step forward in the gradual emancipation of man from metaphysical dogmatism, it also entailed a number of weaknesses. And to the charge that it could only issue in a paralyzing relativism and scepticism, Löwith replies that Dilthey never intended the establishment of an objective philosophical system. In fact, for Dilthey, philosophy is "neither more nor less than a discrete asking and answering" since "within human culture and society," it is a mere function of life itself. In other words, what Dilthey sought to substitute for traditional metaphysics was ultimately only a philosophical "attitude." He was not concerned with the objective "truth" of the world but only with the relative "consequence" of the various intellectual manifestations of the socio-historical reality. Accordingly, he also argued that we should not, as the metaphysicians, attempt to import meaning from the world into life. Rather, quite the contrary,

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73 Ibid., p. 561.

74 Ibid., p. 561.
we should consider "the possibility that meaning and significance only come into being in man and his history." 75

But if this anti-metaphysical and avowedly humanistic orientation is characteristic of Dilthey, then it would appear that there also exists a basic bond between Dilthey and Nietzsche. Nietzsche, too, consciously strove to overcome the "metaphysical hinterland" and to reestablish the primacy of "life" as juxtaposed to "spirit." Yet here Löwith argues that Nietzsche and Dilthey are not really compatible. The "Nietzschean path for the 'discovery of the phenomenon man'" ultimately issues in the isolated individual who by dint of extreme self discipline finally transcends himself, society, and history to an acceptance of the great cosmic cycle of eternal recurrence. In contrast, for Dilthey, "what man really is only becomes manifest in the course of history, i.e., through his existence in the midst of society." 76 Thus Dilthey's "philosophical historical relativism" or historicism as humanism was, for Löwith, the only truly viable position in the post World War I era. In fact, as late as 1933, Löwith was still so completely enveloped in this position that he was quite certain that any ultimate solution to the nihilism of his day would constitute a definite turning away from a specifically humanist orientation. "If nihilism were ever really abolished, man could bury himself as man, because the moving force in all human occurrences is always

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75 Quoted by Löwith in Ibid., p. 503.

76 Ibid., p. 561.
'the power of negation.

However by 1935, after the assumption of political power by the Nazi party and after their callous inhumanity had begun to manifest itself, Löwith was no longer as certain of the benefits to be derived from the "power of negation," nor as sure of the ultimate value of the historicist-relativist point of view. This reconsideration of his earlier convictions is clearly revealed in his analysis of the thought of a leading "occasionalist" and "decisionist" political philosopher who was also a Nazi apologist, Carl Schmitt. Löwith not only condemns Schmitt for his Nazism and anti-Semitism, but he now also indictsthe essentially nihilistic core

Löwith was also firmly convinced that the attempts of his contemporaries to overcome this nihilism, ranging from the neo-classical speculations of Stefan George to the dialectical theology of Karl Barth, were foredoomed to failure. "Hundreds of years were required for it nihilism to arise and hundreds will be required for it to pass away. The present situation is no different from that which Nietzsche delineated some fifty years ago." He observed, "'We have suffered youth as if it were a serious illness. This is the result of the time into which we have been hurled -- a time of a great inner decay and dissolution.'" Uncertainty is the chief characteristic of our age. "'Nothing rests on a solid foundation. . . . One only lives for the next day, because the day after tomorrow is already doubtful.'" Löwith, "Kierkegaard und Nietzsche." p. 29.

H. Fiala (pseudonym), "Politischer Dezisionismus," Internationale Zeitschrift für Theorie des Rechts, IX (1935). A slightly expanded version of this same article can be found in Gesammelte Abhandlungen, pp. 93-123. The following citations refer to the original. For an interesting account of Heidegger's brief flirtation with Nazism see Löwith's, "Les implications politiques de la philosophie de l'existence chez Heidegger," Les Temps Modernes, II (1947/48), pp. 343-360.
of Schmitt's fundamental orientation as the ultimate ground of his Nazism. In contrast to the traditional religious, philosophical, or moral decision for a particular course of action, a decision which generally entailed a clear recognition of the possible consequences, Löwith finds that Schmitt's decision for political activity "is nothing but a decision for the sake of decision" regardless of any consequences. Thus, as far as Schmitt is concerned, the sheer act of deciding itself constitutes "the specific essence of the political." 

Moreover since Schmitt came to this conclusion on the basis of the historicist principles established by the young-Hegelians, Löwith was also prompted to reconsider his earlier blanket condemnation of Hegel and traditional metaphysics. Now he finds that the young-Hegelians are not only responsible for the emancipation of man from the "idealistic morass" of Hegelianism but also for "the decay of the good conscience in respect to wisdom, science, and knowledge" which had still existed in Hegel's day. In other words, Löwith recognizes that once philosophy is reduced to the status of a mere handmaiden to the socio-political context, once it abdicates to the "demands of politics for a fundamental re-orientation . . . on the basis of the 'spirit of the time,'" it, in effect,

80 Ibid., p. 110.
81 Ibid., pp. 121-122.
82 Ibid., p. 122, footnote 1.
commits a kind of suicide. Traditionally, philosophy served "to disclose and enlighten" but with the young-Hegelians it served merely "'to strike, fight, negate, and contradict'" within the all-powerful socio-political framework. 83

However in spite of this reconsideration of the young-Hegelians' destruction of metaphysics, it would be premature to consider Löwith a definite anti-historicist at this point. For although he now admits that the movement initiated by these thinkers could issue in the nihilistic decisionism of a Schmitt, he also emphasizes that it was certainly not the intention of the young-Hegelians to effect a total destruction of the existing value system. In fact Löwith repeatedly stresses their "spiritual vigor" in comparison to the arid and sterile old-Hegelianism of their day; and he takes great pains to point out that their specific proposals for a reorganization of society and for a rehabilitation of man were not based on "a decision for the sake of decision" but were determined by their faith "in the existence of a supreme principle ["humanity," or "man," or the "classless society"] which always functioned as the criterion for their decisions." 84

Nonetheless Löwith's increased caution concerning the historicist orientation is perhaps best indicated in his observation that no intelligent man "will deny that mind or spirit is 'contemporary' or 'present', i.e.,

83 Ibid., p. 122.

84 Ibid., p. 121.
intimately related to a concrete situation. But from this fact, one cannot simply deduce that the human intellect exhausts itself as being nothing more than a mere expression of this concrete situation." Instead Lö-with argues that the human intellect possesses its own peculiar "spiritual being" which enables it to penetrate "to the permanent essence of human affairs and to transcend every hic and nunc" -- although just what is meant by the intellect's "spiritual being" and the "permanent essence of human affairs" is not subject to further elucidation.

Löwith's doubts as to the validity of the historicist orientation are also apparent in a number of other studies that appeared in the middle and late thirties. In 1935, for example, Löwith published a thorough analysis of Nietzsche, elaborating and synthesizing many of his earlier observations and judgments. Yet in spite of his definite sympathy for Nietzsche's attempt to reassert the ancient pre-Socratic doctrine of eternal recurrence, he points out that this attempt was foredoomed to failure because of Nietzsche's total absorption in the specific problems of his particular time. In Löwith's opinion, Nietzsche did not arrive at eternal recurrence in the course of a disinterested, i.e., supra-historical...
contemplation of the nature of reality per se, as apparently the pre-
Socratics did; rather it was the product of a desperate search for moral
and ethical imperatives to replace the defunct Christian ones of his day;
and, as such, it was a mere surrogate for nineteenth century nihilism,
an explicit "religious substitute."^88 Thus as far as Löwith is concerned,
the doctrine of eternal recurrence itself, as an objectively existing truth,
is acceptable. It is only the way in which Nietzsche arrived at this truth
and his specific use of it within the context of his age that causes Löwith
to reject it.

But the very fact that Löwith can raise these kinds of objections
to Nietzsche taking a notion like classical eternal recurrence seriously
and merely objecting to the "mechanics" of its use and derivation is again
a clear indication of his estrangement from a strictly historicist orienta-
tion. A true historicist would deny the assertions of both Löwith and
Nietzsche by arguing that no one can ever really escape his age or "trans-
scend" his time to a realm of eternal and objective truth. He would point

^88K. Löwith. Nietzsche's Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des
of this work appeared in 1956 published by W. Kohlhammer in Stuttgart.
Other analyses of Nietzsche by Löwith are: "Zur neuesten Nietzsche For-
Nietzsche 1844-1900," ed. by H. Heimpel, J. Heuss, and B. Reifenberg
in Die grossen Deutschen, deutsche Biographie (Berlin: Propyläen Ver-
lag, 1956), III, pp. 582-598; Nietzsche, Zeitgemässe und Unzeitgemässe,
ed. by K. Löwith (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1956); "Zu Schlecht-
ta's neuer Nietzsche Legende," Merkur, XII (1958), pp. 781-784. Fried-
rich Nietzsche, Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft, aus dem Nach-
lass, Briefe, ed. by K. Löwith (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Bücherei, 1959).
out that the doctrine of eternal recurrence itself far from indicating an "objective" or "natural" insight into the true character of the cosmos was nothing more nor less than an expression of the metaphysical "needs" of pre-Socratic Greece. Also he would argue that Nietzsche's attempt to overcome the nihilism of his time through the revival of this doctrine was only a similar expression of the spiritual needs of his particular age. In contrast, Löwith strongly implies that given a different approach, Nietzsche's eternal recurrence would have constituted a genuine or "timeless" insight into the nature of reality as such.

Löwith's gradual drift away from the historicist orientation also comes to light in the course of an analysis of the young-Hegelians' understanding of man's unique "humanity," of that which alone differentiates him from all of the other species of animate being. According to Löwith, the last expression of a genuine extra-temporal or non-historicist determination of man was Hegel's conviction that "spirit" as the "absolute" is also "the true universal essence of man." In fact, for Hegel, it is only the pre-supposition of the "inner universality" of the spirit which enables one to recognize the external peculiarities of particular men. 39 Hegel also claimed absolute certainty for this knowledge and definition of man since the Christian God is included speculatively in his notion of cosmic or absolute spirit.

However the young-Hegelians, and Feuerbach in particular, considered this extra-temporal specification of humanity superfluous and preferred to locate it in man's finite and conditioned historical existence. But thereby, as Löwith now emphasizes, they indirectly created the contemporary "problematical situation of man." For without an extra-temporal sanction, man's humanity soon becomes as groundless and transient as his various socio-political ventures, and he increasingly withdraws from his fellow man into a radical and nihilistic self isolation, as the transition from Feuerbach and Marx to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche has illustrated. Furthermore with the destruction of the metaphysical criterion of humanity the question arises whether man's "humanness" in the traditional sense can ever be revived or are we henceforth condemned to regard man as a mere cosmic anomaly fortuitously hurled into the world, a being whose essence -- if any -- is incomprehensible apart from the sheer fact of its existence as such? Obviously Löwith is unwilling to accept this radical "existential" analysis of the problem with its implicit denial of the entire notion of humanity. "Humanity," he says, "is not a mere 'prejudice' which one can set aside at will; rather, it is . . . an integral part of the nature of . . . man."
But in spite of Löwith's acknowledgment of the weaknesses of the historicist position and outright rejection of the existential denial of humanity, he still persists in regarding humanity as essentially a "phenomenon of man's history," ein Menschengeschichtliches Phänomen. Hence Löwith's dilemma is that while he recognizes the need for a criterion which is not subject to the vicissitudes of the socio-political climate, he is, as yet, neither ready nor willing to forego completely the possibility that history itself might still somehow provide such a criterion. And it is this search for a historical and yet non relative determination of humanity that eventually leads him to an examination of the thought of Jacob Burckhardt.

At first glance Burckhardt seems to provide the solution to Löwith's dilemma, since he discovered a standard that was extra-temporal but neither ahistorical nor purely transcendent. According to Löwith, Burckhardt's extra-temporal point of reference or "Archimedian point" is the constancy of human nature, i.e., "man suffering and acting, as he is, and always was, and always will be." Thus man himself is the constant that underlies, endures, and prevails throughout all historical change and that alone makes this change intelligible. For without this immutable human nature, we truly would be imprisoned in our respective eras and would be incapable of grasping the achievements as well as the infamies.

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of our predecessors. Burckhardt also emphasized that the special
"obligation of the educated is to develop within himself, as completely
as possible, a sense of the past and an appreciation of the continuity of
the world's development." This alone, as he put it, "'differentiates him
as a conscious man from the unconscious man or the barbarian, just as
the view of a past and future per se differentiates man from the animals.'"96
In effect then, the conscious and uncoerced preservation and contemplation
of the past is one of the noblest activities of man because it reveals the
essence of our unique humanity, or in Burckhardt's words, "'the enduring
metempsychosis of man acting and suffering through innumerable
sheaths.'"97

But since Burckhardt was primarily interested in man as a rational-
historical individual rather than as a peculiar unity of both nature and
spirit, an "ontological dual nature," his understanding of the constancy
of human nature does not provide a wholly satisfactory answer to Löwith's
quest. In fact, a basic concern of Burckhardt's was to delimit sharply
the historical and natural realms. "History is the 'break' with nature,
historical being arises and passes away differently from natural being."98
In contrast, Löwith, as indicated, seeks to grasp the specifically natural
as well as the purely historical dimension of existence.

96Quoted in Ibid., p. 208.
97Quoted in Ibid., p. 208.
98Ibid., p. 347.
In sum then, although Löwith has not yet attained to a definite anti-historicist position, the year 1935 marks his unmistakable estrangement from the strict historicist orientation of his earlier writings. However 1935 was also decisive in several other ways for Löwith. Unable to compromise with the Nazi regime, he left Germany journeying first to Rome, and then to the Tohohu University in Sendai, Japan where he gave courses on both Hegel and Heidegger. This sojourn in the Far East, which lasted until 1941, also provided Löwith with an opportunity to sum up, synthesize, and clarify his earlier speculations on the origins of contemporary thought as well as to reconsider the ultimate value and validity of the historicist orientation. Thus in 1941, after leaving Japan for the United States, Löwith published what some reviewers and commentators have judged to be one of the few truly important works on

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99 As the recipient of a Rockefeller Fellowship to study the influence of Hegel upon Italian thought.

the entire post Hegelian development: *Vom Hegel bis Nietzsche*. 101

CHAPTER III

Hegel and Goethe

In the foreword to Vom Hegel, Löwith states that he has no intention of writing a "Geistesgeschichte in the usual (i.e., Hegelian) sense of the word" since its principles have become "so attenuated that they are now trivial." Rather he "seeks to bring accurately to life the epoch which starts with Hegel and ends with Nietzsche, 'transcribing' the philosophical history of the nineteenth century within the horizon of the present." 102 But in sharp contrast to the "transcribing" activities of many of his contemporaries (F. Gundolf, H. Freyer, and A. Bäumler), Löwith emphasizes that "to transcribe history does not mean to counterfeit the irrevocable power of what has taken place once and for all, or to increase vitality at the expense of truth, but to do justice to the vital fact of history that the tree may be known . . . by its fruits, the father by his son." 103 Thus Löwith's desire to "transcribe" the intellectual developments of the nineteenth century is ultimately based on the view that past and present are intimately related and manifest fundamental similarities.

Hegel seems to stand very far removed from us and Nietzsche very near, if we consider only the latter's influence and the former's works. In fact, though, Hegel's work mediated

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102 Translation of Vom Hegel, pp. v-vi.

103 Ibid., pp. v-vi.

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through his pupils had an effect upon intellectual and political life which it would be difficult to overestimate while the numerous influences exerted by Nietzsche since 1890 have given birth to a German ideology only in our own time. The Nietzscheans of yesterday correspond to the Hegelians of the 1840's. 104

In other words, the "present German happenings are the key to what happened a hundred years ago, just as these in turn unlock the understanding of the present."105

This emphasis upon a "correspondence" or even a "reciprocity" between various historical ages is also a further very strong indication of Löwith's increased alienation from the historicist orientation. For in order to discern such a "correspondence," Löwith must necessarily adopt a point of view which is no longer preconditioned by the historicist "spirit of the age" but which, in effect, "transcends" any and all ages. This new interest in a "transcendent" or extra-temporal rather than a specifically historicist orientation can also be illustrated by comparing and contrasting Löwith's interpretations of men and movements in his writings before 1935 with those in this particular work.

Initially, as indicated, Löwith welcomed the young-Hegelians' dissolution of Hegel's metaphysical synthesis as a definite emancipation of man from a web of abstract metaphysical conceptualization, and as a reestablishment of philosophy on the basis of "philosophical historical anthropology." Now, however, he regards this philosophizing on the

104 _Ibid._, p. v.

105 _First edition of Vom Hegel_, p. 530.
basis of man and history as definitely inferior to the former metaphysical, 
i.e., extra-temporal perspective.

Hegel accorded to the human spirit the strength to open the 
sealed nature of the universe, revealing its riches and its depth; 
but from Haym to Dilthey it was the more or less avowed convic-
tion that the human spirit is essentially powerless vis-a-vis the 
political and natural world, because it is itself only a finite "ex-
pression" of "socio-historical" reality. For them, the spirit is 
no longer the "power of an age," in itself timeless because it is 
eternally present; it is merely an exponent and mirror of the age. 
Thus philosophy becomes a "world view" and "interpretation of 
life," the ultimate consequence of which is the self assertion of 
"particular, individual" historicity in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit. 106

In line with this new critical orientation, Lowith judges the writ-
ings of the young-Hegelians to be "manifestos, programs, and theses,
but never anything whole, important in themselves. In their hands, their 
scientific demonstrations became sensational proclamations with which 
they turned to the masses or the individual." In comparison to Hegel,
"they make immoderate demands with insufficient means and dilate Hegel's 
abstract dialectics to a piece of rhetoric. . . . Their critical activism 
knows no bounds, what they seek to bring about is in every case and at 
any price 'change.'" Very simply then, "they are 'cultured men run 
wild,' frustrated existences." 107

106 Translation of Vom Hegel, p. 64. See also Löwith's juxtapo-
sition of "M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity," 
Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, III (1942/43), pp. 53-77. A 
German translation of this article appeared in Zeitschrift für Philosophische 
Forschung, XII (1958), pp. 161-187. Also in Gesammelte Abhandlungen, 
pp. 68-92.

107 Translation of Vom Hegel, p. 67. This is certainly a far cry
This reevaluation of the young-Hegelians is also clearly manifest in Löwith's new highly critical account of the thought of its key figures: Feuerbach, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche. In contrast to his earlier criticisms, which were often nothing more than mild correctives tempered by a basic sympathy for their general historicist-humanist orientation, he now finds their thought marred by deep and fundamental inadequacies.

For example, Löwith still acknowledges Feuerbach's discovery of "sensuous-natural corporeality," and he is still critical of Hegelian idealism because it "no more recognizes the independent reality of other men than it recognizes the reality of sensuous-natural corporeality." But this criticism of idealism and apparent praise of Feuerbach is far outweighed by the deep aversion Löwith now feels for many of the conclusions which Feuerbach drew from his fundamental principles. He is especially unhappy with the political views of Feuerbach and particularly with his suggestion that "philosophy is itself to become religion, and also politics, a kind of political world view which replaces the religion of the

From Löwith's earlier view of the young-Hegelians as writers "whose real ambitions were not to surpass the experiences of life per se. They return again to the 'human all too human' dimension of the understanding; they lack the belief in something like 'pure thought' or 'absolute consciousness,'" i.e., any real possibility for the extravagance of conceptual thought. "Feuerbach und der Ausgang," p. 327.

108 Translation of Vom Hegel, p. 80.
109 Ibid., p. 80.
of the past."

As Löwith sees it, the motive behind Feuerbach's proposed leveling of philosophy to a "political world view" was not simply the establishment of just and equitable forms of government. Instead, "Feuerbach's actual interest was the concentration and extension of the power of the state as such, much more than the outward form of a republic." This is demonstrable by the circumstance that he "viewed Bismarck not as an enemy but as a pacemaker along the road to his revolutionary goals." Furthermore, in comparison to Hegel's conceptually organized "absolute," Löwith finds that "Feuerbach's massive sensualism must seem as a step backward... as a barbarization of thought which replaces content by bombast and sentiment." Thus "Hegel's final doubt whether the tumult of his contemporaries and the 'deafening loquacity' of vanity left any room at all for passionless knowledge is drowned out by the verbose rhetoric of his pupils, who replaced philosophy with the interests of the day."

Another thinker who, in Löwith's view, played a major role in undermining the Hegelian concern for "passionless knowledge" and in confounding "the interests of the day" with philosophy was Karl Marx. As indicated, Löwith fully acknowledges Marx's contribution to the general "anthropological" and socio-historical reorientation of thought.

\[110\] Ibid., p. 81.
\[111\] Ibid., p. 82.
\[112\] Ibid., p. 82.
effected by the young-Hegelians. But this acknowledgment is now tempered and, as in the case of Feuerbach, far outweighed by a sharp critique of the basic tenets of Marxian thought, particularly the assumption of the conditioned character of all understanding. As Marx put it, "A point of view is never unconditional. It proceeds from real conditions, it never leaves them for a moment. Its preconditions are human beings, not in some fantastic abstraction and seclusion, but in their real ... process of development under specific conditions."\(^{113}\)

Against this emphasis upon the conditioned character of all human understanding and of human existence in general, Löwith raises two objections. First, "Hegel's metaphysics of the history of the spirit is developed thereby to the most extreme position possible, made temporal, and placed in the service of history."\(^{114}\) And secondly, assuming the omnipotence of the socio-political and socio-economic context, then on what grounds can the Marxians claim superiority for their particular analysis and solution in lieu of other points of view? "In respect to Hegel's spiritual world, it makes no basic difference whether Geistesgeschichte after Hegel is given a material interpretation based on the economic factors of production" or whether it is based on Dilthey's "socio-historical reality" or even whether it is based on the racial distinctions of the National Socialists. For they all, like Marx, can lay

\(^{113}\) Quoted in Ibid., p. 102.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., p. 102.
equal claim to comprehending a pre-conditioned "real life process" and a "particular way of living." 115

Also in contrast to his earlier sympathy for the young-Hegelians' dissolution of Hegel's reconciliation of the ideal and the real, of God and the world, 116 Löwith now finds Marx's critique of this reconciliation decidedly one sided, in fact, as one sided as that of Kierkegaard. Marx, he argues, undertook a radical critique of the Hegelian reconciliation from the standpoint of a "pure humanity" (the proletariat as the totally alienated class) just as Kierkegaard undertook his critique of Hegel from the point of view of a "pure spirituality" (the completely isolated individual before God). But Löwith is highly sceptical of the apparent fruits of this critique. "Both no longer look upon existence as Hegel did: as pure 'ex-istere,' as the appearance of an internal essence in the appropriate form of existence." For Kierkegaard, "it is a retreat to individual existence which makes decisions according to conscience." For Marx, "it is an advance to a political decision of circumstances considered en masse." Thus

they comprehend "what is" [reality] as a world determined by merchandise and money, and as an existence shot through with irony and the "drudgery" of boredom. The "realm of spirits"

115 Ibid., p. 102.

of Hegel's philosophy becomes a phantom in a world of labor and despair. For Marx, a "German ideology" perverts Hegel's self-existent "idea," and for Kierkegaard, a "sickness unto death" perverts the self-satisfaction of the absolute spirit. For both, Hegel's consummation of history becomes the terminus of a pre-history leading up to an extensive revolution and an intensive reformation. His concrete mediations are converted to abstract decisions for the ancient Christian God and a new earthly world. In place of Hegel's active spirit, Marx substituted a theory of social practice and Kierkegaard a reflection of inner activity; thus both consciously and deliberately deny theoria as the title of highest human activity.  

Concerning Nietzsche, as indicated, Löwith has thus far in spite of some mild reservations, manifested considerable sympathy for his attempt to reassert the pre-Socratic doctrine of eternal recurrence. Now, however, he juxtaposes Nietzsche's dynamic and "Dionysian" understanding of eternal recurrence to the "Apollonian" speculations of a well known contemporary of Hegel, Goethe. And he finds that Nietzsche's view is as different from Goethe's "as the extreme from the moderate, seething power from ordered cosmos, desire from ability and the destructive violence of attack from well meaning irony."  

But this reappraisal of Nietzsche is perhaps best manifest in Löwith's judgment of the respective views of Christianity of Nietzsche and Goethe. "Nietzsche is reported to have remarked that the 'cross' should be seen as Goethe saw it. But he himself saw it quite differently; he wanted to teach men laughter instead of suffering, and called his laughter holy; Zarathustra mocks

117 Translation of Vom Hegel, p. 161.

118 Ibid., p. 179.
Christ's crown of thorns by crowning himself with a crown of roses."

Yet this crown has no human or rational relationship to the cross. "Zarathustra's 'rose-wreath crown' is purely a polemic contrast to that of the crucified." Goethe, on the other hand, "was not an anti-Christian, and was therefore the more genuine pagan; his 'god' had no need to oppose any other, because by his very positive nature he was disinclined to any such denial." \(^{119}\)

However the outstanding example of Löwith's new highly critical orientation toward the young-Hegelians is his changed view of Dilthey. He still regards Dilthey as the most profound and least arbitrary of the entire group; but the praise which he once heaped upon Dilthey, as a major opponent of all metaphysical conceptualization and as a chief advocate of a historicist-humanist orientation, now gives way to a very careful and critical reanalysis of the ultimate value of the Diltheyan accomplishment itself. "Dilthey reduces Hegel's speculative 'comprehension' of the notion of reality to an analytic 'understanding of its most universal structures. Thus the 'logos' of what has being is transformed into a relative 'meaning' and Hegel's ontology into an empirical analysis of reality." \(^{120}\) Also where Löwith had once welcomed Dilthey's conversion of Hegel's abstract 'spirit' to the 'socio-historical reality' as an

\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 179.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., p. 123.
indication of "an emancipation from metaphysical dogmatism," he now finds this conversion to be neither particularly emancipating nor indicative of a new concrete rationality but only "in an indefinite way 'significant.'"\(^{121}\) And finally where Löwith had previously accepted Dilthey's relegation of philosophy to the role of a mere handmaiden of "life," since "within human culture and society" it is "'neither more nor less than a discrete asking and answering,'"\(^{122}\) he now feels "that this answer to the problem of history is not really a philosophical answer." In fact "Dilthey's lifelong efforts to construct a philosophy on the basis of historical consciousness per se were brought to nought."\(^{123}\)

In sum then in this work, in sharp contrast to the studies and analyses of these same thinkers which appeared before 1935, the chief accent is now definitely no longer on the attempt of the young-Hegelians to recover and preserve man under the given socio-political and socio-economic conditions of their respective ages; it is rather on their "temporalization" or "historicization" of the extra-temporal Hegelian "spirit." Moreover where Löwith had once discerned a positive or constructive development from Feuerbach to Dilthey -- a development that only became question-able with the appearance of such contemporary existentialist thinkers as Heidegger and Jaspers -- he now implies a completely negative or

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\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 124.  
\(^{122}\) See above Chapter I.  
\(^{123}\) Translation of *Vom Hegel*, p. 124.
destructive development which with "deadly consistency" has determined the course of philosophy since Hegel. Clearly Löwith has experienced a profound reorientation in his thinking. In contrast to his former commitment to historicism as the bulwark of contemporary humanism, he is now firmly convinced that historicism, instead of protecting and preserving man, is actually his chief enemy. Hence the only way man can be rescued from the pernicious relativism and nihilism entailed in the historicist destruction of traditional metaphysics is to recover and reassert a valid extra-temporal or transcendent view of man and history.

This new concern for an extra-temporal dimension of human existence is revealed in Löwith's analysis and critique of our contemporary notions of time and history. For Löwith the crux of the problem lies in "the transformation of the timeless spirit of the ages" Geist der Zeiten into the temporal "spirit of the age" Zeitgeist.

Prior to the French Revolution, he argues, the phrase "spirit of the age" had a very narrow and limited meaning, i.e., it was understood quite differently than in the post revolutionary era. For example, both Goethe and Herder used the term frequently and for both it served to express the unique peculiarities of the various ages of mankind. Yet neither

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125 Translation of Vom Hegel, p. 201.
Goethe nor Herder conceived of the "spirit of the age" as a temporal spirit. "It is rather -- analogously to the spirit of the people or of the language -- always one and the same spirit of the whole 'sphere of mankind,' which assumes a particular mode of appearance in different ages and among different peoples." However "the French Revolution with its destruction of tradition, had an historicizing effect upon the consciousness of its contemporaries. Thenceforth the time of the present, in contrast to the entire 'past,' views itself expressly as belonging to the course of history, looking toward the future." Thus from this radical break with the past occasioned by the Revolution,

the phrase "spirit of the age" enters the romantic's criticism of their period; finally, among the writers of the thirties and forties, it becomes a universal slogan. In the midst of the radical changes taking place between ages, all events are referred more and more consciously to the spirit of the "epoch," and the feeling of an epoch-making turning point between two ages grows; thus the final age as such becomes the destiny of the spirit. This is what lends all talk of the spirit of the age that contemporary note which adheres to it still today.

Even Hegel, who consciously strove to preserve the innate timelessness of the spirit, is credited by Löwith as unwittingly playing a major role in effecting this transformation. For Hegel, in harmony with the tradition, the spirit was eternal and its relationship to time consisted "simply in the fact that it must 'expound' itself in time as well as space,

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127 Ibid., pp. 204-205.
not in any innate temporal quality of the spirit, arising from time and falling into its power."¹²⁸ Nonetheless, in spite of this acknowledgment of the innate timelessness of the spirit itself, Hegel also conceived of an essential unity between spirit and time. The spirit not only unfolds itself in the course of time; but it is also identical with time in the sense that it is always the fullest expression of a particular time. In the preface to his Rechtsphilosophie, Hegel observed "as concerns the individual, each is a son of his time; and philosophy is their time comprehended in thought. It is just as foolish to imagine that some philosophy transcends its present world as to imagine that an individual can transcend his time."¹²⁹ But Hegel drew a conservative, one might almost say reactionary, conclusion from this circumstance that no theory can transcend its own time because of his conviction that his own age and his own philosophy, which includes the Christian logos, constituted a final state in the unfolding of the spirit.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 209.
¹²⁹ Quoted in Ibid., p. 84.
¹³⁰ "If Hegel causes the eternal to be manifest in the temporal, this is not the result of any formal dialectics, but an intrinsic metaphysics of the Christian logos." In fact "his philosophy includes within itself the Christian consciousness of the 'end of all things,' because Hegel does all of his thinking conscious of the absolute significance of the historical appearance of Christ." Therefore "not any present moment at all was for him 'the highest' but only that which like his own, is a 'final link' in the 'sacred chain' of the past, now appropriated by thought in its full extent." Hence it is only the time which extends from Thales to Proclus and from thence to his own age which makes it possible for Hegel to write a period after the "now" of "up to now." In his unification of all
His pupils, on the other hand, on the basis of the same coincidence between spirit and time, but less interested in the present as a period of spiritual fulfillment and more concerned with the social and material possibilities of the future, focused upon what should be rather than upon what is. "They sought to place philosophy at the service of the revolution following the progress of time." Accordingly, "in the forward movement of the age, history as progress is elevated to the status of ultimate arbiter even of the spirit; the spirit of Hegelian metaphysics is consistently made temporal."\textsuperscript{131}

Thus far in our analysis of Löwith's shift in interest from the humanist-historicism of the young-Hegelians to their temporalization of Hegel's extra-temporal spirit, we have frequently juxtaposed his critical view of the former to his favorable view of the latter. Yet this juxtaposition, while useful as an illustration of the changing accent in his thinking, is not, in itself, intended as an indication of a basic endorsement of Hegel. For example, Löwith appears to favor Hegel's understanding of the relationship between spirit and time when discussing the modifications introduced by the young-Hegelians. But, taken by itself, he finds the previous history the accent "is on the entire 'thus far now,' that is, 'finally' the world spirit has come; and this entirety is a deliberate goal." Hegel left the question open as to what might proceed from this goal in the future, but because three epochs have now been concluded (one free, some free, all free), "Hegel considered history, taken abstractly, to be ended." \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 127-129.

\textsuperscript{131}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 84 and p. 205.
Hegelian view completely unacceptable.

The true [stumbling block] in Hegel's analysis of time is not that he thought of eternity, but that -- in spite of his study of Aristotle's Physics -- he no longer saw it as it was primi-
tively seen by the Greeks, in the circling constellations of the heavens and the real "ether," but rather ascribed it to a spirit, in the notion of which the Greek and Christian traditions are in-
extricably entangled. As philosopher of the Christian-Germanic world, Hegel understood the spirit as will and freedom. For this reason, the relationship of the spirit to time, which he views in the Greek fashion as an everlasting present and recurrent cy-
cle, remains in fact a contradiction and a riddle. 132

However Löwith's chief objections to both the Hegelian as well as young-Hegelian points of view are best revealed in the course of his anal-
ysis of Hegel's and Goethe's conceptions of history. Löwith begins his in-
vestigation of Hegel with a sharp indictment of Hegel's emphasis upon the great events and the grand scope and sway of history, understood al-
most exclusively as universal or world history. Löwith argues that the term history should be understood as referring to any simple "happening" or Geschehen; and the function of the historian should be to investi-
gate this happening "and by report and description give information about what has been inquired after and investigated." According to Löwith, the ancient Greek historians Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius still studied and wrote with this modest goal in mind. "They were explorers,

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132 Ibid., p. 210. In the original German the first sentence of this passage reads "Das wirkliche Kreuz in Hegel's Analyse der Zeit . . . etc." The translator has rendered this as "The crux in Hegel's analysis of time" which is literally correct but does not really convey Löwith's meaning, hence my interpolation of "stumbling block."
with their eyes and ears open, and told us in exemplary fashion what they
had seen themselves and learned through others." But ever since Hegel,
history and particularly world history, in contrast to the goals of classi-
cal inquiry "seems to be precisely what one has not seen and experienced,
iquired after and investigated for himself;" and in our contemporary world,
"history has traveled so far from its original meaning that among modern
historians reflection upon the history of 'historicism,' has almost re-
placed the investigation of events."

Yet, Löwith contends

the events of each single day, everyday history, show us on a small scale something of world history on a large scale. Before any universal history, the daily papers transmit every day the events of the world; our own time in particular can flatter itself that it is daily experiencing world history on a grand scale. But together with world history as a whole, which passes us all by without regard, there is also another kind of event, which attracts less attention, but for all that, is nonetheless real: the unpretentious events in the course of man's daily life, and the uniform events of the course of the natural world.

Thus in sharp opposition to the Hegelian emphasis upon the impersonal, "abstract," great historical event, Löwith stresses the specifically human and natural dimension of all historical occurrences. In fact he flatly states, "the simple fact that man must live in the midst of nature" and with his fellow men absolutely "determines the way philosophy must approach the events of the world." And given this strong accent upon

133 Ibid., p. 213.
134 Ibid., p. 213.
135 Ibid., p. 214.
man and nature, Löwith will, of course, discern a number of inadequacies in the Hegelian view of history beyond the general overemphasis upon "world-history on a grand scale." His specific objections center on Hegel's understanding of the relationship between nature and spirit, on his interpretation of the individual's role in history, on his secularization of the Hebrew-Christian salvation epic, and on his tendency to justify "success" above any and all critical considerations.

Löwith rejects Hegel's understanding of the relationship between nature and spirit on the grounds that Hegel views nature "negatively," merely as something to be overcome. It is true that Hegel recognized the influence of the various types of climate on the historical life of mankind because the spirit conceived as world spirit manifests itself in space as well as time. But, for him, this influence is never determinative. Progress in the unfolding of the spirit toward freedom is essentially progress in the liberation of the spirit from subjection to nature. "In Hegel's philosophy, therefore, nature as such has no independent positive significance. It is not the ground of the history of the world, but only its geographical terrain . . . merely the natural 'arena' of the spiritual events of the world."\(^{136}\)

Hegel's view of the role of the individual in history is also rejected by Löwith, not only because "the everyday life of mankind is without substantial significance for Hegel's idea of world history," but primarily

\(^{136}\)Ibid., p. 214.
because of his notion that "the absolute right of the world spirit transcends all particular rights. Within the movement which involves the 'world as a whole' individuals are only means to the end of this whole." \textsuperscript{137} In other words, for Hegel, the only individuals of consequence are the "world historical individuals," individuals like a Napoleon, who realize or bring about the great goals of history by embodying temporarily the particular "national spirit" the \textit{Volksgeist} destined to dominate.

In contrast to this "spiritual" view of the great man, Löwith prefers the more mundane but sober evaluation of Goethe. Goethe too recognized Napoleon as a true representative of his age, "but because he did not systematize on the basis of an idea, but rather lived by intuition, he saw in Napoleon not only a mere 'agent of the world spirit,' but an inconceivable 'phenomenon' a demigod, " a completely extraordinary man who emerged 'from the abyss'\textsuperscript{138} --- in effect, a phenomenon of nature instead of an incarnation of the world spirit.

Yet if, as Hegel claimed, the governing force behind the events of this world is spirit rather than nature, then it must be asked what relationship this "idealistic" view of history has to a direct perception and intuition of real life? Hegel conceded that an immediate or unprejudiced view of the world yields "neither a basic idea nor a rational goal," but only a "'confused heap of rubble' and a 'shambles' upon which the fortune

\textsuperscript{137}Ibid., pp. 214-215.

\textsuperscript{138}Ibid., p. 216.
of peoples, states, and individuals is sacrificed." However it is just this direct perception of reality which prompted him to ask why or for what purpose it all takes place. And as a thinker thoroughly steeped in the Christian tradition, Hegel answered his own question by secularizing the Christian doctrine of providence into the "cunning of reason" and by converting the Christian belief in salvation into a secular theodicy "for which the divine spirit is immanent in the world, the state is an earthly god, and all history is divine." Thereby he not only overcame the initial dualism between spirit and experience, but he was also able to elicit an inherent rationality in the world historical process which manifests, as he observed, a "perpetual progress in the consciousness of freedom." Hegel traced the course of this progress from the ancient Near East (one free), to the Greco-Roman world (some free), and then finally to the Germanic-Christian world whose culmination was the French-Revolution (all free). But Löwith finds this conversion of the old Christian faith into a secular theodicy or a "metaphysical historicism" far from praiseworthy. In fact as a specific faith in the meaningfulness of the historical process per se, he judges it to be a mere substitute religion and the "cheapest sort of substitute" to boot. "For what is cheaper than the faith that over the long course of history everything

139 Ibid., p. 216.
140 Ibid., p. 216.
141 Quoted in Ibid., p. 217.
that has ever happened, with all its consequences, must have a meaning
and a purpose!"

As a specific faith in the meaning of history, Hegel's historicism
has become the religion of those "whose skepticism is not vigorous
enough to live entirely without faith;" and "even those who know nothing
of Hegel continue to think today in the Hegelian spirit, to the extent that
they share his admiration for the power of history, using 'world history'
to disregard the demands and miseries of the day."\(^{142}\)

But along with this rejection of Hegel's metaphysical historicism,
Löwith also repudiates another important feature of the Hegelian view
of history; its ostensible vindication of the common sense insight, "suc-
cess crowns the master" \textit{Erfolg krönt den Meister}. According to Löwith,
in the final analysis Hegel's entire historical construct rests on sheer
hindsight. Hegel argues backwards from the final stage to the preceding
ones thereby arbitrarily transforming them into necessary steps of an
inevitable development. The successful party, as the current embodiment

\(^{142}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 217. But if Löwith is here highly critical of the con-
sequences of Hegel's "metaphysical historicism," his judgment of the
young-Hegelians is even more severe. "The actual pupils of Hegel con-
verted his metaphysics of history into an absolute historicism; that is,
they retained merely the historical aspect of the absoluteness of the spirit
which unfolds historically, and made the events of the age into the supreme
power over even philosophy and the spirit." Thus "the young-Hegelians
transform Hegel's retrospective and reminiscent historicism into an his-
torical futurism; they desire to be more than the consequence of history,
they want themselves to be epoch-making and thus 'historic.'" \textit{Ibid.},
p. 217.
of the world-spirit, is always the ultimate criterion of the Hegelian judgment. However, in Löwith's view, success is a very dubious criterion; and in sharp contrast to Hegel, he cites Nietzsche's observation that

"success has always been the greatest of liars."\textsuperscript{143} He also points out that

success is in fact an indispensable criterion of human life, but it proves everything and nothing: everything, because in world history as in everyday life only that which is successful remains, and nothing, because even the greatest popular success proves nothing of the inner worth and true "historical greatness" of what has actually been successful. Things wretched and stupid, baseness and madness, have often had the greatest success. It is quite remarkable when a victorious power proclaims the fame and honor of those it has conquered and not merely the ostensible right of its own successful power. Never has an historical power come to be without violence, injustices, and offenses; but for good or ill offended mankind accustoms itself to every change, while world history "gathers great treasures at our expense."\textsuperscript{144}

Thus Löwith concludes his analysis of the Hegelian view of history with a definite indictment of metaphysical historicism and a strong plea for a return to a point of view which acknowledges the indominability of man rather than the sovereignty of a supra-human "spirit."

Whoever has really experienced a slice of world history rather than merely knowing it through hearsay, speeches, books, and newspapers will have to come to the conclusion that Hegel's philosophy of history is a pseudotheological schematization of history arranged according to the idea of progress toward an eschatological fulfillment at the end of time; it does not correspond at all to visible reality. The true "pathos" of world history does not reside only in the sonorous and imposing "great events" with which it deals, but also in the silent suffering it brings upon men. If

\textsuperscript{143}Quoted in \textit{Ibid.}, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{144}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 219.
there is anything in world history to be admired, it is the power, the patience and stubbornness with which mankind recreates itself again after all losses, destructions, and injuries.145

In contrast to Hegel's "pseudotheological schematization of world history," Löwith finds that Goethe's view of history was much closer to "visible reality." Goethe was primarily concerned with the direct "observation," the Ansehen und Anschauen of historical phenomena rather than with the construction of universal all-encompassing systems. But Löwith contends that this Goethean emphasis upon the immediacy of the perceptual experience was not "because Goethe was a 'poet' and Hegel a 'thinker' but rather because Goethe's pure human disposition was as open to nature and the everyday life of men as to the great events of the world."146 Through his position as prime minister of the principality of Weimar, Goethe had the opportunity to experience at close range such great events as the coronation of Emperor Joseph II, the Seven Years War, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars. Yet almost all of the non-governmental correspondence stemming from this period of his life manifests a peculiar lack of interest in the political significance of these great events. For example, Goethe's impressions of the battle

145Ibid., p. 219. In the original German, the last sentence of this paragraph reads, "Und wenn man etwas an der Weltgeschichte bewundern kann dann ist es die Kraft, die Ausdauer und Zahigkeit, mit der sich die Menschheit aus allen Einbussen, Zerstorungen und Verwundungen immer neu wieder herstellt." The translator has rendered it as follows: "If there is anything in world history to be admired it is the power, the patience, and stubbornness with which it continues to recreate mankind after all losses, destructions, and injuries (italics mine)."

146Ibid., pp. 219-220.
of Valmy, in which he took part, are more concerned with the effects of the actual fighting upon the human participants than with the ultimate historical consequences of the battle itself. Goethe "describes the entire course of the real life of men in the midst of war's confusion in the proper mixture; he neither glorifies the story in monumental terms nor trivializes it critically; he views it without prejudice as a phenomenon."147

And Löwith goes on to observe

The prejudice to which world history as a whole can seduce us consists in viewing this history in the abstract, without the realities of human life and real situations, as though it were a world in itself without relevance to people that act and are acted upon within it. Goethe was not guilty of such philosophic abstraction. He does not construct "national spirits" as incarnations of absolute "principles," but rather tells quite graphically how he felt the desire to eat in that historic moment of the bombardment of Valmy. After Goethe's return from Bohemia, when the "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation" came to an end, he confesses that at that moment he was more disturbed by a quarrel between his attendant and his coachman than by that important, but vague and distant event.148

In other words, it is Löwith's considered opinion "that world history loses all true meaning when we do not come back from it to ourselves

147 Ibid., p. 221.

148 Ibid., pp. 221-222. This tendency to allow the moment to take precedence over other considerations was an underlying motif in all of Goethe's writings. In his drama Egmont, Goethe has the hero remark, "Do I but live to think about life," i.e., to speculate historically, "Should I rather not enjoy the present moment?" And in his Faust, Goethe created a character for whom complete bliss can only be attained when he finds the perfect moment, that moment of which he demands, "Please linger; you are so beautiful." Egmont, III, ii, and Faust, I, iii, in Goethe's sämtliche Werke (Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'scher Verlag, 1854), I, p. 69 and IX, p. 175.
and what is nearest to us.\textsuperscript{149} But while this concern for the specifically human dimension of all historical happenings is certainly praiseworthy -- especially in the light of the many distortions brought about by Hegel and his followers -- it in no sense provides us with a proper view of history \textit{per se}. For example, Löwith argues that one of the virtues of the Goethean view of history is that it acts as an effective check upon the "critical trivialization" of the event. But does not this Goethean view itself issue in a comparable trivialization? By reducing the great event to the level of a personal reaction (anger at the quarrel of his servants or hunger during the bombardment of Valmy), Goethe has, in effect, trivialized it or, at least, fragmentized it into as many individual reactions as there were individuals participating in the event itself. It is certainly necessary to evaluate historical happenings in terms of their "relevance to people," but this focus upon the individual and personal dimension of the event must not gain the upper hand lest the event itself dissolve into a chaos of subjective feelings and sentiments. Thus neither Hegel nor Goethe seem particularly concerned with the actual problem of the historian; ascertaining and evaluating the event itself. For the former it is reduced to a mere instrumentality serving the goals of the sovereign, all-powerful world spirit; and for the latter it becomes a vague composite of innumerable human plans, actions, and reactions.

\begin{quote}
In fact, for Goethe, history itself as the product of such a manifold
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{149} Translation of \textit{Vom Hegel}, p. 222.
diversity was more akin to a "natural happening" a Naturereignis than to anything else. In contrast to Hegel, who saw history as a "progress in the consciousness of freedom," Goethe observed "in all this monstrous experience there is nothing to see but nature; nothing of what we philosophers would be so happy to call freedom." Also in opposition to Hegel, who viewed nature almost exclusively as the "otherness" of the idea, Goethe discerned both reason and form in nature; and from this experience of the essential unity between nature and spirit, he gradually developed his understanding of man and history. As he put it, "without my studies in the natural sciences, I should never . . . have come to know men as they are." But Löwith also emphasizes that Goethe's study of nature is not comparable to the natural science of his day. Goethe did not approach nature as a mere realm of mass and force subject to mathematical quantification, microscopic and telescopic exaggeration, or even artistic and philosophical sublimation. Instead he viewed it as a total all-encompassing "phenomenon" which could only be grasped intuitively. Goethe cultivated a familiarity with plants, bones, stones, and colors in order to develop "the patience and attentiveness..."
which does not gain knowledge by force, but rather allows phenomena to
reveal their own secrets, letting them speak for themselves."152 Through
his study of nature, Goethe also became aware that in all living things
"there takes place a constant regular alteration of forms, a metamorpho-
sis of what remains the same," i.e., a metamorphosis of the one "prim-
ordial form," the *Urform*. 153 And pursuing this path from nature to his-
tory Goethe found that ""The circle of man's course is definite enough;
notwithstanding the standstill brought about by barbarism, it has gone
through its cycle more than once. Even if a spiral movement is ascribed
to it, it still returns again and again to the region through which it has
already passed. In this way, all true views and errors are repeated.""154

But if Goethe was convinced that history viewed as a manifestation
of nature repeats certain basic forms of human destiny, he was also ada-
mant in his belief that without such a "natural" perspective, historical
studies were of little value. In sharp contrast to his contemporaries who,
encouraged by Hegel's "spiritual" view of the world, emphasized the dis-
continuity between nature and history, Goethe proclaimed that history
viewed "purely historically," as an autonomous realm of activity separate
and distinct from nature, is the most "absurd" thing under the sun, "a
tissue of nonsense for the higher thinker." The work of the "pure"

152 Ibid., p. 225.
153 Ibid., p. 226.
154 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 226-227.
historian is not only uncertain, thankless, and even dangerous, it is actually a "mishmash of error and violence" a "refuse can and junk pile; at best a government project." And Löwith, pursuing this line of thought, paraphrases Goethe as follows: the fruits of "pure history" are like those of a newspaper story, "a distortion of the truth, composed of wishful thinking and tendentiousness, special pleading and stupidity, cowardice and lies. How much does even the best historical study give us of the real life of a people, and how much of this little bit is true, and how much of what is true is certain?"  

However Löwith also acknowledges that the same Goethe who, on the one hand, could so sarcastically condemn the "pure" historical contemplation of his contemporaries could, on the other, contribute greatly to the refinement of the historical craft itself.  

In the historical portion of his theory of color, he provided a standard for the treatment of "spiritual history" by discussing a series of scientific discoveries and concealments with reference to the character and way of thought of human beings, but not abstractly as a history of mere ideas and opinions. For he understood the actual history of realms of knowledge as the conflict of the individual with immediate experience and mediated tradition, because in the last analysis it is the "individual" who can "open himself to a more inclusive nature and a more inclusive tradition." In addition, his sketch of Winckelmann shows marvelously how even art can be treated historically from the standpoint of man; and particularly in Dichtung und Wahrheit, he showed how an individual man caught in the action and counter-action of his historical environment develops into a man whose life is of significance for the entire world.  

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155 Ibid., p. 227.  
156 Ibid., p. 230.
Thus in Löwith's opinion, Goethe, alone of all the thinkers of the nineteenth century attained to a proper view of man, nature, and history.

In fact his emphasis upon the essential unity of nature and spirit and upon the direct unfettered and unmediated perception of all phenomena is, for Löwith, a sure sign that "Goethe can never become timely or untimely, because he is forever a pure spring of truth in the relationship of man to himself and to the world." 157

But Goethe is not only a "pure spring of truth," he also constitutes a "'triumph of the purely human," 158 i.e., he is an embodiment of that "humanity" which Löwith has thus far in all of his writings sought to recover and preserve from the anti-humanistic relativist, decisionist, and existentialist orientations of his day. Yet Löwith never really succeeds in telling us just what this "humanity" consists of. Quoting Goethe he refers to it as a "'high, benevolent irony ... fairness of judgment ... even temper in the face of offensiveness ... equanimity in all vicissitudes ..." 159 And somewhat further on, quoting Herder, Löwith refers to humanity as "'the treasure and prize of all human effort, the art of our race." 160 But these designations and definitions are much too vague and general when compared to the concrete classical definition

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157 Ibid., p. 200.
158 Ibid., p. 324.
159 Ibid., p. 324.
160 Ibid., p. 325.
of man as a rational and social animal, *zoon logon echon* and *zoon politikon*, or to the Christian conception of man as a being specially created in the image of God, occupying an intermediate position between the Divine and the brutes. What Löwith is really saying, through Goethe and Herder, is that man's humanity is a product of education and development, of the slow and careful cultivation of an inherent but unspecified potential. In the end then, it boils down to the old eighteenth century Enlightenment "ideal of education" Bildungsideal. Nonetheless, for Löwith, this Goethean and Herderian "humanity" is alone the true, the proper, very simply, alone the natural as well as normative point of view.

It is easy to miss seeing that what is true, to the extent that it has made itself heard in Germany during the past century, can be seen in Goethe and not in more recent figures. It is usually not understood that the exception to the ordinary is not what is conspicuous by excess and deficiency, but what is completely normal.161

However despite this superiority of Goethe's "normality," in comparison to the distortions and exaggerations of Hegel and of most of the young-Hegelians, Löwith is well aware of the fact that a simple reassertion of the validity of the Goethean point of view in our contemporary "technological civilization . . . without which we can no longer even picture our daily lives"162 would itself constitute an anachronistic denial of a major revolution in human life. In addition, Löwith is himself too thoroughgoing and conscientious a thinker, seriously, to cherish illusions

161 Ibid., p. 231.
162 Ibid., p. vii.
of a direct return to a Goethean view of man, nature, and history. "There is no going back in time neither to Goethe nor anybody else," primarily because the "historicism, which developed out of Hegel's metaphysics of the history of the spirit, became more futuristic than the unhistorical world view of Goethe." It "became the standpoint of the age. Now -- consciously or unconsciously -- it belongs to all of us."

But since this historicist orientation has become the dominant standpoint of our time, then "a study of the age from Hegel to Nietzsche ultimately will have to yield the question: Is the essence and 'meaning' of history determined absolutely from within history itself and, if not, then how?" Löwith states that the result of an affirmative answer to this question, i.e., the result of an answer "from within history" by the members of his generation, "born before 1900 and come to maturity during the First World War, would be a resolute resignation." Yet he is also firmly convinced that "even if only to be able to understand the age as an age, a point of view is necessary which will transcend the bare events of the age." Furthermore, only after the adoption of such a

163 First edition of *Vom Hegel*, p. 530.
164 Translation of *Vom Hegel*, p. 181.
165 Ibid., p. 82.
166 Ibid., p. vi.
167 Ibid., p. vii.
168 Ibid., p. vi. Löwith also observes "time and history per se
transcendent point of view or "only in those moments in which eternity appears as the truth of being does the temporal scheme of progress as well as decay prove itself to be a historical chimaera." Presumably Goethe, as a "pure spring of truth" neither "timely nor untimely," constituted one of those moments. In any case, Löwith is certain that "man is not solely dependent upon all-powerful time. He survives the vicissitudes of existence thanks to a single ray or spark from the being of eternity." But, characteristically, Löwith is incapable of providing us with a further specification of this "being of eternity" either as Christian spirit or pagan nature as Hegel and Goethe could; hence it is not really anything substantial in its own right but merely serves as an antipode or a counterpoise to the "resolute resignation" of his contemporaries who have succumbed to the "spirit of the age." Thus in spite of Löwith's conviction that an extra-temporal point of reference is necessary, his own "being of eternity" is still more a product of a negative reaction to his age, and thereby unconsciously conditioned by it, than the result of a genuine emancipation from the historicist orientation.

However this objection notwithstanding, Löwith has now, at least,

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169 Ibid., p. 530.
170 Ibid., p. 9.
come to the definite conclusion that historicism, far from providing an adequate solution to the problem of the discovery and preservation of man, is, in fact, a major threat to this very undertaking. Moreover, his serious consideration of the possibility of an extra-temporal point of reference already clearly foreshadows the direction of his subsequent attempts to effect an overcoming of historicism. Indeed, directly after Vom Hegel, Löwith undertakes a very critical and thorough investigation of the historicist distortions of the original extra-temporal sources of the historical point of view per se, or, in his words, an investigation of the problem of "meaning in history."
CHAPTER IV

Meaning in History

Meaning in History is actually a many faceted work concerned not only with the general problem of the meaning and significance of past events but also with the problem of the theological background of the philosophy of history, i.e., with the relationship between sacred and secular history, with Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte. However, the underlying motif uniting all of these concerns is the attempt to demonstrate the innate inadequacy of the historicist orientation. To demonstrate the inadequacy of a point of view, Löwith argues, one must first go to its actual base or source and then show that it does not do justice to empirical reality. But in the case of historicism, the actual base is not simply a congeries of isolated historical facts nor even the entire young-Hegelian movement; it is the total enterprise of history itself. Thus in order to overcome historicism, "it does not suffice merely to reason correctly, instead a historical reflection upon historical thought itself is required."  

171 K. Löwith, Meaning in History, the Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). In 1953 this work appeared in German as Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschichte, die theologischen Vorraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1953).

Moreover this reflection or, better still, critical reexamination of the sources of our contemporary understanding of the role and function of history is all the more necessary since, according to Löwith, "we find ourselves more or less at the end of the modern rope. It has worn too thin to give hopeful support. We have learned to wait without hope 'for hope would be hope for the wrong thing.'" Hence "the wholesomeness of remembering in these times of suspense what has been forgotten and of recovering the genuine sources of our sophisticated results."

Löwith finds that the vast majority of our contemporary "sophisticated results" are traceable back to the Hebrew-Christian salvation epic. For example, our concern with the meaning of history, i.e., with a "philosophy of history," he discerns as a product of religion, "it is Hebrew and Christian thinking that brought this colossal question into existence. To ask earnestly the question of the ultimate meaning of history takes one's breath away; it transports us into a vacuum which only hope and faith can fill." And in order to emphasize this original dependence of the philosophy of history upon Hebrew-Christian thinking, Löwith points out that the first great attempt to elicit an ultimate meaning in history, Augustine's *City of God*, is not to be considered a genuine "philosophy of history" at all; rather it is a dogmatic-historical interpretation of Christianity.

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174Ibid., p. 4.
Though he is demonstrating the truth of the Christian doctrine in the material of sacred and profane history, the history of the world has for him no intrinsic interest and meaning. The City of God is not an ideal which could become real in history, like the third age of Joachim, and the church in its earthly existence is only a representative signification of the true, trans-historical city. For Augustine the historical task of the church is not to develop the Christian truth through successive stages but simply to spread it, for the truth as such is established.175

In other words, Augustine's true theme is not the human history of the world per se; it is the eschatological history of the faith, the Heilsge-schehen, which is a kind of esoteric history within secular history visible only to those who possess the eyes of faith. For Augustine, the entire course of history becomes progressive, meaningful, and intelligible solely by anticipating a final triumph, beyond historical time, of the city of God over the sinful city of man.176

But if Augustine viewed history as definitely distinct from God, for the later Christian thinkers, and Hegel in particular, God tended to become one with history, manifesting himself primarily in and through the historical process itself. Thus history, as the realm for the specific realization of the spirit of Christianity, increasingly became a theodicy, the justification of God in history, hence Hegel's conviction that "the history of the world is the world's court of justice," Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.177 However, in Löwith's view, the principle difference

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175 Ibid., p. 166.

176 Ibid., pp. 168-172.

177 According to Löwith, "a sentence which is as religious in its
between Augustine and Hegel lies in the fact that Hegel interprets the entire Christian religion in terms of speculative reason. Hegel said, "'the process displayed in history is only the manifestation of religion as human reason, the production of the religious principle under the form of secular freedom." Moreover with this secularization of the Christian faith or, in Hegelian terms, 'realization' of the Christian spirit, Hegel believed himself loyal to the genius of Christianity. But in Löwith's judgment

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 -- Christianity in terms of a self-sufficient Logos absorbing the will of God into the spirit of the world and the spirit of the nations, the *Weltgeist* and the *Volksgeist*.179

Another important derivation from the Hebrew-Christian religious orientation, according to Löwith, is our concern with the future as the true focus of history. Given our understanding of history as "a movement in time" its "meaning," generally, will be conceived in terms of a final goal. But "the temporal horizon for a final goal is . . . an original motivation where it means that the world's history is proceeding toward its judgment at the end of all history, as it is irreligious in its secular application, where it means that the judgment is contained in the historical process as such." Ibid., p. 58.

178 Quoted in Ibid., p. 57.

179 Ibid., p. 59.
eschatological future and the future exists for us only by expectation and hope." Furthermore, "such an expectation was most intensely alive among the Hebrew prophets; it did not exist among the Greek philosophers."¹⁸⁰ Thus in the Hebrew-Christian view of history, the past becomes a promise to the future and as a result "the interpretation of the past becomes a prophecy in reverse, demonstrating the past as a meaningful 'preparation' for the future."¹³¹

Yet, on the other hand, from a strictly orthodox point of view, this futuristic motif does not extend indefinitely; with the appearance of Christ, time has been fulfilled. Therefore the time between the resurrection and the second coming is not comparable to that which preceded

¹³⁰ "When we remember that II Isaiah and Herodotus were almost contemporaries, we realize the unbridgeable gulf that separates Greek wisdom from Jewish faith." Ibid., p. 6.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 6. Löwith also argues that not only our interest in the future but the general tendency to distinguish various zones or phases within time itself reflects our Hebrew-Christian heritage. "The theoretical observation of natural space-time and the distinction of an indifferent 'now' point from its 'before' and 'after' do not explain the experience of a qualitative historical time. A historical now is not an indifferent instant but a kairos, which opens the horizon for past as well as future." Accordingly, "the significant now of the kairos qualifies the retrospect on the past and the prospect upon the future, uniting the past as preparation with the future as consummation." Historically, "it was the appearance of Jesus Christ at the appointed time which opened for the Christian faith this perspective onto the past and onto the future as temporal phases in the history of salvation. . . . A mere before and after of a neutral now could never have constituted historical past and historical future." Ibid., pp. 185-186.
the incarnation. It is no longer a time of anticipation and expectation of a glorious future fulfillment but rather the "last time," an interim, "a time of probation and final discrimination between the wheat and the tares.

Its constant content are variations of one single theme; God's call and man's response to it."182 Thus for the true believer, the incarnation and crucifixion indicate that time is fulfilled, it only remains to be consummated; in other words, "the Kingdom of God is already at hand, and yet as an eschaton still to come."183 But the eschaton as the end is not an anticipated future in the course of time; it is a penultimate consummation beyond time.

However in sharp contrast to this orthodox understanding of future fulfillment, Joachim of Floris, in the twelfth century, on the basis of a revelation, proclaimed a new and last dispensation after those of the Old and New Testaments. The general scheme of Joachim's inspiration is based on the doctrine of the Trinity. Three different dispensations come to pass in three different epochs in which the three persons of the Trinity are manifest in an orderly succession. The first dispensation is that of the Father (the age of the law or the Old Testament), the second that of the Son (the age of Grace or the New Testament), and the third that of the Holy Ghost (the age of pure spirit) which he also conceived as just beginning, i.e., beginning in his own day.184 Joachim's expectation of

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182 Ibid., p. 184.
183 Ibid., p. 188.
184 Ibid., pp. 147-150.
a last providential progress toward a future "age of the spirit" was radically new in comparison to the orthodox pattern, especially since Joachim conceived of this progress or consummation within rather than beyond the framework of history.

This consummation does not occur beyond historical time, at the end of the world, but in a last historical epoch. Joachim's eschatological scheme consists neither in a simple millennium nor in the mere expectation of the end of the world but in a two-fold eschaton: an ultimate historical phase of the history of salvation, preceding the transcendent eschaton of the new aeon, ushered in by the second coming of Christ. The Kingdom of the Spirit is the last revelation of God's purpose on earth and in time. Consequently, the institution of the papacy and clerical hierarchy is limited to the second epoch. This implies a radical revision of the Catholic doctrine of succession from St. Peter to the end of the world. The existing church, though founded on Christ, will have to yield to the coming church of the Spirit, when the history of salvation has reached its plenitude.  

With Augustine and Thomas, the Christian truth rests once and for all on certain historical facts. With Joachim, Christian truth, like Hegel's spirit, has a temporal setting in its successive development. Hence compared with Augustine and Thomas, the thought of Joachim is "theological historism." Therefore, despite the fact that Joachim himself did not overtly criticize the church of his day, his speculations did indirectly encourage the "striving for new historical realizations," especially those of the Franciscan spirituals. "To them the clerical church was indeed at its end. Rejecting the alleviating distinctions

\[185\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 151.
\[186\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 156.
\[187\]\textit{Ibid.}, p. 159.
between strict precepts and flexible counsels, they made a radical attempt to live a Christian life in unconditional poverty and humility."

They wanted "to transform the church into a community of the Holy Spirit without Pope, clerical hierarchy, sacraments, Holy Scripture and theology." In short then, they "expected everything from the future."\(^{188}\)

Another thinker who, in Löwith's view, "expected everything from the future" was Karl Marx. Marx, as indicated, viewed history as absorbed into a total all-encompassing economic process which he conceived as moving toward a final future world revolution and world renovation. And "it is precisely for the sake of this final and future consummation of the whole historical process that Marx strove to hasten the disintegration of bourgeois capitalistic society."\(^{189}\) But here Löwith is not simply interested in determining the key features of the Marxian outlook as such but, more specifically, in uncovering the motivation for such an outlook. Just as Marx himself was greatly concerned with what he termed the "hidden" or secret history of the chief concepts of bourgeois society, i.e., the "secret" economic base of its legal, political, and social forms, so Löwith seeks to uncover the "hidden" history of Marx's own "ideological" and "socialistic" futurism. And not surprisingly, he finds the real driving force behind all of Marx's conceptions to be "the old Jewish messianism and prophetism -- unaltered by two thousand years of economic history

\(^{188}\) Ibid., pp. 152-155.

\(^{189}\) Ibid., p. 33.
from handicraft to large-scale industry." The fundamental antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat, he traces back to the Old Testament antagonism between the "children of darkness" and the "children of light." The missionary task of the proletariat "corresponds to the world-historical mission of the chosen people." Even Marx's "scientific" prediction of a final struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, Löwith sees foreshadowed in the Hebraic vision of an Armageddon and a last judgment. Clearly it is the "Jewish insistence on absolute righteousness" and future fulfillment which lies at the base of Marx's materialism and is the true source of its popular appeal.

Historical materialism is essentially, though secretly, a history of fulfillment and salvation in terms of social economy. What seems to be a scientific discovery from which one might deduce, after the fashion of Marxist "revisionists," the philosophical garb and the relic of a religious attitude is, on the contrary, from the first to the last sentence inspired by an eschatological faith, which, in its turn, "determines" the whole sweep and range of all particular statements. It would have been quite impossible to elaborate the vision of the proletariat's messianic vocation on a purely scientific basis and to inspire millions of followers by a bare statement of facts.

Another major, if not perhaps the most important, product of the eschatological history of salvation, according to Löwith, was the idea of progress. Such an idea could only become the leading principle for the understanding of history within the primary horizon of the future as

\[190\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 44.}\]

\[191\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 44.}\]

\[192\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 45.}\]
established by Jewish and Christian faith. "Within a cyclic Weltanschauung and order of the universe, where every movement of advance is, at the same time, a movement of return, there is no place for progress." 193

But granted that the idea of progress is ultimately derived from Hebrew-Christian hope and expectation, Löwith again takes pains to point out that this secular derivation must be carefully distinguished from the cardinal tenets of the faith itself. The Gospels never proclaim a future improvement in our earthly condition, only the sudden advent of the Kingdom of God. Salvation is not to be attained through a gradual development of our natural faculties but, on the contrary, through a decisive conversion, effecting a total transformation in the life of the individual. Saint Paul's admonitions to "press forward" have little to do with modern activism and progressivism; Paul is solely concerned with a transcendental transformation and consummation which, although still distant, is nonetheless definite and at any time imminent. In other words, "Christianity, far from having opened the horizon of an indefinite future like the religion of progress, has made the future paramount by making it definite;" and thereby it has also immensely accentuated and deepened the earnestness of the present instant. The only "progress" that could possibly interest a Christian would be the progressive imitation of Christ who himself did not really care for worldly improvements and whose divine perfection cannot be surpassed by human imitators. 194

193 Ibid., p. 111.
194 Ibid., pp. 112-113.
Yet with the emergence in the seventeenth century of the controversy between the "ancients and the moderns," the belief in an immanent and indefinite progress gradually began to replace the belief in a definite transcendent providence; and in the eighteenth century Voltaire boldly explained revealed religion in terms of profane history. But, thereby, Löwith argues, he did not attain to a more complete universality or a superior vision of truth in comparison to his counterpart Bossuet, who still explained profane history religiously. Instead, Voltaire despite his polemics against Christianity merely secularized "the Christian hope of salvation into an indefinite hope of improvement and faith in God's providence into the belief in man's capacity to provide for his own earthly happiness." 195

Turgot, another eighteenth century apostle of the religion of progress, Löwith judges a somewhat subtler thinker than Voltaire, since he specifically acknowledged Christianity's contributions to progress rather than considering it a chief impediment. 196 Löwith also finds that Turgot was one of the first to understand historical movements as not merely a simple one-dimensional progression but as "an intricate system of passionate intentions and unexpected results." Yet Turgot, too

195 Ibid., p. 111.

196 For Turgot Christianity was the "natural religion," spreading charity and gentleness. "That those principles have been increasingly effective in the midst of man's tumultuous passions; that they have mitigated his rages, tempered his actions, and moderated the fall of states by having made man better and happier . . . seems to Turgot a well-established and indisputable fact." Ibid., p. 101.
secularized providence into a "natural law of progress" and retained a "religious respect" for such secular manifestations of Christianity as "personal liberty and labor; inviolability of the right of property; equal justice for everyone; multiplication of the means of subsistence; increase of riches; and augmentation of enjoyments, enlightenment, and all means to happiness." Thus Turgot's work shows that even if one attempts to understand history through a strictly rational analysis of "'the sources and the mechanism of the moral causes and their effects,' the theological scheme still remains visible as long as history is not completely simplified to a plain and intelligible progression of successive stages and events."197

This underlying "theological scheme" is also readily discernable in the thought of Condorcet, Comte, and Proudhon for whom history was certainly more than a mere "plain and intelligible progression of successive stages and events." For example, Condorcet's Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind sought to demonstrate the concrete future perfectability of man on the basis of man's apparently limitless capacity for initiating "improvements." And Condorcet supported this argument with all kinds of inferences and observations which he termed "scientific," such as the observation that physical improvement automatically entails moral betterment, yet Löwith finds "that there is nothing scientific, precise, and quantified in Condorcet's

197 Ibid., pp. 101-103.
speculations about man's future progress." In fact "Condorcet's hopes for the future perfection of men were not the result of scientific inference and evidence but a conjecture, the root of which was hope and faith." 198

Comte, who was a disciple of Condorcet, fares little better in Löwith's judgment. His only distinguishing feature is seen to be "the completeness and persistency of his elaboration" in comparison to the sketches and outlines of his predecessors upon whom he was dependent for the basic structure of his work. 199 From a study of the "general development of mankind," Comte deduced "a great fundamental law" of development, namely, that each branch of civilization passes through three successive stages: the theological or fictitious (the stage of childhood), the metaphysical or abstract (the stage of youth), and finally the scientific or positive (the stage of manhood).

In the first stage, Comte envisaged man as constantly searching for the first and final causes of things, and as eventually discerning these causes in a supernatural agent or agents. In the metaphysical stage, these supernatural agents are replaced by abstract entities but the search for ultimate causes is still the same as in the theological stage. Only in the positive stage does the mind finally understand the impossibility of grasping absolute notions; it renounces the vain search for the origin and

198 Ibid., p. 96.

199 "The principle of order and progress had already been formulated by Condorcet, and the law of the three stages by Saint-Simon and Turgot." Ibid., p. 92.
destination of the universe and confines research to the empirical ob-
servation of phenomena with the intention of eliciting natural laws.

Thus the general outlook of Comte's study of mankind is determined
by the open future of a linear progression from primitive to advanced
stages. This progress is, of course, more conspicuous in the intellect-
ual than in the moral realm and more firmly established in the natural
than in the social sciences. But the ultimate aim and task, according to
Comte, is the application of the achievements of the natural sciences to
the creation of a social physics or "sociology" for the sake of a whole-
scale social reorganization.200

However Comte, like all of his predecessors, did not realize the
depth to which his leading conceptions are still theological. For example,"he blame Christianity for having barred its own progressive tendency
by its claim to being the final stage of man's progression and yet he at-
tributes the self-same ultimacy to the scientific stage, 'which alone indi-
cates the final term of human history."201 Löwith also argues that, for
Comte, "the law of progressive evolution replaces the function of provi-
dential government, perverting the secret provision by providence into a
scientific provision by a prevision rationelle." Furthermore Comte's
"expectations of a 'fundamental modification of human existence,' after
the full establishment of the positive philosophy is but a pale shadow of

200 Ibid., pp. 69-72.
201 Ibid., p. 83.
that eschatological expectation which constituted the core of early Christianity. In sum then,

if Comte had really reasoned on a purely positive basis, that is, with the neutrality of the scientist ... he would neither have "discovered" the ideal law of progress nor have been concerned with the final reorganization of human society, the abolition of wars, and the religion of humanity. On the other hand, if he had penetrated to the core of the theological system, which is, after all, no system but an appeal and a message, he would not have stopped with the scientific method as the final solution and salvation.

Proudhon, like Comte, also viewed history as a tripartite progression. But in contrast to Comte's stages, Proudhon saw history as advancing by certain key revolutionary crises that inevitably gave birth to new conceptions of justice. The first was provoked by Jesus when he denied the concept of the chosen people and proclaimed the equality of all men before God; the second was inaugurated by the Reformation and Descartes and resulted in equality before conscience and reason; the third began with the French Revolution and established equality before the law. The coming crisis, according to Proudhon, will be specifically economic and social in character and will mark the end of the bourgeois age. It will also bring about a final equality by the "equation of man with humanity." But in order to realize this final equality, Proudhon emphasized

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202 Ibid., p. 84.
203 Ibid., p. 91.
204 Ibid., p. 63.
that man has yet to overcome the ultimate obstacle to human progress, i.e., the one great source of all dogmatisms: the deity. Against the religious interpretation of reality, Proudhon argued that it is man's privilege to apprehend the apparent inevitability and inscrutability of providence, to penetrate its promptings, and to influence it. The providence of God is only "the 'collective instinct' or 'universal reason' of man as a social being. The God of history is but man's own creation." Thus, for Proudhon, "the first duty of a free and intelligent man is to chase the idea of God out of his mind and conscience incessantly." For if God does exist, he is essentially inimical to man. "We attain to science in spite of him, to well-being in spite of him, to society in spite of him: every progress is a victory in which we crush the deity." 205

Yet these apparent blasphemies notwithstanding, Löwith finds that Proudhon was deeply marked by Christianity. In his polemics against the deity, "there is also much of the passion and earnestness of a religious soul which needs a violent effort to assert its freedom and independence." Moreover, Proudhon's "language, imagination, and turn of mind were decidedly theological," for "in all his passion for destruction, [he] wanted to prepare la foi nouvelle, asking for a 'token of salvation' when he searched in the spectacle of modern revolutions 'as in the entrails of a victim' for the secret of its destiny." Thus, as was the case with all of the aforementioned advocates of a boundless human progress and

205 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
improvement, it was "the faith in a coming Kingdom of God [on earth] which inspired Proudhon's struggle against God and providence for the sake of human progress."²⁰⁶

But while our desire to ascertain the meaning of the whole historical enterprise, as well as our interest in history as the future and as progress, are clearly the product of a perversion and secularization of the Hebrew-Christian religious orientation, Löwith also acknowledges that the delineation of this aspect of modern historical thought does not constitute a total or exhaustive explanation. Our interest and concern with the very process of history itself, viewed as a kind of endless continuity, is certainly not Hebrew-Christian in origin; rather it is an off-shot of its great counterpart: the classical tradition. Löwith illustrates this contention by first juxtaposing the Hebrew-Christian and classical historical orientations, and then by tracing the influence of this polarity upon the thought of such leading thinkers as Vico, Nietzsche, Spengler, Toynbee, and Burckhardt.

In contrast to the Hebrew-Christian and modern concerns with the ultimate meaning and purpose of history, Löwith finds that the ancients were more modest 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

²⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 65-66.
understanding of history." Morever in comparison to the Hebrew-Christian focus upon history as the future and as progress, Löwith argues that in the Greek and Roman mythologies and genealogies the past is represented as an everlasting foundation. "Greek philosophers and historians were convinced that whatever is to happen will be of the same pattern and character as past and present events; they never indulged in the prospective possibilities of the future." Thus "if the idea of progress had been presented to a Greek, it would have struck him as irreligious, defying cosmic order and fate." But Löwith also finds that this classical emphasis upon the natural rather than supernatural dimension of history (upon eternal recurrence rather than future fulfillment) underwent the same transmutations, perversions, and secularizations as the Hebrew-Christian point of view.

Vico's *New Science* is one of the earliest works to effect an unconscious union of the classical and Christian traditions with the result that both are perverted and distorted. Vico distinguished three ages which follow the pre-historic period: the age of the gods, "in which the

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207 Ibid., p. 4.

208 Ibid., p. 6.


210 For examples of the persistence of this tripartite approach to history since its first appearance with Joachim, see *Meaning*, Appendix I, pp. 208-213.
gentiles believed they lived under divine government, and everything was commanded them by auspices and oracles;" the age of the heroes, "in which they reigned everywhere in aristocratic commonwealths on account of a certain superiority of nature which they held themselves to have over the plebs;" and the age of men, "in which all men recognized themselves as equal in human nature, and therefore there were established first the popular commonwealths and then monarchies."  

The divine age is, of course, strictly theocratic; the heroic age is a manifestation of true mythology, and the human age is characterized by rationality. The first and second ages are also uniquely "poetical" epochs, i.e., times of rich imaginative creativity. Corresponding to these three ages, Vico also distinguished and analyzed three kinds of languages, laws, and civil states.

The course of humanity through these ages may be considered a "progress" -- at least in so far as there is a definite movement from anarchy to order and from savage and heroic customs to more rationalized and civilized ones. It is, however, a progress without a goal and fulfillment. For Vico, its real end is a decadence and an ultimate relapse into a period of rejuvenating barbarism after which the whole course (corso) begins anew. This new course is therefore more than a simple recurrence (ricorso); it is also a resurgence or revitalization. Such a revitalization had already occurred once, after the fall of Rome, with the return of barbaric times in the Middle Ages, and, in all likelihood, it

\[^{211}\text{Quoted in Ibid., p. 131.}\]
will occur again at the end of the present corso, which itself is already a ricorso.

Thus far, Vico's view of history appears to be a restatement of the classical theory of cyclical growth and decay. But, as Löwith points out, "Vico becomes inconsistent when considering, toward the end of his work, the possibility of a final Telos and settlement of the historical process." Reviewing the situation in Europe, Russia, and Asia in his day, he observed "today a 'complete' humanity 'seems' to be spread through all nations because a few Christian monarchs rule over this world of peoples." Obviously, this tentative outlook toward a "complete" Christian world, as the fulfillment of history, is incompatible with the consistent theme of his work which stresses that history has no fulfillment since it is ruled by recurrences. Furthermore, when compared with the classical theory of cycles, Vico's

ricorso is not a cosmic recurrence but a historical structure with the juridical connotation of "appeal." Since the historical corso has failed to attain its end, it must, as it were, appeal to a higher court to have its case rehearsed. The highest court of justice is, however, providential history as a whole, which requires an age of disintegration and oversophistication, the "barbarism of reflection" to return to the creative barbarism of sense in order to begin anew.

And it is this recurrence of the "creative barbarism of sense," but not a true transcendental redemption, which is the real end and "providential"

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212 Ibid., p. 132.
213 Ibid., p. 133.
meaning of history for Vico. Thus his leading idea is neither the secularized Hebrew-Christian progression toward fulfillment, nor the classical cosmic cycle of sheer natural growth and decay, but a strange amalgam and perversion of both. In effect, it is "a historico-cyclic progression from corso to ricorso in which the cycle itself has providential significance by being an ultimate remedy for man's corrupted nature." In other words, "Vico's perspective is still a theological one, but the means of providence and salvation are in themselves historico-natural ones. History, as seen by Vico, has a prehistoric beginning but no end and fulfillment, and yet it is ruled by providence for the sake of mankind."\(^{214}\)

Another thinker who also unconsciously amalgamated and distorted both the classical and Christian traditions was Nietzsche; although he, ironically, regarded himself as the champion of the former and arch-enemy of the latter. Zarathustra, one of Nietzsche's most important works, was intended as a pure and direct restatement of the classical point of view. However Löwith judges it to be "from cover to cover a countergospel in style as well as in content."\(^{215}\) It reflects "the God of the Old Testament," since its underlying motif is not the contemplation of the past as an "everlasting foundation" but the "thought of the future and the will to create it."\(^{216}\) Yet even more conspicuous, in

\(^{214}\) Ibid., p. 135.

\(^{215}\) Ibid., p. 220.

\(^{216}\) Ibid., pp. 221-222.
Löwith's eyes, is Nietzsche's application of this will to the eternal recurrence of a classically understood cosmos which is beyond all will and purpose.

To the Greeks the cyclic motions of the heavenly spheres manifested a universal rational order and divine perfection; to Nietzsche the eternal recurrence is "the most frightful" conception and "the heaviest burden" because it bears upon and conflicts with his will to a future redemption. To the Greeks the eternal recurrence of generation and corruption explained temporal changes in nature as well as in history; to Nietzsche the willed acceptance of eternal recurrence requires a standpoint "beyond man and time." The Greeks felt awe and reverence for fate; Nietzsche makes the superhuman effort to will and to love it. Thus he was unable to develop his vision as a supreme and objective order, as the Greeks did, but introduced it as a subjective ethical imperative. The theory of eternal recurrence becomes with him a practical device and a "hammer," to pound into man the idea of an absolute responsibility, substituting that sense of responsibility which was alive as long as men lived in the presence of God and in the expectation of a last judgment.

Moreover since the will traditionally moves in a straight line and in an irreversible direction rather than in a circle, Nietzsche was also faced with the crucial problem of redeeming the will from its one-dimensional structure. For how can the will integrate itself with the cyclic recurrence of the cosmos, where every forward movement is at the same time one of return? According to Löwith, Nietzsche suggests that "the will must redeem itself from itself by also willing backward, i.e., by accepting voluntarily what it did not will, the whole past of all that is already done and existent--in particular, the fact of our own existence, which nobody had produced by his will." However this is all

\[217\] _Ibid._, p. 221.
"entirely un-Greek, not classic, not pagan but derived from the Hebrew-Christian tradition, from the belief that the world and man are created by God's purposeful will."\textsuperscript{218} Thus Lowith concludes that despite Nietzsche's classical-Dionysian stance, he "was not so much 'the last disciple of Dionysios' as the first radical apostate of Christ."\textsuperscript{219}

But if Löwith finds Vico and Nietzsche inconsistent, what about contemporary thinkers like Spengler and Toynbee? As heirs of the entire critical tradition of the nineteenth century and as consciously empirical or "scientific," one might expect them to have overcome the inadequacies of their predecessors. At first glance, Löwith finds Spengler's morphology of world history to adhere closely to the classical pattern of genesis, growth, flowering, and decay. The primary significance of historical cultures consists in the fateful fulfillment of predetermined life-cycles, and since these cycles are directed neither by the will of God nor by the will of man, history is completely devoid of a goal or purpose; in fact its sublimity is seen to lie in this very purposelessness. Yet Spengler was far from accepting the inevitability of the civilizational cycle with classical detachment. He also considered himself a son of the "Faustian culture," which arose at the height of the Middle Ages but independent of the Christian religion; and as such a Faustian man, he felt himself in possession of the unique "sense of the future" which is

\textsuperscript{218}Ibid., pp. 221-222.

\textsuperscript{219}Ibid., p. 222.
peculiar to the dynamic Faustian soul and Weltanschauung. Hence when Spengler introduces and defines his supreme concept, "destiny," Löwith argues, "he introduces the notion of a noncyclical 'historical' time directed toward the future;" and thereby he vitiates his own neoclassicism. For the Faustian Spengler, "destiny" does not have the connotation of a passive acceptance and reconciliation to the inevitable as for the Greeks; on the contrary, it is replete with modern activism and the Hebrew-Christian emphasis upon the will. Thus Spengler, like Nietzsche, urges his fellow men to will and love fate, even promote and fulfill it. This counsel Löwith finds unacceptable.

No ancient ever fancied that the fate of decline should be willed and chosen; for fate is either really fate, and then it is futile to decide upon it, or it is a self-chosen destiny, and then it is no unavoidable fate. Spengler does not solve this problem of natural fate and historical destiny. His pathos grows from the confusion of the will to a future, still open to possibilities, with the acceptance of a definite outcome.

Löwith also finds Toynbee similarly divided between the Christian and classical traditions, especially in his attempt to rescue the Christian religion from the logical conclusion of his own scheme of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations and religions. Initially, Toynbee appears to be a detached empirical observer of the historical process, carefully

220 Ibid., p. 12.
221 Ibid., p. 12.
222 Löwith's view of Toynbee is based solely on the first six volumes of the Study of History and therefore does not reflect the modifications and adjustments in the later volumes.
chronicling the rise and fall of twenty-one civilizational cycles. One of the more interesting of Toynbee's empirical observations pertains to the rise of religions. In contrast to Spengler, Toynbee does not view religions as homogeneous expressions of their culture but as genuine transcendent forces. They are the only "creative" means of escape from a disintegrating civilization. They generate a new clime and dimension, in effect, a new kind of society, a universal church over against the dominant universal states. Also, according to Toynbee, the standard disintegration rhythm of every civilization is exactly three and one-half "beats" and our own Western civilization is already supposed to have undergone the experience of one and one-half beats. Hence following Toynbee's scheme of the breakdown of civilizations and rise of religions, one would naturally expect that Christianity is about to be superceded by the appearance of a new transcendental savior religion. Yet here Toynbee the detached empirical observer and Toynbee the believer suddenly part company, and he reverts to a confession and a commitment which, judged by his own standards of objectivity, neutrality, and detachment, can only be termed "parochial."

As a loyal son of the Christian church, Toynbee cannot really envisage a supersession of the faith; and with all the empirical knowledge he can muster, he endeavors to show that, in spite of a considerable previous development, Christianity is still the greatest "new" event in man's history. However it is Löwith's considered opinion that
Toynbee is neither an empirical historian nor a good theologian. Instead of arguing with Augustine and all the church Fathers that Christianity is the latest news because it is the good news and because God revealed himself in history only once and for all, he argues on astronomical grounds. Instead of demonstrating by the knowledge of faith that Christianity is true or by the standards of history that it was once young and is, therefore, now old, he refers to the modern scientific discoveries of geologists and astronomers which have vastly changed our time-scale, on which the beginning of the Christian era is an extremely recent date.\textsuperscript{223}

But how can one infer historical and even religious significance from \textit{impersonal} astronomical and geological facts? Löwith argues that "it is sheer belief, quite apart from an empirical study of history, which prompts Toynbee to assert that Christianity is still new and that it will not only survive our Western civilization but even become the world religion."\textsuperscript{224}

Yet even assuming that this "evidence" is acceptable and that Christianity truly is the greatest "new" event in the history of man, one is then forced to ask how the classical cycle of growth and decay can be adjusted to the belief in a meaningful goal and a progressive revelation of divine truth in history? Here again, Toynbee's answer is not empirical or scientific but poetic, in terms of a simile. If the Christian faith is conceived as a chariot, then "it looks as if the wheels on which it mounts towards Heaven may be the periodic downfalls of civilizations on Earth [sic]. It looks as if the movement of civilizations may be cyclic and recurrent, while the movement of religion may be on a single continuous


\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., p. 15.
upward line." In other words, "the continuous upward movement of religion may be served and promoted by the cyclic movement of civilizations around the cycle of birth-death-birth."225 Thus behind Toynbee's "surface" classicism and the apparent neutrality of his empirical outlook, the ultimate base of his universal history of twenty-one civilizational cycles is his eschatological concern for the realization of a very particular faith.

In sum then, it is Löwith's contention that any and all attempts to accomplish a reconciliation of the classical and Christian traditions are foredoomed to failure.

This attempt has never succeeded and it cannot succeed . . . the initial decision between Christianity and paganism remains decisive; for how could one reconcile the classical theory that the world is eternal with the Christian faith in creation, the cycle with an eschaton, and the pagan acceptance of fate with the Christian duty of hope? They are all the more irreconcilable because the classical view of the world is a view of things visible while the Christian "view" of the world is, after all, not a view [at all] but a matter of hope and faith in things invisible.226

225 Quoted in Ibid., p. 17.

226 Ibid., pp. 165-166. Moreover, according to Löwith, this same strange amalgamation and attempted fusion of two basically irreconcilable traditions is not only manifest in the works of Nietzsche, Spengler, and Toynbee but is to some extent characteristic of the entire historical community. Our concern with the unity of universal history and its "progress" toward a better world, or, at least, a considerably improved one, he argues, is a clear indication of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, while our exploration of the plurality of cultures for the sake of a disinterested knowledge, quite untouched by any interest in redemption, is a clear indication of the classical heritage. Ibid., p. 19. Also see Löwith's "History and Christianity" ed. by C. W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall in The Library of Living Theology, Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social, and Political Thought (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1956), II, pp. 282-290. This article is a scathing critique of Niebuhr's attempt, and by implication all similar attempts (Bultmann, et al.), to bring about a reconciliation.
The only modern historian who, in Löwith's view, avoided the pitfalls not only of a secularization of the Hebrew-Christian tradition but also of the amalgamation of both the classical and Christian traditions was Jacob Burckhardt. In contrast to Hegel and, in effect, to all of the Western philosophers of history, Löwith praises Burckhardt's assertion that the "rationality" as well as the "progressivity" of the historical process are beyond our ken; as ordinary men and creatures of history we are not privy to the working of such trans-historical forces. And in contrast to the modern tendency to judge certain historical occurrences as fortunate or desirable and others as unfortunate and undesirable, Löwith admires Burckhardt's condemnation of all such blind desiderata as "the deadly enemies of true historical insight;" for, in the last analysis, such judgments always annul one another, and the nearer we come to the present, the more opinions diverge.

If Burckhardt were alive today and were asked about his judgment of contemporary events, as a European he would probably say that the defeat of a Nazi Germany was fortunate and desirable, the rise of Russia appalling and undesirable, though the first depends on the second. As a historian, however, he would refuse to predict whether the alliance and victory of the Allies is ultimately a "fortune" or a "misfortune" in this incalculable world-historical process.²²⁷

between Christianity and the various political and philosophical movements of the modern world such as socialism, trade unionism, existentialism, etc.

In Burckhardt's view, the only truly significant aspect of the historical process is its continuity. It alone is the common standard of all of our particular historical evaluations. But continuity, as understood by Burckhardt, is considerably more than mere continuance and considerably less than a progressive development. It cannot be progressive because, as indicated, Burckhardt was convinced that man's mind and soul were complete long ago, i.e., the permanent center of history is "man, as he is and was and ever shall be." Accordingly, he is not subject to any progressive amelioration. But continuity is also more than mere continuance or sheer "going on," since, for Burckhardt, it implies a conscious remembrance, renewal, and reappropriation of the heritage rather than a mere passive acceptance of custom. Very simply then, continuity as constituted by historical consciousness, is "a prime concern of man's existence," because it is the only proof of the "significance of the duration of our existence," and our only guarantee against the attempts of primitive as well as "civilized" barbarians to effect "permanent revisions."

Burckhardt's emphasis upon continuity was, of course, strongly influenced by his conviction that since the French Revolution Europe has been living in a state of rapidly disintegrating tradition. Thus by stressing...
the civilizing mission of conscious historical continuity he, at least, tried
to retard the forthcoming dissolution. Seen in this context, Burckhardt's
emphasis on continuity is certainly understandable. Yet even without this
contextual perspective, Löwith judges Burckhardt's resolution of the entire
historical process to the thin thread of mere continuity, without beginning,
progress, and end to be the "soundest modern reflection on history."

It is "modern" in as much as Burckhardt understands the
classical as well as the Christian position without committing him-
self to either of them. Over against the modern striving for social
security, he praises the ancient greatness of passion and sacrifice
for the sake of the city state; over against the modern striving for a
higher standard of living, he has a deep appreciation for the Chris-
tian conquest of all things earthly. At the same time he knows per-
fently well that "the spirit of antiquity is not any longer our spirit"
and that "from Christianity 1800 years are separating us."

However in spite of this praise of Burckhardt's view of history,
Löwith also finds his approach deficient in several important respects.
Putting aside for the moment Löwith's earlier critique, here he finds
that "historical continuity and consciousness have an almost sacramental
character" for Burckhardt. They are a "last religion" and a "poor
remainder of a fuller notion of meaning." In addition, Löwith observes
to be theoretically consistent, however the trust in continuity

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standing of, and yet independence from, both the classical and Christian
traditions by juxtaposing him to Turgot (p. 101), Comte (pp. 86-87),
Hegel (pp. 31-59), and Marx (p. 33).

231 See above Chapter I.


would have to come back to the classical theory of a circular movement, for only on the basis of a circular endless movement without beginning and end, is continuity really demonstrable. But how can one imagine history as a continuous process within a linear progression, without presupposing a discontinuing terminus a quo and ad quem, i.e., a beginning and an end?²³⁴

Yet Burckhardt's continuum is, in effect, just such a linear progression without beginning and end; in fact, he even went so far as to devote a considerable segment of his scholarly activity to an apparent refutation of the cyclical understanding of history.²³⁵ Thus while Burckhardt may have presented the "soundest modern reflection on history" and generally manifested a "modern wisdom," in comparison "to all those philosophies of history from Hegel to Augustine -- which definitely know, or professed to know, the true desirability of historical events and successions,"²³⁶ it is quite clear that Löwith cannot accept his view as completely satisfactory.

But then the question arises whether Löwith will ever find a modern philosophy of history which is compatible with either the Christian or classical points of view. Thus far he has argued that the closer we come to the purely religious sources of the philosophy of history the less


²³⁵Burckhardt's day, the cyclical theory was represented by Ernst von Lasaulx who served as a kind of silent partner to the dialogue in Force and Freedom. Burckhardt, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

²³⁶Löwith, Meaning, pp. 26-27.
do we find, with the single exception of Joachim, an elaborate plan of
world history understood on a progressive basis. And "in the Gospels,"
says Löwith, "I cannot discover the slightest hint of a 'philosophy of his-
tory' but only a scheme of redemption through Christ and from profane
history. The words of Jesus contain only one reference to the world's
history; it separates strictly what we owe to Caesar from what we owe
to God." Consequently, nothing in the New Testament itself warrants
a conception of the events that constituted early Christianity as the be-
ginning of a new epoch of secular developments within a continuous pro-
cess. What really begins with the appearance of Jesus is not a new
"Christian" epoch of secular history, but the beginning of an end. "The
Christian times are Christian only in so far as they are the last time."
And since the Kingdom of God is not to be realized in a continuous pro-
cess of historical developments, the eschatological history of salvation
cannot really impart a new and progressive meaning to the history of the
world, which is already fulfilled by having reached its end.

If we understand, as we must, Christianity in the sense
of the New Testament and history in our modern sense, i.e., as
a continuous process of human action and secular developments,
"a Christian history" is nonsense. The only, though weighty,
excuse for this inconsistent compound of a Christian history is to
be found in the fact that the history of the world has continued its
course of sin and death in spite of the eschatological event, mes-
sage, and consciousness. The world after Christ has assimilated
the Christian perspective toward a goal and fulfillment and, at
the same time, has discarded the living faith in an imminent
eschaton. 238

237 Ibid., p. 191.
238 Ibid., pp. 197-198.
But if it is thus impossible to elaborate a philosophy of history on the basis of the Christian faith, without severely distorting the very foundation of that faith, it is also Löwith's contention that it is equally impossible to establish a philosophy of history on the basis of a pure classical orientation. Vico, Nietzsche, Spengler, Toynbee, and even Burckhardt, to some extent, may have felt themselves the champions and advocates of classical historical principles; but despite their conscious classicism and unconscious Christianism, their very interest in and concern for history rather than nature, and especially for history as alone the realm of meaningful happenings, was far removed from the truly cosmic approach of the ancients.

For the ancient Greeks everything moved in recurrences; there was the daily recurrence of sunrise and sunset and the annual recurrence of the seasons. According to Löwith, this conception of eternal recurrence satisfied the Greek's deepest intellectual yearnings because it was a natural as well as rational understanding of the universe; it integrated temporal changes with the recognition of periodic regularity and constancy. Moreover, Löwith argues, the immutable, as visible to them in the fixed order of the heavenly bodies, commanded a higher interest and value than the mutable as manifest in the realm of human happenings. "In this intellectual climate, dominated by the rationality of the natural cosmos, there was no room for the universal significance of a unique, incomparable historic event." As for the destiny of man in history, "the
Greeks believed that man has resourcefulness to meet every situation with magnanimity — they did not go further than that."

Even Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius who seem exclusively concerned with man and history manifest this observation, for their "historical" judgments are always ultimately determined by their experience of nature. "In the view of Herodotus, history shows a repetitive pattern, regulated by a cosmic law of compensation mainly through nemesis, which time and again restores the equilibrium of the historico-natural forces."

For Thucydides history was a record of political struggles based on the nature of man, and since he was convinced that "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 to decay.'" And, for Polybius, "history revolves in a cycle of political revolutions, wherein constitutions change, disappear, and return in a course appointed by nature." Thus, in Löwith's view, since classical antiquity believed that human nature and history imitate the nature of the cosmos, the chief concern of the ancients was "the logos of the cosmos" rather than "the Lord and the meaning of history." In effect then, "to the Greek thinkers, a philosophy of history would have been a contradiction in terms!"

But if all our contemporary theories and philosophies of history

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239 Ibid., p. 4.

240 Ibid., p. 7.

241 Ibid., p. 7.
are thus mere secularized distortions, perversions, and even, at times, strange amalgams of the fundamentally "ahistorical" classical and Christian points of view, why are we then as moderns so enamoured of history that the difficult and often obscure works of Spengler and Toynbee could become best sellers? Or, very simply, why the widespread faith in "the absolute relevance of history as such?" Löwith offers us two explanations for the origins of our modern historical consciousness or for historicism: first, as already implied in Vom Hegel, he argues that the emancipation of the modern historical consciousness from the inherent limitations imposed by both the classical and Christian traditions was the result of the abrupt rupture that occurred in European life at the end of the eighteenth century, i.e., the political revolution in France and the industrial revolution in England. Both had far reaching effects upon the entire civilized world and enhanced the modern feeling of living in an epoch where historical changes are all and everything; hence "the philosophy of history has become a more fundamental concern than ever before, because history itself has become more radical." And secondly, and even in some sense more important, is Löwith's judgment of the role of modern natural science.

Not only have the innovations of natural science accelerated the speed and expanded the range of socio-historical movements and changes, but they have made nature a highly controllable element in man's historical adventure. By means of natural science

242 Ibid., p. 193.

243 Ibid., p. 193.
we are now, as never before, "making" history, and yet we are
overwhelmed by it because history has emancipated itself from
its ancient and Christian boundaries. With Vico divine providence
has already become the natural law of history; and with Descartes
nature has already become a mathematical project, serving man's
mastery. Thus history now occupies a position which is analogous
to that occupied by mathematical physics in the seventeenth cen-
tury, and in consequence of it. To interpret socio-political his-
tory still in terms of ancient physics and cosmology or in terms
of Christian ethics and theology seems to have become an anachron-
ism for modern thinking on history. 244

Yet in spite of these "anachronisms" and the apparent success of
the natural scientist in prognosticating, and regulating natural processes,
Löwith is highly skeptical of the ability of the historian to exercise a
similar control over the historical process. The impossibility of elabor-
ating a progressive system of secular history on the Hebrew-Christian
basis of faith or the classical basis of nature, he flatly asserts, "has
its counterpart in the impossibility of establishing a meaningful plan of
history by means of reason." 245 And for Löwith, this observation is
"corroborated by common sense; for who would dare to pronounce a defini-
tive statement on the purpose and meaning of contemporary events?" Ob-
viously we can ascertain certain definite facts, but "what we cannot see
and foresee are the potentialities of these facts." 246 In other words,
one must always "distinguish . . . between a historical source and its
possible consequences." 247 For example,

244Ibid. , p. 194.
245Ibid. , p. 198.
246Ibid. , p. 198.
247Ibid. , p. 196.
There would be no American, no French, and no Russian revolutions and constitutions without the idea of progress and no idea of secular progress toward fulfillment without the original faith in a Kingdom of God, though one can hardly say that the teaching of Jesus is manifest in the manifestoes of these political movements. This discrepancy between the remote results and the meaning of the initial intentions shows that the scheme of derivation by secularization cannot be equated with a homogeneous causal determination. 248

Furthermore, the very fact "that the result of such a derivation usually distorts and perverts the original intention of the historical source," constitutes, for Löwith, a confirmation of his "law" of history, namely, "the rule of historical developments is that the ways by which ideas become effective are beyond man's intention. History always achieves more and less than what has been intended by the authors of a movement." 249

But Löwith's doubts do not merely concern the rational elucidation of man's historical intentions, they also extend to the entire historical process itself.

Such unpredictable developments, even when unfolded and established are not solid facts but realized potentialities, and as such they are liable to become undone again. Christianity could have vanished from the history of the world as classical paganism did, could have succumbed to agnosticism, or could have remained a small sect. Christ himself, as a historical man, could have yielded to the temptation of establishing the Kingdom of God historically among the Jews and on earth. In the perspective of human wisdom and ignorance, everything could have happened

248 Ibid., p. 212. Also see above Chapter I, especially the sections pertaining to Löwith's discussion of the conscious and unconscious well springs of historical action.

249 "One cannot charge the initiators of a movement with personal responsibility for its historical results. In history 'responsibility' has
differently in this vast interplay of historical decisions, efforts, failures, and circumstances.  

Grudgingly, Löwith will admit that "after it reaches a certain climax the general course of historical destinies seems to be final and therefore subject to prognostication," but he is adamant in the conviction that no historical prophet ever "foresaw the real constellations and the outcome" of a historical event. At best "what they prognosticate is only the general pattern that history will probably follow" -- as if this, in itself, was not already quite significant and praiseworthy.

However, for Löwith, a "probable" general pattern is really no pattern at all. Thus in sharp contrast to all of the "rational" as well as "theological" attempts to construct meaningful schemes of history, Löwith finds that history itself is a realm of sheer contingency whose only demonstrable "law" is not its "progressive manageability" but rather its increasing complexity and tracklessness. In short, Löwith is firmly convinced that

the problem of history is unanswerable within its own

always two sides; the responsibility of those who teach and intend something and the responsibility of those who act and respond." Hence "between the latter and the former there is no simple equation but also no independence -- both together produce historical results, which are therefore ambiguous and never definite in their potential bearing and meaning." Löwith, Meaning, pp. 212-213.

250 Ibid., pp. 198-199.

251 Ibid., p. 199.

252 Ibid., p. 200.
perspective. Historical processes as such do not bear the least evidence of a comprehensive and ultimate meaning. History as such has no outcome. There never has been and never will be an immanent solution of the problem of history, for man's historical experience is one of steady failure.  

The only wisdom that Löwith can glean from this scene of perpetual struggle, disappointment, and "steady failure" is that "history instead of being governed by reason and providence seems to be governed by chance and fate." Yet Löwith also finds that if one reduces the belief in providence to its genuine character; i.e., "directing individuals and nations not visibly and consistently but in a rather cryptic and intermittent way," and "if fate means a supreme power not at our disposal which rules our destinies, then fate is comparable to providential divinity." For "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." However, it does make a difference; and in spite of Löwith's veiled personal sympathy for the classical position, his failure to specify clearly the nature

253 Ibid., p. 191.
254 Ibid., p. 199.
255 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
256 Löwith disparages the Christian emphasis upon hope as "foolish" in comparison to the "sober and wise" classical view "that hope is an illusion which helps man to endure life but which, in the last resort, is an ignis fatuus." He also observes that the ideal of modern science, the idea of progress, our emphasis upon being creative, and our desire to "save unregenerate nations by Westernization and re-education" are certainly not the product of a classical point of view but are rather "evils
of the extra-temporal point of reference is again a definite indication that here, too, as in *Vom Hegel*, he has yet to sever the bonds tying him to his age. In fact his commitment to both fate and providence, i.e., to sheer unspecified transcendental direction as such, bears a remarkable similarity to his earlier commitment to the obscure and indefinite "being of eternity."

But here, in contrast to *Vom Hegel*, Löwith also briefly explores the possibility of another alternative to the modern fascination with history, namely, skepticism. Admittedly, at first glance, skepticism and the faith in transcendental direction appear to have little in common beyond a mutual opposition to the presumptions of a settled knowledge. But Löwith, probing deeper, finds that both the skeptic and the believer share a particular aversion to an "easy reading of history and its meaning." Neither pretends to discern the ultimate purpose of the historical process itself. "They rather seek to set men free from the world's oppressive history by suggesting an attitude, either of skepticism or of faith, which is rooted in an experience certainly nurtured by history but detached from and surpassing it." Thus they enable man "to endure it with mature resignation or with faithful expectation." 257 Yet this

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257 Löwith, *Meaning*, p. VI.
"mature resignation" of the skeptic is not to be confused with the "resolute resignation" of those who in Vom Hegel succumbed to "the spirit of their age." According to Löwith, historicist resignation is the product of frustrated hopes and desires, of a "loss of nerve" and of a false faith in the apparent omnipotence of the historical process as such. On the other hand, the "mature resignation" of the skeptic is merely "the world-ly brother of devotion, in the face of the incalculability and unpredictability of historical issues."\(^{258}\)

In conclusion then, Löwith has sought to overcome our modern historical consciousness or historicism first by tracing its remote origins to the Hebrew-Christian and classical traditions, then by showing that its present form is the product of a distortion and perversion of these two traditions, and finally by pointing out that man's "planning and guessing, his designs and decisions, far-reaching as they may be, have

\(^{258}\) Ibid., p. 199. Further observations by Löwith on the relationship between skepticism and faith can be found in the following:

only a partial function in the wasteful economy of history which engulfs them, tosses them, and swallows them."^259

But granted that Löwith's analysis is correct, does it merely suffice to delineate this situation in order to initiate its overcoming? Without doubt historicism has become the dominant attitude of our time, in effect, a "last religion" as the works of Burckhardt, Dilthey, Troeltsch, Croce, Collingwood, and numerous others clearly demonstrate. Yet Löwith's delineation with its recommendation for a return to the old faith or the adoption of skepticism constitutes no real overcoming of the present "false faith." For if Löwith is serious about a return to the old faith, in either its Christian or classical guise, he is then open to the same charge he himself had earlier leveled at Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. He emphasized that their interest and concern with the classical and early Christian points of view was not the product of a genuine extratemporal investigation of nature or contemplation of the deity, but was rather motivated by their displeasure with the dominant attitudes of their day. Thus, given Löwith's unmistakable aversion to the modern historical consciousness, a "decision" by him for either classicism or Christianity would then, in effect, merely validate the historicist contention that he has not "transcended" at all but simply reacted in a negative way to his age. Hence the only way Löwith can escape the claims of historicism is to adopt a skeptical attitude. But sheer skepticism as such is

no real answer. For, as he freely admits, "it is literally a passion for search -- which may end in upholding the question as question or in answering it by transcending . . . doubt through faith," in which case, however, he is open to the argument just discussed.

Löwith may be firmly convinced that history as a mere "partial record of human experience is too deep and, at the same time, too shallow to put into relief the humble greatness of a human soul." And he may consciously seek to defend the fundamentally ahistorical classical and Christian approaches to man and the world in the face of their modern distortions and secularizations. But his inability to accomplish a non-historicist return to either of these views, or to offer a truly visible alternative to them, testifies to his own unconscious rootedness in his age, to the fact that here, as in Vom Hegel, he is still philosophizing on the basis of the temporal "spirit of the age" rather than from a true extratemporal point of view.

Yet despite the strength of the historicist position, Löwith is not necessarily condemned to remain a mere dissident child of his age. He could have countered historicism more effectively if instead of limiting the alternatives to skepticism and faith, he would have considered a third possibility, namely a cyclical view wherein historical change and mutation is understood as a manifestation of the basic cyclical rhythms inherent

260 Ibid., p. vi.

261 Ibid., p. v.
in nature itself. Such a view is, in fact, implicit in his observation that "it is not the historical world but rather human nature which persists through all historical changes,"\(^{262}\) and that history if filled with disappointments is, at least, a "continuous repetition" of essentially the same disappointments.\(^{263}\) In other words, is not history really a "monstrous phenomenon of nature in which human will participates but without being able to master it?"\(^{264}\) And it is from such a "naturalistic" or cosmic extra-temporal stance, i.e., viewing history as a mere manifestation of an all encompassing nature, that Löwith, after Meaning, seeks to overcome our modern historical consciousness or historicism.

\(^{262}\)Ibid., p. 200.

\(^{263}\)Ibid., p. 190.

CHAPTER V

History as a Natural Happening

Löwith's view that history is a manifestation of an all-encompassing and "timeless" nature is most cogently stated in the several books and articles that appeared after Meaning in History. In these writings, that also constitute his final or developed argument against historicism, Löwith undertakes a fourfold analysis of the entire problem of historical thought: first, he investigates the relationship between history and historical consciousness; secondly, he analyzes the distinction between the natural sciences and the cultural or historical sciences; thirdly, he seeks to demonstrate the innate logical weaknesses and fallacies of the historicist position itself; and finally, he asserts that history, far from being a realm of free human activity, is, in essence, a sheer "happening" or a Geschehen as automatic, autonomous, and inevitable as the happenings in nature.

Löwith's investigation of the relationship between history and historical consciousness is closely bound up with a critical examination of the distinction usually made between the actual historical event itself and the inquiry and analysis of this event. Löwith contends that this distinction is arbitrary as well as misleading because it imparts a certain autonomy and "objectivity" to the event which the event itself does not actually possess. Just as the modern scientist, and particularly Werner Heisenberg, has come to recognize the fundamental reciprocity between the natural
phenomena and the observer, so Löwith is convinced "that what holds true for the natural sciences should also hold true for the intellectual and historical sciences where the essential relativity of the world to man is so much more importunate." Obviously history even more than nature is inseparable from man because "what simply happens somewhere and sometime is not yet, in itself, a historical happening." It only becomes historical in so far as man acknowledges it as such. But then the question arises on what basis does one determine the historical from the non-historical? Löwith certainly does not deny that events like the birth and death of Jesus are historical. Yet he also emphasizes that such events are historical only "for us" since we have imparted a special significance and meaning to them. An event "is not already in itself..." remarkable; significant and important." Otherwise, Löwith argues, the Roman historians Tacitus and Pliny would have regarded the

265 W. Heisenberg, The Physicist's Conception of Nature, tr. by A. J. Pomerans (London: Hutchinson, 1958). Heisenberg argues that in the investigation of natural happenings, the very tools and methods of observation introduce disturbances into what is to be observed so that man no longer confronts nature as an objective observer but sees himself as an actor involved in a dynamic interplay with nature.


268 Ibid., p. 220.
happenings in the province of Judea in the first century A.D. as considerably more than an insignificant Jewish quarrel hardly worthy of note at all. Thus, for Löwith, the "historical" remains essentially a subjective determination. In fact, he even goes so far as to argue that this innate subjectivity of our historical judgments and interpretations does not merely extend to an objective realm of "neutral" events but actually plays a crucial role in the very existence and genesis of events themselves.

Without an "epochal consciousness" there would be no epochal happening, and without the modern faith in progress, history itself would proceed in a different manner. If it is correct that the transcendental Kingdom of God acquired a secular revolutionary potential with Rousseau and Marx and a definite historical power with Robespierre and Lenin, then this means that our historical consciousness actually produced happenings, which would not exist without it. In other words, we are not moved directly by the dynamic of history, rather it is moved by our historical consciousness, by the way we think historically.

Even the avowedly anti-subjectivistic and openly materialistic interpretations of history are not entirely free from this fundamental subjectivism; for the ultimate base of these views, the "class struggle," is not as objective as it first appears. Class struggles themselves are, of course, absolutely dependent on the existence of classes which in turn, says Löwith, are solely dependent on the subjective consciousness of a group that it, as such, constitutes a class. Thus without the subjective awareness of itself and of its "historical mission," there would be no

\[269\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 221.\]
grounds for the existence of class antagonisms or even of classes themselves. But granted that all of our historical judgments and interpretations can be called into question on the basis of this innate subjectivity of all historical knowledge, to be consistent, Löwith would also have to question the very enterprise of history itself. For if events are not "an sich" of importance or meaningful but only acquire such meaning and importance "for us," as subjective selectors and imparters of meaning, then history itself is reducible to a mere fictitious construct on the part of the subjective observer. Yet Löwith refuses to draw this conclusion from his own premises, and while emphasizing the relativity and inescapable subjectivity of all of our "historical views and perspectives," he continues to ask: "where is the happening itself which is relevant to all of our interpretations and conceptions and which occurs whether we investigate it historically and understand its meaning or not [italics mine]?

Hence Löwith finds himself in a strange dilemma. On the one hand, he asserts history to be something completely autonomous and independent of all of our various subjective theories and approaches and yet, on the other, he makes this same history absolutely dependent upon man and his subjective theories; "for how should one experience and understand history, which is always only a history of man, by itself or 'an sich' without some-

270 Ibid., p. 221.

271 Ibid., p. 222.
how being a part of it, i.e., without human consciousness and conduct, understanding and prejudice?" 272  As already indicated, "what simply happens somewhere and sometime is not yet in itself a historical happening." Löwith has no immediate solution to this dilemma, even the careful collection and analysis of documents offers no help for it merely reiterates the distinction between the subjective impression and the objective happening. 273 In fact, the only way Löwith can legitimately maintain such an unusual position is to view history as something which, although ultimately dependent upon man, is not exhausted by the various subjective individual interpretations but rather transcends them and enjoys an independent autonomous existence on its own. In Löwith's view, "history exists before and after all of our historical-philosophical speculations." We "'over-ask' and 'over-interpret' history in terms of its possible significance, and the only important question: what it is, in itself, essentially and before all interpretation is not posed." 274  Furthermore, Löwith

272 Ibid., p. 220. See also Löwith's analysis of "Mensch und Geschichte" in Gesammelte Abhandlungen. Here Löwith describes the relationship between man and history in almost Paulinian fashion. "One has to hold on to the fact that although man has a history and stands inescapably in history, he himself is not history and does not live from it; therefore history and man never coincide." p. 163. In other words, man is in history but not of it.

273 "It documents what many individuals, at a certain time suffered, thought, planned, and concealed. But the totality of what actually happened eludes exact historical determination to the same degree as data piles up in relation to the details." Löwith, "Die Dynamik," p. 222.

274 Ibid., p. 223.
is very pessimistic about the prospects of finding an answer to this question -- even if it were posed -- as long as we continue to distinguish and to juxtapose nature and history as suggested by Dilthey, Windelband, Rickert, and Simmel. Their "discovery," that history is an autonomous realm in which alone meaning and importance reside, is, he argues, no real answer at all. In fact, "in the final analysis," it is "a concealment of what actually happens in history." Thus in order to "unconceal" this concealment and to attain to an "essential" view of history, we need a critical investigation of the historicist distinction between nature and history.

Loewith's investigation begins with an analysis of the historical roots of the distinction itself. He argues that the apparent self-evidence of our differentiation between nature and history, and accordingly between natural sciences and cultural or historical sciences, has its origin at the beginning of modern times. It goes back to the scientific revolution which began in the sixteenth century. The premodern antithesis to nature was not history but art. "In epochs when men were closer to nature than we are, as in classical antiquity, nature or physis was contrasted with art, or technē, that is, with the artificial which is not 'by nature' but is wrought by man, its artificer." Thus our distinction between nature


\[276\] Originally physis was understood as "the ground of all being."

\[277\] K. Löwith, "Nature, History and Existentialism," *Social
and history is only a relatively recent development, and the individual
who clearly stated it for the first time, according to Löwith, was Des-
cartes.

Descartes divided the whole realm of reality into two kinds
of being; the res cogitans and the res extensa. From the principle
of being-thinking he constructed nature as the object of mathemat-
ical physics. There is true and certain knowledge about nature;
about history nothing can be known truly and with certainty. What
we seem to know about history rests on mere tradition, opinion,
and custom.\textsuperscript{273}

Vico, about a hundred years later, was the first who ventured to construct
a specific counter argument to Descartes. In his "New Science"

he tried to demonstrate that true and certain knowledge is
possible only of things which we have made ourselves -- that is,
of the world of history, the mondo civile, where the true (verum)
and the made (factum) controvert. The world of nature is inacces-
sible to man because he did not make it. It is intelligible to God
alone as its creator.\textsuperscript{279}

However as far as the fundamental division itself is concerned, between

a natural world and a man-made or historical world, Vico, by accepting
it, remained within the framework established by Descartes in spite of

\textsuperscript{273}Ibid., p. 79. Löwith also emphasizes that the criterion of the
Cartesian distinction does not rest primarily upon an essential difference
between the two fields but "in the secondary distinction as to what can be
known about nature and history scientifically. The priority of the problem
of knowledge and method over the question of subject matter is again
typically modern." p. 79.

\textsuperscript{279}Ibid., p. 80.
his opposition. 280

The only modern thinker who seriously attempted to overcome this bifurcation between nature and history, in Löwith's opinion, was Hegel. Hegel, he argues, views nature as much more than a mere realm of physical mass and force; instead he sees it as pervaded by spirit. In fact, his philosophy of history "is but the reverse of his philosophy of nature." 281 Hegel does not postulate a particular reason in world history juxtaposed to a non-rational nature but rather a universal reason which governs both the natural universe as well as the historical world. In nature, this reason is discernable in the regular progression of the seasons and in the lawful motion of the celestial bodies; in history it is discernable in the regular progression of the world spirit toward the realization of ever greater freedom. The only difference is that in nature, in contrast to history, "reason operates without consciousness."

Thus "for Hegel the historical world is a sort of 'second nature' and a 'second world' within the context of the one universe which is fundamentally

280 Although Löwith holds Descartes and Vico primarily responsible for our contemporary distinction between nature and history, he also acknowledges that the ultimate grounds for this distinction lie in the late classical, i.e., Stoic and Epicurean flight from the world and especially in the Christian reduction of the all-encompassing classical cosmos to a mere transitory and contingent creation of a transcendent creator God. "Der Weltbegriff der neuzitalen Philosophie" in Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophische-Historische Klasse. (Heidelberg: Karl Winter, 1960), p. 13; "Menschliche Natur und Sprache," Neue Rundschau, LXVI (1955), pp. 444-445; and "Welt und Menschenwelt" in Gesammelte Abhandlungen, pp. 235-237.

determined by reason, or in Christian terms . . . of the one God, who is spirit."\textsuperscript{282} And "in consequence of this fundamental conception of the one world of spirit, Hegel's explanations of the working of the 'cunning of reason' refer equally to quite different phenomena; to elementary natural processes, to the building of a house, to the world of history."\textsuperscript{283}

Nonetheless, Hegel's conception of spirit as encompassing both nature and history failed to impress subsequent thinkers; consequently, we are still thinking in terms of the dichotomy established by Descartes and Vico. In fact, the very structure of the works of Croce, Collingwood, and most of our contemporary historicists is absolutely dependent upon the clear cut distinction between nature and history.

Yet in spite of the general acceptance and popularity of this point of view, Löwith proceeds to question it in the course of an analysis of the thought of Gottl-Ottlilienfeld, a representative of the neo-Kantian South-West German school (Windelband, Rickert, Simmel, et al.). Gottl's

\textsuperscript{282}Ibid., p. 81.

\textsuperscript{283}For example, "chemical and physio-mechanical processes are made serviceable to higher biological ends through the cunning of reason. The flame absorbs the air but it is, at the same time, fed by wood which grows in the trees, which are fed by the oxygen of the air." Thus "the burning wood, while absorbing oxygen from the air, fights against its own source. A similar dialectic can be seen in the building of a house. The natural elements -- fire to melt iron, air to stimulate fire, water to operate the mill which cuts the lumber -- all help to build the house." And yet the purpose of the house is to protect us against fire, water, and air. "Through a 'cunning of reason' the elements are used against themselves." Ibid., p. 82.
observations on the relationship between nature and history are paraphrased by Lowith as follows: neither biology nor geology, though both have a historical dimension, disclose genuine historical happenings.

"Genuine history is an interpretation which elicits the significance of human happenings." For "history is a significant and explicable human happening. It is caused by men acting reasonably and only for them is it perceptible. The 'Logos' belongs to the substance of history and its only limits are the limits imposed by the 'logic' of the happening itself."²⁸⁴

Löwith raises two objections to these views. First, granted that man is capable of acting reasonably but "therefore not all reasonable action is already per se historical. Rational action is only a sufficient but not a necessary condition for historical happenings." Madmen are also quite capable of initiating actions which can become historical. Secondly, the "logos" instead of belonging to "the substance of history" appears to have a much greater affinity for nature.

If a logos appears somewhere distinctly, then certainly not in history but clearly in everything determined by nature, be it the rotation of the stars or the circulation of the blood, or all normal growth and decay. Nature's happenings arrange themselves intrinsically into a cosmos; those of history remain more or less chaotic and their logos is hardly discernable at all.²⁸⁵

Hence Löwith's real objection to Gottl, and indirectly to all of the


²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 228.
contemporary representatives of the nature-history dichotomy, rests on
the conviction that the specific conception of nature, upon which the original
distinction itself is based, is incorrect. Gottl, he says, "assumes a con-
ception of nature which is no longer oriented on the physis as such, but
rather on its mathematical-physical construction -- to which the cultural,
i. e., the historical sciences in turn orient themselves antagonistically." 286

But Löwith then goes on to raise the very interesting question, what
if the genuine substance of nature, its "naturalness," were far removed
from the theories of modern natural science? 287 Our view of nature has
certainly changed since the advent of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton but
has nature itself really changed? What guarantee do we have that modern
mathematical physics understands the physis more appropriately than the
physics of the ancient scientists? "There exists a modern natural science
but no modern nature, and one cannot dogmatically restrict the quest for
the nature of all things to one particular and historically conditioned point
of view." 288 Even the "successes" of modern natural science have brought
us no closer to an essential understanding of nature. It has only made
nature far "more serviceable to man's historical purposes and projects"
than ever before. Yet the ultimate result of this harnessing of nature to
history is that

287 Ibid., p. 229.
it made nature relative to us, with the effect that actually nothing natural was left over. In our scientifically organized world, naturalness is no longer the standard of nature. What still remains of natural things seems to be a mere left-over of that which has not yet been thoroughly subjected by man. This historical appropriation of the natural world is at the same time an estrangement from it. The earth has not become more familiar to us since we have become capable of covering immense distances in a short time. The more we plan globally and exploit the earth technically the further nature recedes, in spite of all our technical seizure of it.289

Against this wholesale estrangement from nature and concomitant "historicization of reality,"290 Löwith suggests that "in the end, the world itself is probably still today as Heracleitus and Nietzsche described it: a cosmic order made neither by God nor man 'for all and everyone the same,' an eternally vital logos-fire flaming up and dying down according to an inherent measure" -- the Harmonia of Heracleitus.291 However he is also well aware that this suggestion is bound to remain unfeasible as long as we continue to allow our view of nature to be determined by modern natural science and by the "near-sighted bias of historicism," which "obstructs our free and unimpeded view of the regular movements of the heavens and reduces the Greek discovery of the cosmos to an apparently irrecoverable


290 This complete and total historicization of reality is also manifest in the fact that "Christian dogmatics was transformed by the Hegelian F. Ch. Bauer into the history of dogmatics, economics by Marx into a materialistic philosophy of history, philosophy itself by J. E. Erdmann into the history of philosophy, and biology by Darwin into the history of evolution." Löwith, "Die Dynamik," pp. 229-230.

Weltanschauung. And he now proceeds to launch a two pronged attack against this "near sighted bias." First he attempts to demonstrate the inherent "logical" limitations and inconsistencies of the historicist understanding of reality. Secondly, he argues that history instead of enlisting nature in its service is itself actually a mere manifestation of an all-encompassing classical physis. And once understood as such, it reveals itself to be the direct opposite of a realm of free human activity; rather it is a sheer impersonal "happening" or Geschehen akin to the regular impersonal happenings in nature.

Löwith's first "logical" argument against historicism is based on the fact that, as a consciously relativistic point of view, it entails a

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292 Löwith's review of Gerhardt Krüger's Grundfragen der Philosophie and Freiheit und Weltverwaltung in Philosophische Rundschau, VII (1959), p. 8. Also, remarkably enough, even modern natural science has recently adopted a point of view which is very close to the ancient cyclical notion of Heraclitus. Astronomers now argue that the universe was once a single extremely hot, dense "primeval mass" that exploded and sent matter rushing out into space. The various receding galaxies which we can still discern in the form of a "red shift" in the galaxy spectrum are simply the debris of this explosion. However these galaxies are not regarded as rushing outward forever. Mutual gravitational attraction will eventually cause them to slow down, stop, and fall back together again like a handful of pebbles thrown up into the air. But as this new mass condenses, pressures and temperatures rise; and in time it too will explode again and repeat the life cycle of its predecessor. Thus the universe seems to repeat the same basic pattern over and over again. As Dr. Allen Sandage of the Mt. Palomar observatory puts it, "the clues indicate that our universe is a closed system originating in a 'big bang,' that the expanding universe is slowing down, and that it may pulsate perhaps once every 30 billion years." Quoted by C. P. Gilmore in his article "The Birth and Life of the Universe," The New York Times Magazine, June 12, 1966, p. 88.
blanket and unjustified denial of the very existence of a realm of unchanging and absolute truth.

* * *

A priori historicism denies the existence of universal and eternal truths except perhaps in the realm of mathematics. It presupposes that history is a progressive process of enrichment perpetually surpassing its previous stages of development. Thus the attempt to resurrect a former doctrine is regarded as an ahistorical and irrational undertaking.

And Löwith correctly points out that "thereby, historicism overlooks the fact that the relationship of a philosophy to its age is by no means unequivocal." But his subsequent illustration of this inadequacy is somewhat unusual. For example, he argues that the philosopher, who has attained a critical distance to his age, often "cleverly adapts his publications to the prejudices of his age in order to be heard;" he understands the art of conveying his superior and "untimely knowledge" to his ignorant contemporaries. But if this is the case, why then does Löwith accuse such thinkers as Nietzsche and Spengler of unconsciously reflecting the spirit of their ages? Could they not claim that they too have merely clothed their actual thoughts and ideas in a contemporary garb?

Seen from this point of view, Nietzsche's attempt to reassert the

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293 Löwith, "Die Dynamik," p. 236. For Löwith, "if truth exists and if it makes sense to seek for it, then there is no consecutive Greek, Christian, and modern truth, but only one and the same truth. And this circumstance . . . includes the possibility that previous thinkers may have gained insights which were true and remain true even if, at times, they are . . . covered up and forgotten." "Menschliche Natur und Sprache," p. 446.

294 Löwith, "Die Dynamik," p. 236.

295 Ibid., p. 236.
untimely Greek teaching of eternal recurrence with a Bismarkian "Will to Power," and Spengler's counsel to "will" and actively "decide" for the coming of an inevitable stage in a predetermined cycle could actually be the final outcome of a careful and conscious attempt to gain acceptance of otherwise unacceptable notions among highly critical and negatively oriented contemporaries. Hence to argue that the philosopher often "cleverly adapts his publications to the prejudices of his age" is clearly no refutation of the historicist claim of the unequivocalness of an age and its philosophy. It is almost impossible to determine with certainty if a man is truly untimely and merely "adapting," or if he is actually only manifesting an unconscious historicist reaction against his age in favor of some previous point of view.

Historicism also cannot be overcome by arguing that its emphasis upon the omnipotence of the historical process and its reduction of "all distinctions to the one level of their 'being equally historical' fails to recognize the possibility that a certain historical situation or age could have been more favorable for the discovery of truth than any other."296 For thereby, in spite of his concern with the qualitative distinctions between different historical epochs, Löwith is, in effect, still making truth dependent upon history, an insight which is basic to the historicist position as such. A genuine extra-temporal search for truth, as manifest, for example, in the activities and career of a Goethe, is not dependent

296 Ibid., p. 236.
upon any particular historical situation or age, it can occur at any time
and under any and all circumstances.\textsuperscript{297}

However in contrast to the historian contention that it alone pos-
sesses the proper view of human thought and action, Löwith correctly
points out that history, far from demonstrating the "truth" of historicism
or any particular theory for that matter, merely demonstrates "that in
the course of time certain views are abandoned in favor of others."\textsuperscript{298}
Thus "historically, the truth or falsehood of any view is neither demo-
strable nor refutable [italics mine]."\textsuperscript{299} But the fact that one cannot
establish the absolute validity of a particular point of view nor obtain a
knowledge of a permanent realm of truth from a study of the historical
process does not necessarily imply that one can obtain no knowledge at
all from history. For example, Löwith admits that the history of West-
ern philosophy is much more than a mere "perpetual succession of world
views;" rather it displays "the remarkable continuity with which occidental
thought always ponders the same themes and problems from Aristotle to
Hegel and from Parmenides to Heidegger."\textsuperscript{300} Yet, at the same time,

\textsuperscript{297}Löwith's emphasis upon a particular historical situation as
constituting an especially favorable ground for the discovery of truth
appears to be motivated by his desire to reestablish the correctness of
the classical understanding of nature. Also see below.

\textsuperscript{298}Löwith, "Die Dynamik," p. 239.

\textsuperscript{299}Ibid., p. 237.

\textsuperscript{300}Ibid., pp. 237-238.
he emphasizes that in order to discern this "remarkable continuity" one has to be interested in the history of philosophy "philosophically" and not only historically." In other words, unless one possesses a knowledge of the "essential content" of the subject under investigation, "one cannot discern the historical modifications of this content."\(^{301}\)

But granted that history viewed "philosophically" can serve as a legitimate source of knowledge, the big question still remains how one attains to this special knowledge in the first place? Just how does one come to know what "the essential content" of religion, or politics, or economics is? Is it the result of an empirical observation, a divine revelation, a Platonic rational vision? Does one intuit essences as Husserl recommended via a process of eidetic reduction, i.e., phenomenological "bracketing"? Or does a simple common sense insight suffice, as Löwith seems to imply when he observes in Vom Hegel that "the simple fact that man must live in the midst of nature, his environment, and world history determines the way philosophy must approach the events of the world."\(^{302}\)

In any case, since Löwith fails to specify how one attains to a knowledge of the "essential content" of things, he ironically -- despite his previous careful circumscription of the possibilities of obtaining knowledge and truth from history -- leaves the possibility open that one might just come to know the essence of a thing, via history, i.e., via a study of its growth

\(^{301}\) Ibid., p. 238.

\(^{302}\) Löwith, translation of Vom Hegel, p. 214.
and development. Moreover, granted that one has attained to a knowledge of the essence of a thing, by whatever means (intuitive, empirical, rational, etc.), and is thus in a position to view its history "philosophically," this, in itself, constitutes no guarantee that one will therefore arrive at a "proper" view.

As indicated, Löwith "philosophically" surveying the history of Western philosophy has found it to manifest "a remarkable continuity;" and Jacob Burckhardt, admired by Löwith as one of the few nineteenth century historians who "approached history philosophically and not merely historically," also discerned "the constant and repetitious in all change."\(^{303}\)

But Georg Friedrich Hegel, another major advocate of the "philosophical" approach to history,\(^{304}\) came to a somewhat different conclusion. For Hegel, history did not manifest a basic continuity and repetition; instead it consisted of a progressive unfolding of an all-encompassing metaphysical principle. Thus the very fact that such thinkers as Burckhardt and Hegel, while clearly sharing "philosophical" rather than "historical" approaches to the phenomenon of history, could come to diametrically opposite conclusions indicates that this "philosophical" approach is basically as relative as the historicist approach, at least it comes no closer to discovering the truth or inner essence of history itself.

\(^{303}\) Löwith, "Die Dynamik," p. 238.

\(^{304}\) In fact "Hegel says that the only thought which philosophy brings to the contemplation of history 'is the simple concept of reason' as the 'sovereign of the world.'" Quoted in Meaning, p. 54.
One might object that this juxtaposition of Burckhardt and Hegel is unwarranted since both obviously do not share a common "philosophical" approach to history. But this apparent carelessness in selecting "philosophical" approaches to history is precisely the point. For nowhere does Löwith bother to specify just what he means by the term "philosophical," outside of a vague knowledge of "essential content," and surely both Burckhardt and Hegel could claim such a knowledge. Accordingly, we are here confronted with a situation very similar to that in the previous chapters where Löwith failed to specify the nature of the "being of eternity" or to differentiate clearly between the Christian and classical extra-temporal frames of reference. In other words, Löwith is still more concerned with the negative counterpoise to historicism -- and hence still uncynosciously historicist -- than with a positive statement of a definite non-historicist point of view.

Yet if the foregoing arguments have shown themselves open to criticism, Löwith's final argument is remarkably clear and concise and almost impenetrable to critical attack. If, as historicism argues, the intellectual manifestations of every age are nothing but mere transitory expressions of the dominant sentiments and aspirations of that age itself, then historicism falls victim to its own principle.

It cannot escape the consequence that it, too, is only historically valid for a certain historical time and situation. It is relative to the modern thinking of modern man. The historicist thesis that all thought, and not only contemporary thought, is historically determined contradicts its own principles of historical
In short, historicism subverts itself when it claims its relativism as an absolute truth.

But even acknowledging this inherent logical weakness of the historicist position, Löwith still emphasizes that the only way one can overcome it permanently, without any chance of its revival, is, simply and radically, to divorce the search for truth and knowledge from any and all ties to the historical process itself. Instead, one must seek to understand man supra-historically or extra-temporally as either a special creation of a divine transcendent force or as a completely natural product of an immutable and all-encompassing nature; and it is to this latter alternative that he now finally commits himself. Although his decision for this view has already been foreshadowed in his preference for the ancient Greek understanding of nature, he now explains it as a matter of philosophical principle. "Since the advent of Christianity, philosophical thought cannot avoid differentiating itself from the faith, as well as evaluating itself according to its claims. But it also cannot assimilate the faith in revelation without abandoning itself. Therefore, it must orient itself on the natural world." 306

For Löwith, man is "no self made homunculus" or sheer "historical


existence," rather than an "offspring of nature" ein Geschöpf der Natur;³⁰⁷ and since Löwith's nature is that of the ancient Greeks, man is also an integral part of the all-encompassing physis, which "controls the circular movement of the stars . . . as well as the cycle of man."³⁰⁸ Moreover in reply to the charge that this classical view of man and nature is hopelessly anachronistic in the light of modern man's experience, Löwith calmly observes,

just as there is no "modern" nature but certainly a modern natural science, so there is no modern human nature and therefore no "modern man" but certainly time bound and antiquated anthropologies. The modern clairvoyance for the diversity of historical existence and modes of thinking has, as its antipode, a blindness in the face of the unchanging basic traits of the eternally human.³⁰⁹

If the men of today were totally different from the men of a few centuries or of a few thousand years ago, we could not understand or participate in the accomplishments of former times not to mention foreign cultures.

"Yet even if we assume that man can change, then this change must perforce be superficial rather than essential for only that which endures can experience change." When we see an old acquaintance after a prolonged separation and find him completely "changed," we only gain this impression

³⁰⁷Ibid., p. 239.


"because we recognize in the changed person the one we knew long ago." 310

Furthermore, given this eternal nature of man, "we can then gather essential information for the understanding of our own age and of history in general from a Greek or Roman historian like Thucydides or Tacitus;" for these classical historians, "lacking all historical consciousness of their own historical limitations, possessed a rare knowledge of the enduring essence of man and of political circumstances." 311 In fact, the course of history itself, in Löwith's view, is essentially as the Greeks saw it, a vast and eternal cyclical repetition. "It is a continuous repetition of costly achievements which end in ordinary failures -- from Hannibal to Napoleon and the contemporary leaders." Thus "what has happened has always been the same [italics mine]." 312

However, despite this strong personal attraction to the classical understanding of man, nature, and history, Löwith cannot simply postulate its correctness. In order to validate the thesis that man and history must be understood supra-historically, "within the confines of an all-


311 Ibid., p. 162.

312 Löwith, Meaning, p. 190, and "Die Dynamik," p. 244. Löwith's classical view of history is also manifest in his conviction "that history is not primarily cultural and intellectual history or the history of problems and ideas but rather political history." In the modern discussion of the problem of history, "the 'historical world' [Dilthey] and the 'historical existence' [Heidegger] have gradually displaced the natural, i.e., the classical preference for politics." "Mensch und Geschichte," pp. 152-153.
encompassing classical physis," he must first clarify the relationship between the apparently free human "action" or Handlung which we customarily discern as the chief characteristic of history and the unfree and impersonal "happening" or Geschehen, which we discern as the chief characteristic of nature. Granted that man as the chief actor of history is also a product of nature, then history undoubtedly will entail a certain amount of unconscious happening along with conscious action. But, in Löwith's view, the essential character of history itself is that

it is not primarily human action but rather a happening which although it has a vital relation to human action does not completely merge with it. Happening and action are not divorced but they are different. What happens in history is always more and less than what is desired and intended by the man who acts. An active decision for war soon transforms itself into a war-happening which henceforth, by itself, instigates ever new decisions and actions and thus, as a happening, exceeds all of our individual intentions and decisions. We "make" history and yet we are overwhelmed by it.  

Löwith also goes on to point out that this dialectic between acting freely and being acted upon or the "dynamic" of history, as he prefers to call it, has been recognized throughout the course of Western civilization. The ancients referred to it as chance or fate, Tyche or Ananke; the Christians refer to it as Providence; Hegel designated it as the "cunning of reason;" and Marx reinterpreted Hegel's "cunning of reason" in terms of the "class struggle." But no matter how it is designated, the very fact

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that history itself is the product of such a dialectic and "the apparent inner necessity with which it moves and happens makes it comparable to a natural happening." 315

Löwith's emphasis on history as a natural happening and on the dialectic between conscious action and the unconscious results of this action is also strongly reminiscent of his understanding of the Tolstoyan and Goethean views of history, which he had earlier suggested as an alternative to the "historicity" of Heidegger and the "historicism" of Hegel.

It is, in fact, Löwith's way of expressing the relationship between freedom and necessity in history and thus, in some sense, the perfect answer to his quest for a point of view which takes cognizance of man's "ontological dual nature." It clearly acknowledges man's unique, i.e., "historical" capacity for action with his fellow men, his Mitwelt; yet, at the same time, it integrates this apparently "free" activity into the more fundamental and autonomous nature, or Umwelt, of which he is a mere part. 316


316 See above chapters I and III.
But if history is essentially a natural happening, it is also, according to Löwith, basically impenetrable to man. One may discern a certain regularity in the general course of events in terms of a cyclical or spiral repetition but, in the end,

no matter what the final explanatory principle may be, the actual situation described by the historians ultimately resolves itself to an undiscoverable happening which simply "happens" and which is beyond all interpretation . . . because the dynamic of the happening itself is simply what it is. 317

Thus in sharp contrast to the modern faith in the increasing manageability of historical happenings, whereby "the inexplicable remainder of the happening only appears as a meaningless circumstance." Löwith states that it is "precisely this inexplicable remainder" which entails the true "riddle of history." 318

Yet why should history entail such a "riddle" at all if, for Löwith, man is "an offspring of nature," and if this nature is not the nature of the modern physical scientist but rather the all-encompassing physis and cosmos of the ancients? For the ancient Greeks neither man nor nature constituted a particular riddle. Nature, conceived as a cosmos and governed by an inherent rationality or logos, was readily intelligible to man; and man himself, conceived as an integral part of nature, was only distinguished from the other animate beings by his capacity for thought and speech (zoon logon eikon) and for organized communal existence (zoon

318 Ibid., pp. 252-253.
But these capacities, while they also enabled him to dominate
the other forms of life, did not make him or his actions, i.e., history,
any less intelligible than the cosmos itself. 319

However, for Löwith, the case is somewhat different. He is just
too firmly rooted in his own age to accomplish a genuine supra-historical
return to a truly classical view of man, nature, and history. He may
seek to forestall historicist criticism by consciously disavowing any in-
tention "of making pristine again [repristinieren] a past stage in the
history of philosophy." And he may be firmly convinced "that the Greeks
made a discovery which -- like every genuine discovery -- always re-
ains true even though it is buried and forgotten or discredited."320

Nevertheless, Löwith's own understanding of the relationship between man
and nature is by no means as unequivocal as it was for the Greeks. The
Greeks truly lived in one world governed by an all-encompassing physis
which, as the ground of all being, determined not only man and nature
but even the nature of the gods, the "naturae deorum."321 Löwith's world
in contrast, while ostensibly such a fundamental unity, is, in effect, two
worlds; and, his protestations notwithstanding, the Cartesian and Vicoan
distinction has maintained itself in his thought.

319 As Löwith, paraphrasing Polybius, has himself pointed out
"it is the logos of the one natural world which moves both the stars in the
sky and the man in history." Ibid., p. 246.

320 Löwith, "Welt und Menschenwelt," p. 244.

321 Löwith, "Dynamik," p. 239.
For example, Löwith finds the "riddle of history" to reside in the riddle which is man, namely, "that nature could create a being capable of cultivating nature itself and of producing a second world within the first."\(^{322}\) In addition, he is convinced that this "second" or historical world, "the mundus hominum, does not move with the same necessity as the natural world, the mundus rerum, which lacks human caprice and freedom. Historical revolutions do not proceed like cosmic revolutions, i.e., in regular cycles."\(^{323}\) Thus while Löwith may claim that a historical happening is "comparable to a natural happening," it is certainly not a happening on the same plane or the same level as the regular predictable happenings in nature. However for the Greeks, genuinely integrated with nature, history truly was such a predictable "natural happening." Once the necessary data had been collected, Thucydides and Polybius experienced little if any difficulty in prognosticating the general course of historical action and especially not of revolutions.\(^ {324}\) For Löwith, on the

\(^{322}\) Ibid., p. 253.


\(^{324}\) As Polybius observes, "In my opinion, the future is clear... it is evident that the violent influx of prosperity will produce a more extravagant standard of living and an excessively keen competition between individuals for office and other objects of ambition." Soon "the masses become so intensely exasperated and so completely guided by passion that they repudiate all subordination to or even equality with the upper classes and identify the interests of the community with their own." When this point is reached "the commonwealth acquires the flattering appellations of Liberty and Democracy while it is subjected to the appalling reality of the 'despotism of the crowd.'" Quoted in Greek Historical Thought, ed. by A. J. Toynbee (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 110. Also
other hand, the happening which is history is foredoomed to impenetra-
ability, since he is firmly convinced that "nature is what it is by itself
and without us. It is always true and correct while history is subject to
bargaining and interpretation." 325 In other words, the "supra-human
cosmic world of heaven and earth, which is totally self-sufficient and
autonomous, infinitely surpasses that world which stands and falls with
man. The cosmic world and the human world are not equal to one another.

Löwith even finds that although man owes his very existence to na-
ture, he is not really "natural" in the same sense as the other animate
creatures are natural. In fact of all the offspring of nature, he is the
most "unnatural." His uniqueness "extends to his embryonal development;
it manifests itself in the way he satisfies his most primitive natural needs;
and it proves itself in the specifically human possibility of suicide. Man
alone, of all living creatures, can cultivate or pervert and negate his own
nature." Hence "we are nature and we are history and therefore we can
understand the one as well as the other; but, primordially, man, nature,
and history are not equitable, for before we cultivate nature, act histori-
cally, and include nature into our world, we are already, by nature, beings

Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, tr. by Rex Warner (Baltimore: Pen-


326 Löwith, "Welt und Menschenwelt," p. 228; also "Mensch und
Geschichte," pp. 152, 163, 177.
capable of history. In sum then, man's inherent "historicalness" always takes precedence over his primeval "naturalness."

Thus in spite of Löwith's genuine desire to reintegrate man into a classically understood physis and cosmos, the distinguishing feature of human existence itself, as it emerges in his writings, is not really man's basic unity with nature. Rather it is his capacity to separate himself from nature and to make it subservient to a unique and incomparable "second world" of history. This precedence of history over nature is also indirectly revealed in Löwith's very real fear that, through modern technology, man may some day attain to a complete mastery of the physical cosmos and thereby radically transform both himself and the world into something hitherto unknown. "Suppose man would be able to control the entire natural world as he now controls his immediate environment and thus bring to perfection Bacon's equation of knowledge and power, then no longer would man be man and the world no longer world."

Such an eventuality would have been inconceivable for a Greek not simply because of his ignorance of the achievements of modern science and technology, but primarily because his basic view of change as such was determined by a genuine supra-historical insight into the fixed and regular motions of the natural cosmos. As Polybius observed "'The disintegration and transformation to which everything in the Universe is exposed may

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really be taken for granted as a self-evident corollary to the Uniformity of Nature," 329 i.e., to the eternal recurrence of all things. Hence any serious consideration of a forthcoming radical change in the very being and essence of man and the world, as Löwith here seems to imply, is far from the classical supra-historical view he is striving for.

Yet the supreme example of Löwith's unconsciously modern -- at least most unclassical -- view of man and nature is the fact that he cannot conceive of man as an essential existence or a necessary being within the one cosmos of nature but only as an accidental existence or contingent being. Löwith argues that if one discounts the theological view of the origins of man, "then, according to our human judgment, nature was not obliged to bring man into being; and when man is no longer, nature will continue to exist without finding this termination of all history, historically noteworthy." 330 No Greek could question the very fact of man's existence as Löwith is questioning it here. For the Greeks, and Aristotle in

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particular, as Löwith has himself pointed out, whatever is already has its reason for being and one does not question its sheer existence as such. "The inquiry into what something is (its essence) also decides if it is (its existence). Essence and existence are both manifest to 'the same kind of thinking.'" Hence, Aristotle was "not concerned with the sheer factuality of existence in general or with the contingency of human existence in particular but with essential existence, because whatness and thatness are inseparable and neither precedes the other." For Aristotle, "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." 333

Thus Löwith's attempt to overcome the contemporary historicist orientation must be considered incomplete. Instead of manifesting a viable neo-classical position, Löwith emerges as a strange melange of the historicist, the existentialist, and the classical points of view. 334 His historicism is revealed in his persistent failure to overcome the modern

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332 Ibid., p. 359.

333 Ibid., p. 360.

334 See also A. Levison's comments on the historicist-existentialist dimension of Löwith's thought in his Introduction to Löwith's Nature, History, and Existentialism and Other Essays in the Philosophy of History, pp. xv-xl.
dichotomy between nature and history and to reintegrate man into a
classically understood physis and cosmos. The net result of his various
analyses is always the precedence of man's "historicalness" over his
"naturalness," i.e., the uniqueness and incomparability even the "riddle"
of the "second" world of history when juxtaposed to the regularity
and immutability of the "first" world of nature. His existentialism is
clearly manifest in his conception of man as a sheer chance existence,
ein natürlichcher Zufall instead of an Aristotelian essential existence, a
zoon logon echon and zoon politikon. And yet his neo-classicism and open
anti-historicism -- in spite of his difficulties in achieving a genuine union
between man and nature -- is also clearly manifest in his conception of
the general course and character of history itself. It is seen to be an
autonomous independent happening akin to the regular cyclical happenings
in nature rather than a realm of free human activity subject to progressive
technological dominance and manageability.

In effect then, Löwith is a paradox and an innate contradiction,
and as such he is also, ironically, open to the same charge of attempting
to reconcile irreconcilables which he had earlier leveled at such thinkers
as Nietzsche, Spengler, and Toynbee. In fact, his observation that Niet-
zsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence "breaks asunder because the will
to eternalize the chance existence of the modern ego does not fit into the
assertion of the eternal cycle of the natural world"\textsuperscript{335} is as applicable

\textsuperscript{335} K. Löwith, \textit{Meaning in History}, p. 222.
to Löwith himself as to Nietzsche. But granted that these inconsistencies raise certain doubts as to the validity of Löwith's neo-classicism from a strictly rational point of view, do they thereby also constitute sufficient grounds for rejecting his entire struggle against historicism from a purely "humanist" point of view? And with a summary analysis of this particular problem, we should conclude our survey of Karl Löwith's thoughts and observations on history.
CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

Thus far we have seen that Löwith's critical view of modern history, and of the nineteenth century in particular, is almost wholly determined by his desire to overcome the historicist orientation. We have also traced Löwith's own intellectual development from his phenomenologist-humanist rejection of Heidegger to a Diltheyan historicist relativism; then to a negative anti-historicism manifest in his resolute commitment to an unspecified "being of eternity;" and finally to his unsatisfactory attempt to reestablish the validity of the supra-historical classical view of man, nature, and history. But when juxtaposed to the alternatives of analytical philosophy and existential ontology, the two leading non-metaphysical opponents of historicism in our day, Löwith's anti-historicism, despite its weaknesses, emerges as the least extreme and more humanist point of view.

Both analytical philosophy and existential ontology share a common

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336 Marxism, which in its early days held the prospect of a definite culmination within history and thus served as a positive alternative to historicism, has long since capitulated to the all sovereign historical process. As E. Kahler has observed, "Communism in its present state, without giving up the principle of revolution in appropriate situations, appears increasingly convinced by the experiences after its victories that a final state of felicity will forever be unattainable. This is manifest in the course of Soviet policy, stronger still in the philosophy of Mao Tse-tung." E. Kahler, op. cit., pp. 173-174.
distaste for historicism. Existential ontology, as indicated above, seeks to overcome it by discarding the entire post-Socratic development of metaphysics, and by absolutizing its notion of the fundamental temporality of human existence into an all pervasive and total "historicity" of all things. Moreover, since Sein und Zeit, Heidegger has developed his conception of historicity to include not only man and the world but also Being itself. Werner Marx describes Heidegger's current understanding of the relationship between man and Being as follows: "As Heidegger now formulates it, 'Being commands and directs the thinker,' or 'Being claims the thinking of the thinker so that it thereby may un conceal itself in its truth." In other words Heidegger has developed an entirely new understanding of the "essence" or Wesen of Being and of man. Traditionally essence, whether in its scholastic significance of "definition" or as the Platonic "idea" or Aristotelian "eidos," is only the static "what" of a particular phenomenon. But Heidegger's new notion of Wesen comprises not only the unchanging "what" of a particular phenomenon but also its mutable and variable "that," traditionally called its existence. Hence Heidegger's Wesen is particularly suited for the articulation of a dynamic Being which "un conceals" itself. "Being west in and through the 'particular beings,' and thereby it constitutes their 'what' and 'that' at the same

337Introduction and Chapter I.

time. The Essence of Being is thus articulated as an event or occurrence. \(^{339}\)

Furthermore, for Heidegger, *Wesen* has the character of an appeal, or a claim on man. "A man who recognizes his Essence of *Dasein* realizes that he is by nature exposed to the 'ways that Being west,' and is therefore 'responsible' -- must respond to this claim." He must "listen to the 'ways that Being west'" and "bring to conception what Being bestows on man as fate." The thinker is not conceived as "one who arbitrarily or because of his subjective views can bring about changes of *Wesen, Essences,*" but only as one who "speaks out what is fated." Thus "it is wrong to say that Heidegger is a historicist or relativist. Rather it should be recognized that the problem whether the Essence of Being is immutable or mutable is here developed beyond the dimensions of the current controversy."\(^{340}\)

Analytical philosophy is not quite as radical in its departure from the entire metaphysical tradition, but it too definitely discounts the role of metaphysics preferring to philosophize on the basis of the pattern established by the natural sciences. Most analytical philosophers agree that "philosophy is nothing but the logic of science,"\(^{341}\) and their ultimate

\(^{339}\)Ibid., p. 472.

\(^{340}\)Ibid., pp. 472-473.

goal, through the method of empirical and linguistic analysis, is to reduce the world to a point where the problems that remain after analysis "are better handled by scientists."\(^342\)

Applying their method to the realm of history, they find that it soon reveals itself to be an empty and meaningless endeavor. As one of their leading spokesmen, Karl R. Popper, puts it, most people use the term "world history" as designating "a more or less definite series of facts. And these facts constitute, they believe, the history of mankind." But obviously the realm of facts is infinitely rich and there must be selection. "What people have in mind when they speak of the history of mankind is rather the history of the Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman empires, and so on, down to our own day." In other words, "they speak about the history of mankind but what they have learned about in school is the history of political power." Yet given the correctness of these assertions, is there then really no such thing as a universal history in the sense of a concrete history of mankind? Popper flatly states, "there can be none." The term "history of mankind" employed properly "would have to be the history of all men. It would have to be the history of all human hopes, struggles, and suffering. For there is no one man more important than any other. Clearly this concrete history cannot be written. We must make abstractions, we must neglect, select." Hence on the basis of this strictly empirical analysis and

\(^342\) W. Kaufmann, op. cit., p. 50.
linguistically rigid understanding of the term, Popper concludes "'history' in the sense in which most people speak of it simply does not exist and this is at least one reason why I say that it has no meaning." 343

Thus both analytical philosophy and existential ontology succeed to some extent in overcoming historicism, but the price they pay for their triumph is a rather high one.

Analytical philosophy strives for scientific precision. But mere precision, as Popper's argument indicates, cannot furnish the norms for inquiries concerning history nor, for that matter, those concerning such areas as art, ethics, and religion. As a result, the analytical philosophers frequently forsake these areas and deal instead with probability, or they analyze the arguments of others, or, increasingly, they try to settle such difficult and, from their point of view, "murky" questions by recourse to ordinary language. Therefore, in the end, while they pay lip service to "'the empiricist criterion of meaning,'" 344 they actually tend to ignore empirical experience altogether. They limit themselves to an analysis of the relations between concepts, words, or propositions without regard to the non academic experiences and problems from which these pure linguistic structures derive their real meaning and significance.

Existential ontology, on the other hand, and especially the thought


344 Quoted in White, loc. cit.
of the later Heidegger is always in danger of degenerating into a sheer poetical sermonizing, suggestive and stimulating but essentially arbitrary. At present, Heidegger openly spurns the traditional subject-object mode of thinking as merely "representational" vorstellend. In its place, he urges the development of a new kind of thinking which seeks to "resurrect and recall," andenkendes Denken. He seems to demand that the philosopher must "feel himself again as intermediary instrument and voice and that the 'style or character of philosophizing' again become simple, immediate, and poetic, like the singing and thinking of the Philomythoi and the pre-Socratics." The rational explanation of the meaning of particular beings must give way to the "elucidation, articulation, and poetic composition of a new 'Essence of Being,' and thereby of a new 'Essence of man.'" But since Heidegger's new resurrecting and remembering kind of thinking obeys no discernable "inner law" or "logos" accessible to the trained thinker, what guarantee do we have that his particular vision and approach to Being is alone the true and proper one? Thus although Heidegger avoids the pitfalls of limiting experience to the empirically verifiable, in the last analysis, his "poetic" and "composing" Andenken is just as arbitrary and circumscribing as the analyses of the analytic philosophers. In fact in his obsessive concern for the "Essence of Being," Heidegger often systematically ignores the intellectual development, i.e., the historical dimension of the thinkers with whom

345 Marx, op. cit., p. 453.
he deals. 346 As one noted philologist has observed, the texts he interprets are used merely as material for an ontological "idol" that "he molds out of lines picked arbitrarily from here and there." 347

In effect then, Löwith's anti-historicism, while open to criticism, is nonetheless the least arbitrary of either of the aforementioned alternatives. His reassertion of the essential validity of a classically understood cosmos preserves man from the subjective excesses of existential ontologizing as well as from the narrow precisionism of analytical philosophy. Moreover, he does not discard the ideal of historical objectivity nor, of course, the very endeavor of history itself. His "classicism" has precedents going back to the Renaissance and the eighteenth century; and, as all of his writings indicate, his very recognition and understanding of the dangers inherent in the historicist orientation depend to a large extent upon his excellent historical analyses of the basic sources of that

346 The analytical philosophers also share this disregard for the historical development of a man's thought. As W. Kaufmann has observed, for the analytical philosophers, "a proposition is a proposition, whether written by a student, a professor, or a Plato: the laws of logic are no respectors of persons. At this point, however, all modesty is suddenly abandoned, and every student can tell you what is wrong with Kant without troubling to read more than a few pages." In fact, "any sustained effort to determine what a great philosopher actually believed is apt to be dismissed as 'tombstone-polishing' to use one of the favorite phrases of Professor Gilbert Ryle of Oxford." W. Kaufmann, op. cit., pp. 24, 34.

orientation itself. In fact, in this attempt to overcome historicism without however forsaking history per se, Löwith's anti-historicism provides an interesting contrast to the "limited relativism" prevalent among many contemporary scholars, who are also unhappy with the radical solutions offered by Popper and Heidegger, but unwilling to assume the extra-temporal stance recommended by Löwith.

These "limited relativists" accept the basic historicist contention that reality is an all sovereign process of change and development and that all ideas and values are valid only for the epochs, the civilizations, and, in extreme cases, only for the nations or provinces which produced them. But, at the same time, they also deny the corollary to this contention, namely, that historicism as a thoroughgoing relativism must inevitably lead to nihilism. In order to avoid the nihilistic consequences of historicism, these thinkers postulate the existence of certain immanent forces or factors which, they argue, "limit" or modify the historical process as such. Raymond Aron is one of the chief advocates of what might be termed "methodological" limitation.

"In the first place the degree of relativity is limited by the utmost rigour in establishing facts and by that impartiality which the scholar can and must have as long as he is merely unravelling texts and assessing evidence. Next, it is limited by the partial relationships which, starting from certain data, can be discerned in reality itself. A certain degree of uncertainty (but not of essential relativism) is adduced by the causal relation between an event and its antecedents and by calculating in accordance with probability the part played by each of the antecedents." 348

348 Quoted in Meyerhoff, op. cit., p. 160.

I do not believe, however, that in order to escape nihilism we need absolute values. We are citizens of our modern civilization, a civilization with humanitarian ideals. Ideals are directive values. We believe in these values and in these ideals of our epoch and of our civilization, we feel them vibrating in our hearts, we affirm their validity in our judgments. This is not nihilism! Nihilism is the lack of belief in values. Since we live in the present epoch and not in eternity, we may be satisfied with values valid for the present epoch. A trans-historical eternal validity would not contribute anything to our belief in values which developed with us and which we consider therefore, as ours. 349

And Edward H. Carr in his book *What is History* offers a very cautious formulation of a limitation which has its roots in the eighteenth century idea of progress.

The absolute in history is not something in the past from which we start; it is not something in the present, since all present thinking is necessarily relative. It is something still incomplete and in process of becoming -- something in the future towards which we move, which begins to take shape only as we move towards it, and in the light of which, as we move forward, we gradually shape our interpretation of the past. . . . Our criterion is not an absolute in the static sense of something that is the same yesterday, today, and forever; such an absolute is incompatible with the nature of history. But it is an absolute in respect of our interpretation of the past. It rejects the relativist view that one interpretation is as good as another or that every interpretation is true in its own time and place and it provides the touchstone by which our interpretation of the past will ultimately be judged. It is this sense of direction in history which alone enables us to order and interpret the events of the past. . . . But the process itself remains progressive and dynamic. Our sense of direction and our

interpretation of the past are subject to constant modification and evolution as we proceed.\textsuperscript{350}

But these earnest attempts to impede or invalidate the relentless relativization of all norms and standards by historicism do not constitute a real step toward its overcoming. At best they are bound to remain mere intellectual way stations. For their basic acceptance of the historicist claim that reality is essentially a constant process of change and development and that truth and value are daughters of time and history, rather than offsprings of a trans-historical eternity, virtually precludes the success of any subsequent attempts to "limit" the process when it proves to be more than one bargained for. Thus it is Löwith's special accomplishment to have recognized that a radical or fully developed historicism can only be overcome by an equally radical or fully developed extra-temporal or supra-historical view of history -- in lieu, of course, of a complete disavowal of traditional history itself.

But is Löwith's anti-historicism a truly viable position in the light of the various logical inconsistencies which have been discerned in his thought? In this context it is important to keep in mind that Löwith's struggle against historicism is actually twofold in character. On the one hand, it is based upon a series of purely rational counter thrusts to the historicist claims and contentions; and on the other, it rests upon his genuine

"humanist" concern to preserve man from the consequences of historicism's inevitable destruction of all traditional norms and standards. Therefore the real question is which of these two aspects of his thought is the more basic? In our analysis of Löwith's intellectual development from his anti-Heideggerian Individual in His Role as Fellow-Man in 1927 to his Collected Essays in 1960, we have seen that the underlying motif of all of his studies has been the search for a point of view which would encompass man, nature, and history in one organic and harmonious whole, i.e., a point of view which would be compatible with his understanding of man as an "ontological dual nature," a being essentially related to his fellow men, his Mitwelt, as well as nature, his Umwelt. His search for such a point of view has always taken precedence over any other consideration; and, in effect, it provided the basic impetus for his eventual commitment to the classical notion of an eternal and supra-historical physis as the ultimate ground of all being. Thus it is really Löwith's fundamental interest and concern for man; it is really his "humanism" rather than any purely rational and therefore somewhat dubious "neo-classicism" which makes his anti-historicism a meaningful and important alternative to the extremes which currently confront history.

In fact the very appearance of such suggestions as those advanced by Popper and Heidegger indicates that we are truly on a threshold. Historicism as a thoroughgoing relativism has become a virtual impasse
It can no longer be dismissed or avoided, as some historians have tried, with the glib observation that the historical mode of thought is still only "in its infancy" or perhaps undergoing a "crisis of puberty." Nor can it be argued away by an overly optimistic faith in a forthcoming technological capacity to manage the course of human affairs. It is rather that if history as such is to continue to function as a meaningful source for philosophical speculation and as a genuine guidepost for long range social and political action, it will have to undertake a major reexamination of the very foundations of its present position. Löwith's anti-historicism, understood as a specifically "humanist" response to the challenge of a fully developed historicism as well as its radically ahistorical antipodes, analytical philosophy and existential ontology, deserves greater attention than it has thus far received.


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