

# TOWARD a CONCRETE PHILOSOPHY

Heidegger and the Emergence  
of the Frankfurt School

Mikko **Immanen**



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PHILOSOPHY

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MIKKO IMMANEN

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# TOWARD A CONCRETE PHILOSOPHY



## INTRODUCTION

### *Making Good on Heidegger's Promise*

Any contribution this work may make to the development and clarification of problems is indebted to the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger.

—HERBERT MARCUSE, *HEGEL'S ONTOLOGY  
AND THE THEORY OF HISTORICITY* (1932)

The achievement of the neo-ontological formulation is that it has radically demonstrated the insuperable interwovenness of natural and historical elements.

—THEODOR W. ADORNO, "THE IDEA  
OF NATURAL-HISTORY" (1932)

I know now that Heidegger was one of the most significant personalities to have spoken to me.

—MAX HORKHEIMER TO ROSE RIEKHER (1921)

With the publication of *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) in 1927, the philosopher Martin Heidegger became one of the most discussed figures in German intellectual life by thoroughly questioning the scientifically minded philosophical and cultural self-understanding of modern Europe. Since the turn of the 1920s, Heidegger's unique gifts in teaching and his reinterpretations of Greek and Christian classics in his lectures had already set forth "the rumor of the hidden king" among students of philosophy.<sup>1</sup> After emerging from deeply Christian concerns, Heidegger's lectures began to revolve around a groundbreaking reading of Aristotle, in which the father of natural science and the backbone of scholastic Catholicism was cast as a proto-existentialist. Nothing symbolized this provocative effort better than Heidegger's retranslation of the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, changing "All men by nature desire to know" to "The care for seeing is essential to man's being."<sup>2</sup> Something comparable to Heidegger's critique of positivism occurred in Germany's Marxist circles in the 1920s, when an intellectual subculture later dubbed as Western (or critical or Hegelian) Marxism saw the light of day in the works of Georg Lukács, Karl Korsch, and Ernst Bloch. These brought the themes of cultural crisis and alienation, as well as a readiness to revitalize Marxist teachings with non-Marxist sources, into Marxist debates from which they had been outlawed as bourgeois reaction since the codification of historical materialism as scientific socialism during the period of the Second International (1889–1916). The critical appropriation of Western Marxism undoubtedly forms the most important theoretical framework behind the emergence of the Frankfurt School critical theory of Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse—

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1. Hannah Arendt, "Martin Heidegger at Eighty," trans. Alfred Hofstadter, *The New York Review of Books* 17, no. 6 (1971): 50–54. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), § 36 (215); Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552.

independent Marxist intellectuals who drew innovatively on Marx, Freud, and classical German philosophy to grasp the deeper causes behind Germany's failed socialist revolution after World War I and the rise of Nazism a decade later.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, this book argues that the contestation with Heidegger's competing philosophical revolution played a considerable, unacknowledged role in the formation of the Frankfurt School. Rather than claiming that Heidegger, widely considered one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, would have influenced the critical theorists in a positive way, like Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud for instance did, I suggest that Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer saw in Heidegger the most provocative challenge and competitor to their own analyses of the discontents of European modernity at the time of Wall Street's stock market crash, consolidation of Stalinist rule in Soviet Russia, and shifting hegemony in German *Zeitgeist* from progressive modernism to anxiety-ridden existentialism. By focusing on the years between the publication of *Being and Time* and Heidegger's notorious embrace of National Socialism in 1933, I examine what the critical theorists saw as the merits and the blind spots of Heidegger's philosophy before its contamination by Nazism.<sup>4</sup>

As prominent figures in "continental philosophy," both Heidegger and the Frankfurt School thinkers have been studied extensively. There has, however, been little interest in a comparative approach toward these giants of twentieth-century European thought. This is

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3. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

4. For the sake of economy, in this book, I will use the terms "critical theory" and "Frankfurt School" interchangeably to refer to the works of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, even though they did not use these terms in the Weimar Republic. The term "critical theory" was coined in 1937 by Horkheimer in his essay "Traditional and Critical Theory," while the term "Frankfurt School" was only invented after World War II by their opponents. In the Weimar era, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse most often called their positions, respectively, "materialism," "natural-history," and "concrete philosophy."



understandable. Apart from Marcuse's years as Heidegger's graduate student in 1928–1933, during their lifetimes, the relationship between Heidegger (1889–1976) and the German Jewish Horkheimer (1895–1973), Adorno (1903–1969), and Marcuse (1898–1979) was mostly hostile or ignorant. While Heidegger never commented on the critical theorists in his published works, in private he once denied having read a single page by Adorno, whom he dismissed as merely a sociologist.<sup>5</sup> On their part, after World War II, the critical theorists launched sharp attacks on “the Swabian sage,” viewing Heidegger's refusal to apologize for his support for Hitler as symptomatic of the wider German incapacity to come to terms with the past.

In the early 1980s, however, things changed somewhat. At the time when the leading second-generation critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, bid his farewell to the bleak horizons of Adorno's thought—bemoaning that despite their differences, “Adorno is in the end very similar to Heidegger as regards his position on the theoretical claims of objectifying thought and of reflection”—Hermann Mörchen judged these commonalities in a more positive tone, proposing that the peculiar “refusal of communication” between Adorno and Heidegger veiled deeper affinities too difficult for the protagonists to acknowledge, given their identifications with different philosophical and political traditions.<sup>6</sup> Over the years, some scholars have furthered Mörchen's attempt to detect points of contact in the concerns of Heidegger and the Frankfurt School, often taking as their justification rare concessions of proximity by the latter, such as Adorno's words to Horkheimer in 1949. Commenting on Heidegger's new essay collection, *Holzwege (Off The Beaten Track)*, Adorno noted that Heidegger was “*in favour* of false

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5. Heidegger made these remarks after a 1969 television interview; “Das Fernseh-Interview mit Richard Wisser,” in *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger*, ed. Günther Neske (Pfullingen, Germany: Neske, 1977), 283–284.

6. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 385; Hermann Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger: Untersuchung einer philosophischen Kommunikationsverweigerung* (Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta, 1981).

trails [*Holzwege*], in a way that's not very different from our own."<sup>7</sup> In 2008, Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, the editors of an essay collection on Adorno and Heidegger, called for a non-partisan approach that would acknowledge parallels between their criticisms of positivism and instrumental reason and their emphasis on aesthetic experience as an antidote to the modern technological mindset. Most recently, Peter E. Gordon has proposed that a lifelong contestation with Heidegger and the wider existentialist tradition formed an integral dimension of Adorno's thought.<sup>8</sup>

The present book was also stimulated by Andrew Feenberg's fascinating reflections on Heidegger and Marcuse. While Heidegger's Nazism made it hard for Marcuse to express positive comments on his early mentor, Feenberg suggests that Marcuse's best-known work, *One-Dimensional Man*, ought to be read as an implicit response to Heidegger's famous 1949 essay *Die Frage Nach der Technik* (*The Question Concerning Technology*). In his book, which earned him the reputation as the father figure of the American and West German student movements and the New Left, Marcuse referred approvingly to Heidegger's claim that what set modern technology apart from devices of the past was not its sheer volume and efficiency but rather the historically unique calculative mentality, a "technological *a priori*," underlying it.<sup>9</sup> For Feenberg, this indicates that Marcuse's views, although critical of Heidegger's ignorance of capitalist power relations, are greatly indebted to him. What matters for my study is Feenberg's suggestion that Marcuse's reasoning

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7. Adorno to Horkheimer, November 26, 1949, in *Briefe und Briefwechsel—Bd. 4: Theodor W. Adorno—Max Horkheimer, Briefwechsel 1927–1969, Bd. III: 1945–1949*, ed. Christoph GÖdde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2005), 351. Translation from Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 593.

8. Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek, Introduction to *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, ed. Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1–5; Peter E. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

9. Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Andrew Feenberg, "Heidegger and Marcuse: On Reification and Concrete Philosophy," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, ed. François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 174–176; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 153–154.

needs a phenomenological grounding and that the first steps toward this can be found in Marcuse's own past, in his forgotten Hegel study written under Heidegger's supervision around 1930.

These thought-provoking philosophical openings have significantly inspired my book. Yet, my goal is not primarily to solve the question of the philosophical parallels between Heidegger and the critical theorists but rather to contribute to our understanding of their relationship from the angle of intellectual history. Much remains to be said and indeed can be said of their struggles with Heidegger by drawing on unexamined sources and by connecting the writings of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse to several overlooked contexts, to be discussed. Again, rather than focusing on the better-known post-World War II period, defined by Adorno's and Horkheimer's quarrel with Heidegger over the philosophical hegemony and political conscience of Germany seeking to come to terms with, or repress, its Nazi past, I will focus on the critical theorists' under-appreciated reactions to Heidegger in the Weimar era, during their philosophically formative years. Marcuse's novel attempt to fuse Heidegger and Marx during his time in Freiburg as Heidegger's graduate student, which anticipated many later phenomenological and existential Marx interpretations, is well known, as is their bitter correspondence after the war, but their highly charged debate over Hegel's legacy has remained an overlooked issue. Again, while Adorno's meeting with Heidegger in 1929 is often mentioned, our knowledge of Adorno's subsequent "Frankfurt discussion" with his Heideggerian-minded colleagues in the last years of the Weimar Republic has remained on the level of anecdotal observations. Finally, the young Horkheimer's initial enthusiasm over Heidegger's legendary lectures in the early 1920s and his later criticism of *Being and Time*, also in the context of the Frankfurt discussion, have escaped attention almost entirely.

By reading these debates as stimulating intellectual encounters rather than hostile confrontations, the book complicates the common view of Heidegger and the Frankfurt School as archenemies. It should be noted that its central argument was conceived before the publication in 2014 of the first volumes of Heidegger's notorious *Schwarze Hefte* (*Black Notebooks*)—anti-Semitic texts that do

not exactly encourage a fruitful comparison of, let alone reconciliation between, Heidegger and the German Jewish critical theorists. Heidegger began to record his thoughts in notebooks covered in black oilcloth in 1931, and by the early 1970s had filled no fewer than thirty-four volumes with handwritten ruminations. The heated debates ignited by the volumes covering the years 1931–1948 are due to their fusion of Heidegger’s philosophical grand narrative, “history of being,” with grotesque anti-Semitism. Peter Trawny, the editor of the notebooks, suggests that Heidegger’s ponderings result in a Manichean position, which, by viewing “World Jewry” as Germany’s main enemy in its endeavor to redeem occidental existence, comes dangerously close to the anti-Semitic propaganda of Hitler and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>10</sup> My book appears, then, in the wake of yet another episode in the decades-old history of *The Heidegger Case*, that is, the disputation over the connection between his thought and politics, an episode, however, which many commentators, even in the infamously apologetic Heideggerian camp, have judged as qualitatively different from the previous ones.<sup>11</sup> The pressing question of the darkness of the shadow that the *Black Notebooks* cast on Heidegger’s legacy will have to remain a side issue in the present study. They play a crucial role in Chapter 3, however, by shedding light on the racist motives behind Heidegger’s rejection of Marcuse’s Hegel study in the early 1930s.

## Argument, Significance, Methodology

In my reconstruction of the Frankfurt School’s reactions to Heidegger before 1933, I argue that Heidegger’s teachings on historical

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10. Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschwörung* (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2014).

11. On the *Black Notebooks*, see Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, eds., *Reading Heidegger’s Black Notebooks 1931–1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016); Marion Heinz and Sidonie Kellerer, eds., *Martin Heideggers “Schwarze Hefte”: Eine philosophisch-politische Debatte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016); Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny, eds., *Heidegger’s Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

human existence played a significant role in the emergence of the early positions of Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer but, as already emphasized, as a major challenge rather than as a positive influence. Unlike orthodox Marxists, or even the pioneers of Western Marxism such as Lukács, the critical theorists did not simply lump Heidegger together with vulgar irrationalists but rather saw *Being and Time* as a serious, if misguided, effort to bring philosophy back from detached epistemology to reflect on the ambiguous conditions of life in technological modernity. While Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer were all aware that the question of the meaning of being (*Seinsfrage*) was Heidegger's prime concern, they, like the early readers of Heidegger in general, set their focus on his reflections on the lot of the human being, or *Dasein*, and the related questions of authenticity, thrownness, and care. In other words, for them, Heidegger's philosophy was more than anything philosophical existentialism.

What has gone overlooked in previous scholarship is the fact that not only Marcuse's early writings but also those of Adorno and Horkheimer displayed a genuine need to come to terms with Heidegger's philosophy and its promise of concreteness. I seek to show, moreover, that this confrontation with Heidegger took place not in the periphery of their intellectual interests but, especially in the cases of Marcuse and Adorno, in the very center of their desire to come up with a theoretical-practical position ("concrete philosophy" and "natural-history," respectively) sensitive to the crisis-ridden historical situation, a position that would avoid both the unfounded belief in progress of positivism, neo-Kantianism, and orthodox Marxism, as well as such equally untenable doomsday prophecies as Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) and Ludwig Klages's *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* (*The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul*).

Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse are arguably the most important leftist social theorists of the twentieth century. It seems self-evident, then, that a reconstruction of their overlooked early reception of Heidegger, for many the most important philosopher of the twentieth century, is a legitimate topic. As the themes introduced above show, however, instead of merely filling a lacuna in the

scholarship, an examination of the critical theorists' neglected contestation with Heidegger's promise of concreteness ought to be taken as a noteworthy contribution to our understanding of the very emergence of the Frankfurt School. From the opposite perspective, by illustrating the presence of such an "archenemy" as Heidegger in the works of the Frankfurt School, my book adds a chapter to the reception histories of Heidegger by seminal thinkers of the twentieth century. Several studies have reconstructed Heidegger's impact on French philosophy from the "generation existential" of Jean-Paul Sartre to the later postmodern deconstructionists.<sup>12</sup> Again, Martin Woessner has detected Heidegger's influence on various fields of American intellectual life.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the complicated and tortured relationship between Heidegger and his many famous Jewish students, Marcuse among them, has been scrutinized by Richard Wolin and others.<sup>14</sup>

My goal is to show that the early Frankfurt School was heavily invested in a philosophical contestation with Heidegger's thinking and its impact. Instead of looking for lessons from this contestation for today's debates in philosophy or politics, my goals are more historical. The philosophical textual approach has dominated previous studies on Heidegger and the Frankfurt School. My study, too, often has an expository character, for focusing on philosophical arguments is the only way to appreciate the critical theorists' subtle interpretations of Heidegger—interpretations that differ both from blunt dismissals by orthodox Marxists and from more devoted stances by Heidegger's disciples such as Hannah Arendt and

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12. Ethan Kleinberg, *Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France, 1927–1961* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism and Being* (London: Routledge, 1995).

13. Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

14. Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Samuel Fleischacker, ed., *Heidegger's Jewish Followers: Essays on Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Jonas, and Emmanuel Levinas* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2008).

Hans-Georg Gadamer. In this sense, my study belongs to the tradition of “history of ideas.” Yet, with its careful attention to historical contexts and frequent use of under-appreciated sources from letters to autobiographical testimony, my study is also contextual intellectual history. Indeed, in elucidating the significance that the young Frankfurt School thinkers laid on the urgency of facing Heidegger’s challenge, I will connect their writings to several new contexts. Before outlining the individual chapters, I would like to argue for the relevance of these contexts for my task and introduce the previously unexamined, recently published, or even unpublished sources connecting the writings of Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer to them.

The first of these is the famous 1929 Davos disputation between the rising philosophical star Heidegger and the most prominent representative of neo-Kantian mainstream philosophy, Ernst Cassirer—a disputation often considered the single most important event in the history of twentieth-century European philosophy. Many attendants, among them such notable figures as Emmanuel Levinas and Rudolf Carnap, saw the Davos disputation through the prism of Thomas Mann’s 1924 novel *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*) as a struggle over the contemporary German mind between the classical humanist tradition of Kant and Schiller and the new existentialism, laid with theological overtones, of the recently rediscovered Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. In hindsight, the Davos debate has often also been interpreted as a political watershed between fading liberalism and rising Fascism. Yet, in his remarkable reconstruction of the debate, Peter E. Gordon has suggested that rather than a political divide, we should see the event as a profound philosophical quarrel over Kant’s question “What is the human being?” Whereas Cassirer defended Kant’s thought as the foundation of cultural modernity, Heidegger set against this latter-day idealism a conception of human Dasein thrown into historical circumstances not of her own making. Heidegger’s lectures in the early 1920s had gained him a reputation as the new, subterranean philosophical force, and the 1927 publication of *Being and Time* had rocketed him to fame across Germany’s philosophical circles; what was seen

as his overpowering performance in Davos against Cassirer signaled Heidegger's rise to be one of the most admired intellectual forces of the times.<sup>15</sup>

While the significance of the Davos disputation for major twentieth-century philosophical currents such as logical positivism (Carnap) has been documented before,<sup>16</sup> I would like to suggest that the Heidegger-Cassirer debate sheds light on the emergence of the Frankfurt School as well. Some studies have claimed that Marcuse attended the Davos conference.<sup>17</sup> Although this claim seems untenable, Part I of this book shows that the Davos disputation over Kant's legacy illuminates the concurrent debate over Hegel's legacy between Heidegger and Marcuse. Moreover, the latter can also be taken as the culmination of the "Hegel renaissance" of the 1920s, which favored the recently rediscovered, allegedly more concrete young Hegel over the later metaphysical system builder. Both Heidegger and Marcuse contributed to this neo-Hegelian revival. Marcuse, building on Heidegger's openings in his 1929 Hegel lectures, went so far as to claim in his Hegel study that Hegel was the very originator of the problematic of "being and time." Further, the Hegel debate, glimpses of which can also be observed in the Weimar-era correspondence between Heidegger and Marcuse, occurred simultaneously with Heidegger's bitter breakup with his ex-teacher, Edmund Husserl. Since the Hegel debate resulted in Heidegger rejecting Marcuse's book for reasons that, like those related to his quarrel with Husserl, are not entirely clear, the Davos debate offers a fruitful starting point for the assessment of the philosophical stakes in the Hegel debate—the *Black Notebooks* offering clues to its extra-philosophical dimensions with their astounding

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15. Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

16. Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000).

17. Jean Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Eine Biographie* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 170; Alfred Denker, *Unterwegs in Sein und Zeit: Einführung in Leben und Denken von Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart, Germany: Klett-Cotta, 2011), 99.



claim that Husserl's Jewish "race" prevented him from appreciating Heidegger's existential version of phenomenology.<sup>18</sup>

The waves of the Davos disputation were felt in Frankfurt as well. Part II of this book reconstructs the so-called Frankfurt discussion (*Frankfurter Gespräch*) between Adorno and his Heideggerian-minded colleagues—theologian Paul Tillich, philosopher Kurt Riezler, and psychologist Max Wertheimer—as a sequel to the Davos debate. In addition to personal connections—Riezler lectured and befriended Heidegger in Davos, while Tillich and Heidegger were colleagues earlier in the 1920s—thematically, the Frankfurt discussion, as indicated by unexamined or even unpublished transcriptions held in the Max Horkheimer Archive, revolved around the question of what it means to be human and Heidegger's answer to this question with his idea of thrown Dasein. Moreover, Victor Farias and Thomas Meyer observe that besides the Davos disputation, one should also take Heidegger's lecture in Frankfurt a few months earlier in January 1929, attended by Adorno and Horkheimer, as an indication of his increasing presence in the public eye.<sup>19</sup> What makes this recently published lecture important for us is that it can be read as the beginning point of the Frankfurt discussion, in which Adorno rejected the question of the human being but admitted that the Heideggerian challenge had pushed him to articulate his own critical theory better.

## Chapters in Outline

When, toward the end of his life, Marcuse was asked whether he still stood behind the dedication of his Hegel book to Heidegger, he replied positively. Despite everything, Heidegger had taught him

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18. Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 96, ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2014), 46–47.

19. Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell, Dominic Di Bernardi, and Gabriel R. Ricci (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 68–69; Thomas Meyer, *Zwischen Philosophie und Gesetz: Jüdische Philosophie und Theologie von 1933 bis 1938* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 275.

“how one should read a text.”<sup>20</sup> The question of Hegel’s legacy is a case in point. In contrast to his disparaging treatment of Hegel in *Being and Time*, in his lectures in 1929–1931, Heidegger engaged in a fruitful contestation with Hegel’s conceptions of time and being. Marcuse followed these lectures as he was writing what was supposed to become his habilitation thesis, *Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit* (*Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*), where he drew on Heidegger’s openings to reconstruct Hegel’s misunderstood concept of “life” as the key category of human existence, a philosophical depth-dimension he elsewhere argued was the forgotten core of Marxism. Whereas Andrew Feenberg has made an interesting case for the relevance of Marcuse’s Hegel book for current philosophical debates, my historical reconstruction, which often builds on the work by Richard Wolin and John Abromeit, shows that much more remains to be said of Marcuse’s book and the debate with Heidegger that ensued from it.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 1 argues that Marcuse’s Freiburg writings—the seemingly ethereal Hegel book included—formed a continuous effort to redirect Heidegger’s philosophical revolution from solipsistic existentialism toward a critical theory of capitalism or “concrete philosophy.” In doing so, Marcuse did not see himself simply as criticizing Heidegger but rather persuading him to recognize the social-critical, Hegelian-Marxist elements of *Being and Time* itself. The chapter sheds new light on Lucien Goldmann’s famous claim about Heidegger’s debt to Georg Lukács by showing that Marcuse may well already have suspected such debt in the 1920s. Chapter 2 turns from Marcuse’s well-known comments on *Being and Time* to his largely ignored reception of Heidegger’s lectures by reconstructing the Hegel debate between Marcuse’s Hegel book and Heidegger’s Hegel lectures. It suggests that this debate formed the most interesting dimension of Marcuse’s Freiburg period, for it was through

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20. “Herbert Marcuse im Gespräch mit Ivo Frenzel und Willy Hochkeppel.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5PU0EASi\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5PU0EASi_Q) (26:20–31:05).

21. Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*; John Abromeit, “Herbert Marcuse’s Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger 1927–1933,” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 131–151.

a contestation with Hegel that not only Marcuse but also Heidegger sought to articulate their emerging positions, that is, “concrete philosophy” and the “history of being.” Chapter 3 weighs the stakes of this debate by asking exactly why Heidegger ended up rejecting Marcuse’s study. Given Heidegger’s turn to radical conservatism in the late 1920s and the recent appearance of the *Black Notebooks*, I contend that we cannot separate the philosophical debate over Hegel, like the Davos debate in Peter E. Gordon’s reading, from Heidegger’s changing political sensibilities.

Concurrently with Marcuse’s debate with Heidegger, Adorno was beginning his lifelong, extremely ambivalent struggle with Heidegger. At his most ruthless, Adorno judged *Being and Time* as “fascist right down to its innermost components.”<sup>22</sup> The only slightly less polemical *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (*The Jargon of Authenticity*) from 1964 stated that Heidegger’s book “acquired its aura by describing the directions of the dark drives of the intelligentsia before 1933—directions which he described as full of insight, and which he revealed to be solidly coercive.” In his 1966 main work, *Negative Dialektik* (*Negative Dialectics*), however, Adorno admitted that Heidegger’s influence “would be unintelligible if it did not meet an emphatic need, a sign of something missed, a longing that Kant’s verdict on a knowledge of the Absolute should not be the end of the matter.” Adorno conceded that his approach to Heidegger was that of immanent criticism; Heidegger’s question of being, “rather than judged from above,” was to be “understood and immanently criticized out of the need for it, which is a problem of its own.”<sup>23</sup>

As for the Weimar years, it is widely known that Adorno’s two programmatic lectures in the early 1930s criticized Heidegger. Rarer is the observation that instead of simply dismissing Heidegger,

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22. Adorno’s open letter to *Diskus* (University of Frankfurt student newspaper), January 3, 1963. Quoted in Rolf Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz, “Editorische Nachwort zu den Bänden 18 und 19,” in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 19, *Musikalische Schriften VI*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Klaus Schultz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1984), 638.

23. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (London: Routledge, 2003), 2; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), 61, xx.

Adorno here already called for an immanent critique of *Being and Time*. What has not been recognized at all, however, is the fact that Adorno's lectures were replies to Heideggerian criticisms by his colleagues at the University of Frankfurt. Adorno's supervisor, Paul Tillich, and his colleagues, Kurt Riezler and Max Wertheimer—whom I shall designate as the “Frankfurt Heideggerians” (see Chapter 4, last section)—held Heidegger's idea of Dasein as indispensable for their own philosophical, theological, and psychological efforts, and accused Adorno of willfully downplaying Heidegger's philosophical breakthrough. Yet, this Frankfurt discussion has received practically no attention in previous research. Even Peter E. Gordon's recent intriguing study misleadingly reads Adorno's lectures as a dialogue with “an imagined representative of fundamental ontology,” not with real sympathizers of Heidegger's thought.<sup>24</sup>

If the reconstruction of the Frankfurt discussion in Part II thus offers a fresh angle to Adorno's critical theory in the making, the most interesting aspect about it is Adorno's articulation, under the heading of “natural-history,” of a proto version of his and Horkheimer's thesis of entwinement of myth and reason in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*), published in 1947. Remarkably, Adorno develops his conception of natural-history via an immanent criticism of Heidegger's view of human Dasein as inescapably thrown into history. Given the suggestions by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Susan Buck-Morss that this early conception anticipated the later account of Western history as the fateful dialectic of myth and reason, the question is whether the Weimar-era encounter with Heidegger's idea of thrownness—as well as with similar Heideggerian schemes in the works of Riezler and Tillich—influenced the Frankfurt School's most famous argument.<sup>25</sup> By highlighting this connection, I do not claim that we should credit Heidegger with the main thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As

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24. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence*, 48.

25. Robert Hullot-Kentor, “Foreword: Critique of the Organic,” in Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), x–xi; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 59.

we will see, this thesis existed before the Frankfurt discussion, and the latter was more about Adorno refining and defending it against Heidegger. Yet, I suggest that Adorno, in order *both* to dismantle the unhealthy impact of Heidegger's teachings on Weimar-era German thought *as well as* to make good on Heidegger's legitimate promise of concreteness, saw immanent criticism as a necessity. "Not least among the tasks now confronting thought," Adorno declared in 1951, "is that of placing all the reactionary arguments against Western culture in the service of progressive enlightenment."<sup>26</sup> I would read the contestation with Heidegger as a significant instance, if not the most significant one, of what Martin Jay highlights as Adorno's willingness to engage in a critical dialogue with conservative *Kulturkritik*.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the cases of Marcuse and Adorno, Horkheimer's reception of Heidegger has remained an almost entirely neglected topic. To an extent, this is understandable, given Horkheimer's about fifteen, mostly negative, remarks on Heidegger in the Weimar era. Yet, much remains to be said of Horkheimer's reactions to Heidegger, of the young student's guarded enthusiasm after World War I to the later fine-grained criticisms of *Being and Time* by the director of the Institute for Social Research who, without seeing Fascist yearnings in Heidegger's book, saw it as a failed attempt to defend the primacy of practical reason. In his impressive intellectual biography of Horkheimer, John Abromeit suggests that Heidegger's role in Horkheimer's development in the 1920s was at best marginal.<sup>28</sup> Horkheimer's 1921 letter to Rose Riekher, his girlfriend and future wife, however, has encouraged several earlier scholars, and, in 2008, Macdonald and Ziarek, to propose that Heidegger considerably impacted Horkheimer's development as a critical thinker.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), 192.

27. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 17–19.

28. John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

29. Horkheimer to Rose Riekher, November 30, 1921, in Max Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters: Selected Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Manfred R. Jacobson

Navigating a middle route between these interpretations, Chapter 7 focuses on Horkheimer's years as a student and private lecturer in the 1920s and argues that he indeed was impressed by Heidegger's radical teachings, if only briefly. What makes this enthusiasm understandable, I believe, is Horkheimer's experience of Germany's failed socialist revolution in 1919 and his disillusionment thereafter with Max Weber's famous statements against socialism and emancipatory social theory—experiences against which Heidegger's radicalism appeared as a genuine promise to bring philosophy back in touch with life. Even when later in the decade Horkheimer had grown highly critical of Heidegger, he was not indifferent toward him but rather saw *Being and Time* as a major competitor to his critical theory. A distinguishing aspect of Horkheimer's case is that he saw Max Scheler, the most significant of Husserl's followers until the appearance of Heidegger's magnum opus in 1927, as an equally great challenge for critical theory. This attention paid to Scheler, who at the time of his death in 1928 was Horkheimer's colleague in Frankfurt, is hardly surprising. Many observers, Heidegger included, praised Scheler's contributions to philosophical anthropology, and many, such as Cassirer, treated Heidegger too as a philosophical anthropologist—a misunderstanding Heidegger sought to dispel in Davos and in his Frankfurt lecture.

Chapter 8 examines Heidegger's role in Horkheimer's programmatic formulations of critical theory in the early 1930s as the director of the Institute for Social Research. Hauke Brunkhorst proposes that Horkheimer's sublation of philosophy into multidisciplinary social criticism opened a third post-metaphysical path along Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics and analytical philosophy. And Jürgen Habermas judges Horkheimer's early critical theory as “an original, anti-Heideggerian response to the ‘end of metaphysics.’”<sup>30</sup> My historical reconstruction substantiates these

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and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 22. Translation modified. Macdonald and Ziarek, Introduction to *Adorno and Heidegger*, 1–2, 183n3.

30. Hauke Brunkhorst, “Dialectical Positivism of Happiness: Max Horkheimer's Materialist Deconstruction of Philosophy,” trans. John McCole, in *On*

views by demonstrating that in the final years of the Weimar Republic, Horkheimer often presented his critical theory as an alternative to the hegemonic teachings of Heidegger and Scheler as well as to the neo-metaphysical doctrines of the Frankfurt Heideggerians.

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*Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 67–71; Jürgen Habermas, “Remarks on the Development of Max Horkheimer’s Work,” trans. Kenneth Baynes and John McCole, in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 51.

PART I

WHO OWNS THE COPYRIGHT  
TO THE PROBLEMATIC OF  
“BEING AND TIME”?

*Marcuse, Heidegger,  
and the Legacy of Hegel*





# THE UN-HEIDEGGERIAN CORE OF MARCUSE'S MOST HEIDEGGERIAN TEXT

## *The Lukács Question*

Decisive was the failure of the German revolution, which my friends and I experienced . . . with the murder of Karl [Liebknecht] und Rosa [Luxemburg]. There seemed to have been nothing one could have identified oneself with. . . . Then all of a sudden there appeared *Being and Time* as a truly concrete philosophy. There was talk of "Dasein," of "existence," of "das Man," of "death," of "care." That seemed to concern us.

—HERBERT MARCUSE (1978)

While living in Swiss exile as the newest member of the Frankfurt School in the spring of 1933, the German Jewish philosopher Herbert Marcuse was nothing but shocked when learning that his former supervisor, Martin Heidegger, had joined the Nazis. In 1928–1933, Marcuse had worked with Heidegger on his habilitation thesis on Hegel and used Heidegger's 1927 magnum opus, *Being and Time*, to rehabilitate ossified Marxist theory as an

existentially engaged “concrete philosophy” in several of his articles. Marcuse’s first political experience, as part of the failed socialist revolution in Germany after World War I, is crucial in understanding why a Marxist like him could become enthusiastic about Heidegger. Of upper middle-class origin from Berlin, Marcuse had joined Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht’s Spartacist movement, which pushed for radical democratic socialism based on worker councils. After the leaders of this pivotal anti-Bolshevist force were murdered by right-wing troops in 1919, Marcuse lost his only connection to leftist politics. While he abhorred Bolshevik authoritarianism, the social democrats’ support for the war in 1914 and their complicity in crushing the Spartacists made him critical of the moderate left. Besides his political disillusionment, Marcuse was critical of the parties’ crude economist understanding of socialism and their naive belief in progress and automatic evolution from capitalism to socialism. After the stillborn revolution, Marcuse spent the subsequent years in an “inner emigration” studying literature, philosophy, and political economy in Berlin and Freiburg where he earned his doctorate in 1922. Instead of pursuing further academic studies, he worked the next five years as an antiquarian book dealer in Berlin. Then, in 1927, his life took a new turn. After reading the just-published first part of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Marcuse decided to return to Freiburg to continue his studies in philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Since Marcuse’s world fame in the 1960–1970s, scholars have disagreed over whether his Freiburg writings are better defined as Heideggerian or Marxist. Those who label the young Marcuse as a Heideggerian complain that his critique of capitalism, instead of drawing on Marx’s mature critique of political economy, receives its thrust from abstract, and potentially irrational, Heideggerian meditations on authenticity.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, those who cast Marcuse

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1. Barry Kätz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1982), 23–34; Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 13–37. The epigraph is from Herbert Marcuse, “Theorie und Politik,” in *Gespräche mit Herbert Marcuse* (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1978), 10.

2. Alfred Schmidt, “Existential Ontology and Historical Materialism in the Work of Herbert Marcuse,” trans. Anne-Marie and Andrew Feenberg, in *Marcuse:*

as a Marxist claim that despite his fascination with Heidegger's existentialism, Marcuse's "concrete philosophy" differs considerably from the former.<sup>3</sup> I would readily concede to the former group of scholars that in his Freiburg writings, Marcuse remains, for better or worse, a philosopher; his goal is to reconstruct the philosophical premises of Marxism, not to practice actual Marxist analysis of capitalism. But I am in perfect agreement with the latter group of scholars and their emphasis on the crucial differences between Marcuse's and Heidegger's philosophical positions; despite clinging on to Heidegger's vocabulary, at the most fundamental philosophical level Marcuse was more Marxist than Heideggerian. Yet, I believe that the historical picture of Marcuse's early encounter with Heidegger is more complex than the either/or question of Marx or Heidegger.

Marcuse was way too modest when, in a late recollection of his debt to Heidegger, he said that "there were relatively few reservations and relatively few criticisms on my part."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, John Abromeit rightly notes that Marcuse's approach to Heidegger's thought was always merely instrumental. I would, however, modify the chronology given by Abromeit, as well as by Gérard Raulet, of the development of Marcuse's stance toward Heidegger. Despite stressing Marcuse's criticism of Heidegger, they see this criticism as really beginning only after Marcuse's disappointment with Heidegger's new publications in 1929—a disappointment that allegedly caused Marcuse to turn to Hegel as a philosophical supplementation to Marxism.<sup>5</sup> I argue, instead, for the continuity of Marcuse's early writings;

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*Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, ed. Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, Charles P. Webel, and contributors (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 47–67; Paul Piccone and Alexander Delfini, "Herbert Marcuse's Heideggerian Marxism," *Telos* 6 (Fall 1970), 36–46.

3. Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 43, 389–390n31; Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 133–134, 147n28, 151n62; Kätz, *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 65n20.

4. Herbert Marcuse, "Heidegger's Politics: An Interview," in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 165.

5. Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 134, 138–140, 143–144; Gérard Raulet, "Marcuse's Negative Dialectics of Imagination," in *Herbert*

his distance from Heidegger is already evident in his first, and allegedly most Heideggerian, article from 1928, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism.” What my seemingly minor modification amounts to is the claim that Marcuse’s habilitation thesis, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, written in 1929–1930, should not be seen as a break from Heidegger to Hegel but rather as the culmination of the effort begun in 1928 to give *Being and Time* a Hegelian-Marxist twist—an effort, moreover, that did not go unnoticed by Heidegger. The decisive philosophical turning point in Marcuse’s stance toward Heidegger, sealed politically in 1933, happened only in 1932 with the appearance of Marx’s *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte* (*Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*) from 1844. These youthful speculations on human essence and alienation disclosed a truly philosophical Marx, and “from that point on the problem of Heidegger versus Marx was for me a problem no longer.”<sup>6</sup>

What was it, then, that Marcuse had been looking for in Heidegger’s thought before 1932 and then found in Marx himself? In my view, Marcuse was from the beginning interested in articulating what I would call the “ontology of labor,” the philosophical insight that social-historical institutions, such as capitalism, are not quasi-objective nature-like phenomena but human products. If these institutions seem to be operating behind the backs of individuals, this is because human beings have lost control of their own creations. As a philosophical paradigm, the ontology of labor holds that emancipation presupposes self-consciousness of this state of affairs—that human beings are not just objects but also potentially subjects of history. Labor here means, then, an ontological category and only secondarily an economic one related to the production of goods. Apart from the nascent intellectual subculture of Hegelian Marxism, inaugurated by Georg Lukács’s 1923 *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (*History and Class Consciousness*), this philosophical depth-dimension of human *praxis* had

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Marcuse: *A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 116–117.

6. Marcuse, “Theorie und Politik,” 11.

been ignored by official Marxism, which believed in the inevitable collapse of capitalism.<sup>7</sup> From his first article onwards, I contend, Marcuse sought just this ontology of labor, not an “ontology of mortality,” as I would call Heidegger’s own position. Heidegger sees the human being as being-toward-death, thrown into historical occurrences forever beyond its control. By rejecting the ready-made truths of one’s historical heritage and those of the conformist social world, the individual can lead, momentarily at least, an authentic life. Notwithstanding Marcuse’s fascination with these “un-bourgeois” traits of Heidegger’s thought, he used *Being and Time* only instrumentally for his own purpose to rejuvenate Marxism as radical democratic socialism.<sup>8</sup>

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7. On the “crisis of Marxism,” see Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 5–9; Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 3–60.

8. The Weimar-era Marcuse was interested in fighting *social* reification, not reification of *nature*. The former refers to the situation where people do not recognize capitalism as a human creation, and where positivist sociology and philosophy further this blindness by their conceptual choices. In contrast, reification of nature would mean treating as eternal not only capitalism but also the historically specific, instrumental relationship between human beings and nature characteristic of Western modernity. Andrew Feenberg correctly reads Marcuse’s mature writings as criticism of both social and natural reification. Yet, John Abromeit rightly notes that Feenberg’s reading of these later concerns back to Marcuse’s Freiburg period is anachronistic. As Stephan Bunschuh notes, Marcuse’s early view of human being is the “classical subject of the philosophy of history” who through labor distances “himself from the heteronomy of nature.” But neither was the early Marcuse, in Moishe Postone’s terms, a “traditional Marxist” who hypostatized the forces of production. Despite casting Marcuse as a theoretician of labor, I agree with scholars who stress his defense of bodily gratification against the Taylorist and Stalinist cults of labor. As we will see, in the Weimar era, these preferences are visible in Marcuse’s idea of socialism as realization of “the whole person” and in his embrace of Schiller’s “play impulse,” a preference that set him apart from both traditional Marxism and Heidegger’s anxiety-ridden conception of authenticity; Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, xi–xvi, 1–6; John Abromeit, “Left Heideggerianism or Phenomenological Marxism? Reconsidering Herbert Marcuse’s Critical Theory of Technology,” *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory* 17, no. 1 (2010): 89, 98–100; Stephan Bunschuh, “The Theoretical Place of Utopia: Some Remarks on Herbert Marcuse’s Dual Anthropology,” trans. John Abromeit, in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 152–153, 160; Moishe Postone,

An important, if also confusing, aspect of Marcuse's Freiburg writings is that before the 1932 publication of Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, known also as the *Paris Manuscripts*, he could not yet be sure who owned the copyright to the ontological idea of labor—hence the perplexing mix of Heidegger, Marx, Hegel, and Lukács in his writings. On the basis of Marx's writings available before 1932, it was not clear that Marx's critique of political economy had grown on such an ontological foundation. One could ask: had not Lukács provided this foundation in *History and Class Consciousness*, which speculated, almost ten years before the appearance of Marx's manuscripts, on the connection between Marx and Hegel? Although, as we will see, Marcuse embraced Lukács's book, he apparently thought that it lacked a phenomenological analysis of the human being. Only with the appearance of Marx's quasi-ontological meditations on alienated and non-alienated labor, won in a struggle with Hegel, could Marcuse convince himself that Marx was the inaugurator of the ontological idea of labor and that it was no longer necessary to look for philosophical implements for Marxism outside of the Marxist tradition.

In the absence of such an ontological foundation in the late 1920s, however, Marcuse turned to Heidegger. Like so many of his contemporaries, Marcuse was impressed by Heidegger's radical pathos. Yet, I believe he was more intrigued by what he saw as the yet unfulfilled promises of *Being and Time*. Marcuse thought that in certain places, *Being and Time* toed the line between heroic individualism and a genuine understanding of social being, between an ontology of mortality and that of labor. Moreover, in the absence of the eagerly expected second part of *Being and Time* (which never appeared), Marcuse could entertain hopes that Heidegger had not yet made up his mind about the ultimate meaning of his philosophical breakthrough. To his disappointment, in 1929, he was forced to concede that Heidegger's next publications—*Was ist Metaphysik?* (*What Is Metaphysics?*) and *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*

(*Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*)—moved toward increasingly metaphysical speculations.

In 1929, Marcuse began working on his habilitation study on Hegel. But with this choice, he did not simply bid farewell to Heidegger. On the contrary, his Hegel study marked no greater a departure from orthodox Heideggerianism than his 1928 article, since both made a case for the ontology of labor not for that of mortality. Indeed, despite Marcuse's fascination with Heidegger's existentialism, his articles and his Hegel book ought to be seen as a continuous effort to reinterpret Heidegger's philosophical revolution in Hegelian-Marxist terms. This does not mean, however, that from 1929 onwards, Marcuse no longer found anything worthwhile in Heidegger's ideas. He continued to draw inspiration from *Being and Time*'s promise of concrete analysis of human existence. What is more, as we shall see in Chapter 2, he also found much to his liking in Heidegger's lectures on Hegel in 1929–1931, which he attended while writing his own study. Chapter 3 ponders the reasons why a fruitful philosophical collaboration on Hegel ended in Heidegger's rejection of Marcuse's study in the early 1930s, that is, at a time when, as we know from hindsight, Heidegger was undergoing an ideological transformation that made him anything but that "Marxist fellow traveler," to use Richard's Wolin's term, that Marcuse at some level wished he were.<sup>9</sup>

The present chapter begins by introducing Heidegger and Lukács, "the two great philosophers of alienation, reification and inauthenticity."<sup>10</sup> It then shows that the ontology of labor forms the philosophical backbone even of Marcuse's most Heideggerian article from 1928. Although this text contains only a few remarks on Hegel, they are all suggestive of Marcuse's unorthodox, dialectical understanding of Heidegger's key concepts. Further, the chapter emphasizes Marcuse's debt to Lukács. Several scholars have noted the parallels between Marcuse's "concrete philosophy" and Lukács's theory of reification. Yet, to what extent Marcuse suspected a *historical* connection between Heidegger and Lukács—an oft-cited

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9. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 145.

10. Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 95.



claim made by Lucien Goldmann in the late 1960s—has been more difficult to ascertain. To illuminate this question, the chapter scrutinizes Marcuse’s article next to a little-examined review of *Being and Time* by his friend Maximilian Beck, who proposed, anticipating Goldmann’s claim by decades, that Lukács had influenced Heidegger.

### Heidegger and Lukács: Critics of Reification

Heidegger’s thought and its popularity in the Weimar Republic would be unintelligible without the sense of profound crisis that overtook German minds after World War I. Already present since the late nineteenth century in avant-garde art and the cultural criticisms of Friedrich Nietzsche, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber, its culmination in the devastating war further shook people’s material and spiritual security. The younger generations saw academic philosophy as unable to keep pace with stormy political and cultural developments. Championing philosophical and cultural ideals of the nineteenth century, mainstream neo-Kantianism appeared helplessly outdated and incapable of offering guidance in a situation where a new historical epoch seemed to have begun. In this situation, a philosophical movement known as phenomenology seemed to offer a new direction to many.<sup>11</sup> In 1919, Heidegger became the assistant to Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. At the time, Heidegger was undergoing a religious crisis that alienated him from the orthodox Catholicism of his youth. He confided to a friend that epistemological “insights that pass over into the theory of historical knowledge have made the *system* of Catholicism problematic and unacceptable to me—but not Christianity and metaphysics, although I take the latter in a new sense.”<sup>12</sup>

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11. Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 111–113.

12. Heidegger to Engelbert Krebs, January 9, 1919, quoted in Thomas Sheehan, “Reading a Life: Heidegger and Hard Times,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 71–72.

For Heidegger, modern science and historical consciousness had discredited the mythological elements of dogmatic Christianity and traditional metaphysics. Yet, as his letter implies, Heidegger's mental disposition remained metaphysically oriented. But how to legitimate or even articulate this disposition in the modern disenchanting world, where everything was reduced to psychology, anthropology, or physics? Heidegger found the solution in Husserl's battle cry "to the things themselves," which sought to disclose a human dimension that could not be reduced to an object of the sciences. In *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft (Philosophy as Rigorous Science)*, Husserl had launched an attack on positivism, relativism, and historicism. For him, it was not enough to counter the hegemony of the natural sciences by setting up independent human sciences, as the latter also drastically thinned reason down to mere scientific methodology. Husserl desired to restore philosophy back to its older place as an expression of universal reason. In his breakthrough work, *Logische Untersuchungen (Logical Investigations)*, Husserl criticized a psychologistic view in logic, which reduced logical judgments, such as the law of contradiction, to psychological regularities of human thought. He claimed that the laws of logic were instead of a priori nature, residing in a timeless realm of their own. As a follower of Cartesian-Kantian subject philosophy, Husserl believed that this logical realm was to be found in the human consciousness, though not in the empirical one studied by psychology but in the transcendental one whose intentional structures were disclosed by phenomenology.<sup>13</sup>

Whereas for Husserl the relevance of phenomenology lay in its articulation of the timeless logical presuppositions of the sciences, for Heidegger, phenomenology contributed to our sharpened sense of ourselves as temporal beings. Instead of viewing the eternal ideas, the transcendent God, or the world spirit as the Archimedean point of philosophy, Heidegger set his focus on the human individual.

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13. Dermot Moran, *Edmund Husserl: Founder of Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 43–58, 94–129; Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction, Vol. 1* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 73–124.

What separated Heidegger from the Cartesian philosophy of the subject, however, was the conviction that what was decisive in the human being was not the capacity to know but the privilege—or burden—to care (*Sorge*) for one's lot in the world. On Heidegger's account, his view of the human being as worldly and temporal *Dasein* was more profound than traditional accounts of the human condition. This dimension had been lost in the history of philosophy from Plato to Hegel and even to Husserl. Still worse, modern scientific positivism either knew nothing about this or, if it did, claimed that because one could not talk about these matters clearly, one should therefore be silent about them (Wittgenstein). What Heidegger called authenticity meant the individual's awakening to the hard fact of her mortality. In anxious anticipation of death, the individual was forced to realize that her life choices, possibilities, and responsibilities depended solely on herself. Apart from theological and idealistic daydreaming, the dimension of care was eclipsed in everyday life by the superficialities of the social realm, which Heidegger saw as a permanently inauthentic realm of the "they" (*das Man*), that is, as an anonymous collective world that robbed the individual of her responsibility to think for herself.<sup>14</sup>

Heidegger had introduced many of his central philosophical themes in his lectures earlier in the 1920s. Yet, they received systematic expression in *Being and Time*. The book's ultimate goal was to raise anew the old Greek question of being, but rather than offering new answers, Heidegger wished to disclose that particular meaning, horizon, or prejudice that had conditioned this question from its inception to the present day. The main theme, however, of the published first part was the so-called existential analytic, a sort of philosophical anthropology that sought to articulate the core features, or *existentials*, of the human being, or *Dasein* (§§ 9–11), and thereby to prepare the ground for the question of being. The existential analytic was a profound criticism of contemporary aca-

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14. On Heidegger's philosophy, see Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987); Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

demical philosophy and its ultimately Cartesian view of the human being as a detached scientific observer. Heidegger claimed that before all theorizing, the human being was embedded in webs of practical significance of ready-to-handness (§§ 14–24), determined by the coexistence of other people (§§ 25–27), and defined as much by moods such as fear and anxiety as by cognition (§§ 28–38). Division 1 of the first part culminated in the idea that what was distinctive in the human being was not the capacity to know in objective terms but the ability to care for one's particular existence (§§ 39–44). Division 2 examined temporality as the decisive constituent of care; Dasein was not a fixed entity like Descartes's *res cogitans* but rather was in constant temporal movement where changing expectations about the future affected the image of the past and vice versa. The discussion of temporality led to that of historicity (§§ 72–77), which criticized the backward-looking historicism hegemonic in Germany since the heyday of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Leopold von Ranke. Following Nietzsche's reflections on the disadvantages of the historicist worldview for cultural vitality, Heidegger argued that essential in historical existence was not knowledge of the past (*Geschichte*) but rather human life as it is actually lived forward in its open-ended temporal nature as it happens (*Geschehen*), so to speak. Instead of understanding themselves as detached observers of the past, human beings could rehabilitate their ossified present by digging into those past possibilities that had never developed into actual traditions. The former could offer revitalizing insights for the present by challenging the latter that had become hegemonic.<sup>15</sup>

With the question of the meaning of being, Heidegger had in mind a very specific tradition that needed reconsideration: the history of Western metaphysics. But since the decisive third division of part 1 of *Being and Time*, "Time and Being," as well as the entire second part, consisting of the "destruction of the history of

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15. On *Being and Time*, see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

ontology” (Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant), remained unpublished in 1927, the existential analytic received more attention than Heidegger had intended. Marcuse’s interpretation of *Being and Time* can perhaps be seen as the best expression of this fruitful misunderstanding. Like countless others of his generation, Marcuse was impressed by Heidegger’s call for authenticity and his pathos of beginning anew. As a Marxist, however, Marcuse saw further possibilities in *Being and Time*. In their naïve believe in progress, orthodox Marxists had ignored the concrete individual, her doings and choices, as that site where historical development happened or failed to happen. Indeed, what else had the first decades of the century proven but the implausibility of the Marxist prediction of capitalism’s demise—a view canonized by the Second International under the guidance of Friedrich Engels and Karl Kautsky? History in itself did not do anything. Yet, as an ex-Spartacist, Marcuse thought that perhaps determined individuals, aware that history consisted of the decisions of individuals, could still engage in the changing of the world. With Heidegger’s help, it was at least possible to grasp what the Marxist critique of capitalism was philosophically all about.

After engaging in a thorough analysis of *Being and Time* in 1927 with his friend Alfred Seidemann, Marcuse decided to continue his studies and work with Heidegger. Together with his wife and their little son, in 1928, Marcuse returned to Freiburg, where he had earned his doctorate six years earlier with a dissertation, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman (The German Artist-Novel)*. Husserl had been on the dissertation board and judged Marcuse’s defense of his thesis as outstanding. During his second visit to Freiburg, Marcuse was one of about a dozen graduate students of Heidegger’s. Heidegger’s Marburg period in 1923–1928 had attracted such future greats as Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Karl Löwith; his later Freiburg students included the young Emmanuel Levinas. Marcuse was also Heidegger’s assistant, and in 1930, he was even asked by the Berlin University to act as an intermediary and deliver Heidegger the call to the prestigious Fichte-Hegel-Schelling chair at the University of Berlin, a call that Heidegger famously turned down in the name of a more rooted provincial existence. As Marxists,

Marcuse and his friends Seidemann and Siegfried Landshut were the exceptions among Heidegger's mostly apolitical students. As students of Heidegger, Marcuse and his friends were in the minority among the Weimar left as well, as figures such as Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin were far more suspicious about Heidegger's philosophical revolution.<sup>16</sup>

Rather than with Heidegger's *Being and Time*, the philosophically sophisticated factions of the Weimar left were occupied with another revolutionary book: Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. Together with Karl Korsch's *Marxismus und Philosophie (Marxism and Philosophy)*, Lukács's book inaugurated an important intellectual subculture of the 1920s later dubbed as Western, critical, or Hegelian Marxism. Before his turn to Marxism, Lukács had gained renown as a literary critic both in his native Hungary and in Germany, where as a member of Max Weber's Heidelberg circle, he had sought refuge from the "iron cage" of modernity in the romantic anti-capitalism of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. After the October revolution, Lukács abruptly cast his lot with the Bolsheviks and participated in the short-lived Hungarian revolution in 1919 as a cultural commissar and military commandant in Béla Kun's communist regime. *History and Class Consciousness* offered an incisive account of the political and theoretical crisis of Marxism. The political shortcomings of the Second International had become evident at the turn of the century in the absence of the much-awaited collapse of capitalism in the industrialized West. In this period of relative economic prosperity, many Marxists had followed Eduard Bernstein's revisionism and replaced the dogma of revolution with the trust in peaceful evolution toward socialism. Lukács, writing in a gloomier social and economic turmoil of the postwar era, denounced this social-democratic passivity and embraced Lenin's activism that had revolutionized the largely agrarian Russia. Theoretically, Lukács argued that the political quietism of the Second International resulted from its faulty understanding of history after the natural-scientific model of objective laws. In this

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16. Kätz, *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 57, 61, 66, 85; Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 32–37.

view, history was an independent, thing-like process, the course of which human beings could observe but not fundamentally change. For Lukács, this conception resulted from an unquestioned adherence to the Cartesian division of the world into matter and mind.<sup>17</sup>

Lukács emphasized Marx's debt to classical German philosophy, the great merit of which had been the overcoming of the Cartesian separation of subject and object. Lukács underscored the importance of Marx's early writings, such as "Thesen über Feuerbach" ("Theses on Feuerbach"), which showed that Marx had seen his critique of capitalism as a practical solution to the problems of reason, subjectivity, and alienation raised by Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism," Marx had argued in the first thesis, "is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active side* was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such."<sup>18</sup> German idealists had understood the human being as an active agent, but only in thought. Marx brought this insight to the real world of history and society. The second and third Feuerbach theses captured the core Lukács's Hegelian Marxism by insisting that the historical world was not alien "otherness" but rather a human product. Lukács maintained that this idea was incomprehensible, especially if one ignored Marx's Hegelian roots. He emphasized that rather than a remnant from Marx's youth, the Hegelian view of history as a dialectical process of subject *and* object formed the backbone even of *Das Kapital* (*The Capital*).<sup>19</sup>

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17. Andrew Arato and Paul Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 13–32, 75–96; Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 137–142. On Western Marxism, see Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: NLB, 1976).

18. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *Collected Works, Vol. 5* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 3.

19. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), 110–149.

The most influential aspect of Lukács's book was its theory of reification (*Verdinglichung*), an effort to update Marx's critique of capitalism with the help of Weber's theory of rationalization. While Marx had scrutinized capitalism's dehumanizing effects on the workers, Weber observed the colonization by impersonal bureaucratic rationality of every realm of modern life, from material production to law and politics. Going still further, Lukács argued that this tendency penetrated even the realm of thought, where positivism in science and philosophy lost sight of the social totality. Twisting Weber's diagnosis dialectically, however, Lukács suggested that the course of this development could be changed by realizing that it was not an outcome of some occidental reason as such but rather of capitalism. This realization was open only for the workers who, by recognizing their current lot as mere objects of capitalism, could become subjects of history by reaching awareness of themselves as the real engine behind the accumulation of capital. Yet, Lukács suspected that the actual workers were incapable of shaking off their conformist "trade union consciousness" and achieving genuine "class consciousness"—a vanguard role he allotted to the Bolsheviks.<sup>20</sup>

*History and Class Consciousness* quickly became an object of heated debates. In the fifth World Congress of the Third International in 1924, Soviet ideologues denounced it as a heretical "infantile disorder" that wished to turn Marxism from an objective science to subjective idealism. Surprisingly, Lukács gave in to these charges and sided with the Leninist orthodoxy. In Germany, however, his ideas assumed a life of their own and inspired the opening in 1924 of the Frankfurt-based Institute for Social Research as a forum for an independent development of Marxist theory. Although the emerging Frankfurt School thinkers rejected Lukács's politics, they found his theory of reification—its emphasis on modernity as an open-ended process and in its sensitivity to capitalism's

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20. Ibid., 83–110. On Lukács and Weber, see Éva Karádi, "Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukács in Max Weber's Heidelberg," in *Max Weber and His Contemporaries*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Jürgen Osterhammel (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 499–514.



dehumanizing potential—an insightful diagnosis of the age.<sup>21</sup> Lukács’s philosophical concerns, however, were not that far from Heidegger’s either. As Lukács recalled, a key element of his book was “the question of alienation, which, for the first time since Marx” was treated “as central to the revolutionary critique of capitalism.” Lukács drew an interesting link: “of course the problem was in the air at the time.” With the appearance of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, “it moved into the center of philosophical debate.”<sup>22</sup> Marcuse’s first publication, examining the possibilities of a fusion of Heidegger and a rather Lukácsian Marx, was an article from 1928, “Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie des historischen Materialismus” (“Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism”), which praised *Being and Time* as “the point at which bourgeois philosophy unmakes itself from the inside and clears the way for a new and ‘concrete’ science.”<sup>23</sup>

### Marcuse’s Search for the Ontology of Labor in *Being and Time*

Marcuse’s first article has been perceptively scrutinized before, and it is therefore not necessary to go through it in detail once more.<sup>24</sup> Instead, I wish to highlight the degree to which Marcuse already here, at his most Heideggerian, approached *Being and Time* through what is essentially a Hegelian-Marxist lens. It may appear implausible to argue that Marcuse’s fusion of Heidegger and Marx in his first article had much to do with Hegel; Marcuse mentioned Hegel only three times and even wrote that the “relationships between the

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21. Arato and Breines, *Young Lukács*, 176–209; Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, chaps. 6–8.

22. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, xxii, Preface to the new edition (1967).

23. Herbert Marcuse, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism,” trans. Eric Oberle, in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 11.

24. See the excellent analyses in Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 38–63, and Schmidt, “Existential Ontology,” 48–63.

Marxian and Hegelian dialectic cannot be entered into at the present.”<sup>25</sup> But several passages in Marcuse’s text show that when he used *Being and Time* to revitalize Marxism, his reading of it was already conditioned by a Hegelian-Marxist (mis-)understanding of its key concepts.

Marcuse was convinced that *Being and Time* offered crucial insights to disclose the philosophical core of Marxism. While the economic critique of capitalism was an integral part of Marxist theory, Marcuse stressed that this critique drew upon specific philosophical reflections on human existence—a connection overlooked by contemporary advocates of scientific socialism. Using Heidegger’s conceptual tools, Marcuse came up with the following characterization of Marxism’s philosophical core, its “fundamental situation.” The phenomenological scrutiny of historical materialism “begins with the disclosure of the fundamental situation of Marxism—a disclosure through which a new, revolutionary fundamental attitude gains a new view of the whole of social being by coming to know historicity.” Insight into historicity enables, “through a new understanding of reality, the possibility of radically transformative action.” The core of Marxism was its concern “with the historical possibility of the radical act—of an act that should clear the way for a new and necessary reality as it brings about the actualization of the whole person.”<sup>26</sup>

What Marcuse found relevant in Heidegger’s phenomenological meditations was their emphasis on certain existential phenomena that had remained alien not only to scientific socialism but to the academic philosophy and historiography, concerned with matters of detached cognition, as well. One of these was the contrast between authentic individuality and an inauthentic social mode of existence. The “average subject of Dasein is ‘the they’” (*das Man*), which “assumes for itself, from the very outset, all possibilities and decisions of Dasein.” Yet, in an anxious awakening to the fact of one’s own inevitable death, a possibility of genuine individuation remained open: “there remains, at the ground of Dasein, an

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25. Marcuse, “Contributions,” 17.

26. *Ibid.*, 1–4.

understanding—however hidden it might remain—of its own authenticity.”<sup>27</sup> No doubt, Marcuse admitted, one could direct countless criticisms at Heidegger’s book. But these missed its lasting significance. “Conscious of its acute necessity, the basic question of all living philosophies is posed: what is authentic existence and how is it possible at all? After choosing many false paths, it is now once again evident that the meaning and essence of man is comprised in his concrete Dasein: ‘Man’s *‘substance’* is . . . [his] *existence.*’”<sup>28</sup> After briefly discussing *Being and Time*’s terms of care and temporality, Marcuse moved to the theme of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*), “the point in Heidegger’s phenomenology that is decisive for us.” The sections on historicity were crucial because, as Heidegger had pointed out, “a resoluteness toward authentic existence . . . is only possible as a ‘disavowal’ of the past, a past whose domination always stands in the way in the form of fallenness. This is, when taken in conjunction with the Marxian breakthrough to practical concretion, the theory of revolution.”<sup>29</sup>

Heidegger’s reflections on historicity contain a problem that has perplexed commentators on *Being and Time* for decades, and because this problem occupied Marcuse too, it is relevant for us here. The problem is who Heidegger’s authentic Dasein ultimately is. Up to the sections on historicity, the whole narrative of *Being and Time* seems to make a case for a non-conformist Nietzschean-Kierkegaardian individual, but the sections on historicity introduce themes that some have seen as anticipating Heidegger’s political turn in 1933. Here, Heidegger views authentic existence in collective terms, writing that Dasein “exists essentially in being-with-others, its happening is a co-happening and is determinative of it as *destiny*. This is how we designate the happening of the community, of a people.” And further, “Dasein’s fateful destiny in and with its ‘generation’ goes to make up the full authentic happening of Dasein.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, does Dasein refer to the individual person seeking her own

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27. Ibid., 12.

28. Ibid., 14; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 25 (153).

29. Marcuse, “Contributions,” 13, 18.

30. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 74 (436).

identity amid conformist social pressures, a reading made their own by French existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre? Or does it refer to the German people, humiliated in Versailles in 1919 and living between the pincers of Americanization and Bolshevization, a political reading that Heidegger in 1936 admitted was behind his Nazi turn?<sup>31</sup> This core problem of *The Heidegger Case*—the question of the relationship between his thought and politics—has been raised again by the *Black Notebooks*. But as this problem is not central to the present chapter, it can be put on hold until Chapter 3.

What does concern us here, however, is Marcuse's view, before 1933, of these sections and *Being and Time*'s ambivalence between individualism and collectivism. In general, Marcuse judged *Being and Time* as a work of heroic individualism. Yet, he also drew attention to and even quoted the collective lines quoted above. Instead of detecting in them nationalist or Fascist yearnings, however, I would argue that Marcuse saw them as a sign that Heidegger had captured something of what Marx had called social existence—that human beings are born into specific historical relations of production: "Recognizing the historical thrownness of Dasein and its historical determinateness and rootedness in the 'destiny' of the community, Heidegger has driven his radical investigation to the most advanced point that bourgeois philosophy has yet achieved—and can achieve."<sup>32</sup> Marcuse apparently thought that with these passages, *Being and Time* pointed beyond its predominantly individualistic ethos. Further, they could be seen as suggesting that the crisis of modernity could be solved neither by individual non-conformity nor by parliamentary politics, but only by a structural change at the institutional level of society. We can understand Marcuse's reasoning if we pay attention to certain similarities between Heidegger and Marx. When translated into more historical terms, Heidegger's derogatory notion of the inauthentic social world could be seen in terms of Marx's idea of ideological consciousness in

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31. Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, 111–154; Karl Löwith, "My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936," trans. Richard Wolin, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 142.

32. Marcuse, "Contributions," 15.

capitalism. Again, Heidegger's emphasis on care as more important than scientific knowledge was not that far from Marx's preference of transformative practice over mere interpretation of the world. Finally, both shared a trenchant criticism of certain elements of Western culture, a prophetic pathos of inaugurating a new historical epoch, and a negative attitude toward liberal-democratic traditions.

Up to this point, Marcuse's article had tried to argue for the relevance of Heidegger for Marxism. Next, he turned things around and pointed to Heidegger's serious weaknesses that threatened to vitiate *Being and Time's* promise of concreteness:

Within these discoveries lies the necessity—for a project with ambitions as radical as Heidegger's—of recourse to the decisive fact of the “today” in its full historical concretion. It was in and for this “today” that the buried truths were uncovered: it was not a new attempt to solve the traditional problems of *philosophia perennis*, but was rather a fate-bound reflection demanded by the threatening situation of contemporary human beings. In view of this “today” and of the recovery of these truths, certain questions thus needed to be asked and answered: what, concretely, is authentic existence? How is authentic existence concretely possible, if at all?<sup>33</sup>

It is here that Marcuse's meditations on *Being and Time's* key concepts begin to betray his ultimately non-Heideggerian, Hegelian-Marxist perspective. Marcuse certainly sympathized with Heidegger's concern with individual authenticity. “There are values of the solitary Dasein,” he conceded, “whose grandeur feeds, in large part, on the tragic heroism of the hopeless struggle against” frustrations encountered in the inauthentic social realm. But Marcuse did not let Heidegger's existentialism have the last word. In this context, Marcuse wrote what I take to be a clear sign of a Hegelian-Marxist dimension in his reading of *Being and Time*: “Here the question should be raised of whether and to what degree concrete historical forms of Dasein (social systems) can be valuable in and of themselves”—in other words, whether “historical forms of Dasein (social systems) necessarily make the realization of certain existential

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33. Ibid.

values impossible—suggesting, in turn, that the realization of these values would only become possible under a new historical form of Dasein.”<sup>34</sup> Marcuse pondered, then, whether authenticity could be predicated not on individual actions but rather on social institutions. Without being explicit about it, he clearly preferred the Hegelian idea of *Sittlichkeit*—an understanding of ethical questions as questions primarily of just social institutions—over Heidegger’s ethics of individual authenticity, where all social forms were equally bad. “One must undoubtedly oppose Heidegger’s attempt,” Marcuse insisted, “precisely at this juncture, to refer the decisive resoluteness back to the isolated Dasein” for the “resolute act is not just a ‘modification’ of existence as it has been—it is a shaping anew of all spheres of public life.” Authentic historical existence was, then, “only possible today as the act of the proletariat, because it is the only Dasein within whose existence the act is necessarily given.”<sup>35</sup>

Despite frequent references to Dasein’s historical concreteness, Heidegger had omitted the concern with the current historical world as a false interest in merely “ontic” contingencies. “How should this Dasein be more precisely defined for the concrete context?” Marcuse asked. Where “are the boundaries of the particular historical situation itself? And is the world ‘the same’ even for all forms of Dasein present within a concrete historical situation?” Marcuse’s answer to this question was negative: “Precisely in the most existentially essential behavior, no understanding exists between the world of the high-capitalist bourgeois and that of the small farmer or proletarian.”<sup>36</sup> Heidegger’s transcendental, quasi-Kantian gaze ignored differences between historical communities and social standings within them. Marcuse pointed out, again in a Hegelian-Marxist frame, that “here the examination must confront the question of the material constitution of historicity and in so doing achieves a breakthrough that Heidegger fails to achieve or even gesture toward.” Anticipating the problematic of his Hegel book—Wilhelm Dilthey’s debt to certain downplayed elements in Hegel’s

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34. Ibid., 22–23.

35. Ibid., 16, 32.

36. Ibid., 16.

philosophy—Marcuse continued that Dilthey “has gone further than Heidegger in this direction”; his meditations in *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (*The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*) “repeatedly find themselves in their analyses running up against the irreducibly material content of history.” The latter was no secondary empirical contingency that one could ignore but rather “the structurally final determination of Dasein.”<sup>37</sup> Marcuse’s article from 1929, “Über konkrete Philosophie” (“On Concrete Philosophy”), would highlight the same point in less technical language. The material constitution of historicity meant that different historical periods and societies could be “identified and distinguished through” their “particular economic and social structure.”<sup>38</sup>

Heidegger’s thought restricted itself to providing timeless wisdom about the human condition. A truly concrete philosophy, Marcuse claimed, would not stay content with outlining such abstract invariants but would try to comprehend actual history and current society. But what else was this than siding with Hegel’s claim that philosophy “is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*,” an insight freed from its idealist underpinnings by Marx?<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Marcuse’s modifications of *Being and Time* mean a step from Kant to Hegel. Heidegger understood his philosophy as a continuation of Kant’s search for a priori structures of reality in the human subject; the difference was that whereas Kant’s transcendental analytic looked for the categories necessary for objective knowledge, Heidegger’s existential analytic sought a priori categories, or *existentiales*, of temporal human life: being-in-the-world, care, historicity, authenticity, inauthenticity, and so on. Marcuse figured that even when Heidegger justly took the human being as an active historical agent as his starting point, he failed to capture specific historical realities—a failure

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37. Ibid., 16, 25.

38. Herbert Marcuse, “On Concrete Philosophy,” trans. Matthew Erlin, in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 49.

39. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

inherent in the very idea of transcendental philosophy. History consisted of unique, unrepeatable social constellations defined by the particular state of social relations between human beings. Again, the social-historical reality was not a fixed object permanently obstructing freedom like Heidegger's "das Man." In a Left-Hegelian manner, Marcuse emphasized that the social world could take qualitatively different forms, some of them more suitable to authenticity and human flourishing than others. This progress depended on whether empirical individuals perceived social institutions as permanently alien otherness that suppressed their true interests or as their own creations, as a realm of possible self-realization that would recognize the subjectivity of each and every one.

Playing Marx against Heidegger, Marcuse saw this insight into social existence as having been captured well in some of Marx's classic formulations. "All social life is essentially practical," Marx emphasized in the eighth Feuerbach thesis. "All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human praxis and in the comprehension of this praxis."<sup>40</sup> While this passage was well known at the time, Marcuse quoted two other formulations, which by 1928 had not yet acquired classic status in the Marx scholarship. "The presuppositions with which we begin are neither arbitrary nor dogmatic," Marx insisted in *Die deutsche Ideologie* (*The German Ideology*) published in 1927. They "include the true individuals, their action and their material conditions" and are "ascertainable through purely empirical means."<sup>41</sup> Attesting to the boldness of Marcuse's article was his claim that this description of historical materialism by Marx was methodologically phenomenological, not positivist as it came to be viewed in subsequent twentieth-century Marx scholarship. Finally, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*), also published in 1927, contained the famous aphorism: "To be radical is to grasp a matter by its roots. The root of humanity is, however, humankind

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40. Marcuse, "Contributions," 4; Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," 5.

41. Marcuse, "Contributions," 6; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), 31.



itself.”<sup>42</sup> The interpretation of just this passage, as we will see in Chapter 3, would become a crucial divider between Marcuse’s and Heidegger’s views of Marxism as a diagnosis of the crisis of modernity.

### Lukács’s Presence in Marcuse’s First Article

Marcuse later confirmed that Lukács had already been important for him before Heidegger. Not only had *History and Class Consciousness* detected more in Marxism than “a political goal,” it had also pointed “to a more or less implicit ontological foundation in the work of Marx.”<sup>43</sup> In 1930, Marcuse referred to Lukács’s book when he defined philosophy as “the scientific expression of a certain fundamental human attitude; indeed an attitude toward being [*Sein*] and beings [*Seienden*] in general, through which a historical-social situation often can express itself more clearly and deeply than in the reified practical spheres of life.”<sup>44</sup> And in a 1930 review of a survey of recent philosophy, Marcuse enthused that “finally, a long-standing and gross injustice is redressed.” Lukács’s book is “appreciated as a contribution to the development of Marxism that is essential and whose importance cannot be overestimated.”<sup>45</sup>

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42. Marcuse, “Contributions,” 4; Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Introduction*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 182.

43. Marcuse, “Theorie und Politik,” 12. See also the interviews with Douglas Kellner and Richard Wolin in the 1970s: Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 387–388n15; Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 258n18.

44. Herbert Marcuse, “Transzendentaler Marxismus?” in *Schriften*, Bd. 1, *Der deutsche Künstlerroman: Frühe Aufsätze* (Springe, Germany: Klampen, 2004), 445. Translation from Seyla Benhabib, translator’s introduction to Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, trans. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), xviii.

45. Herbert Marcuse, “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” trans. John Abromeit, in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 67. Marcuse’s interest in Lukács went back to the early 1920s when the latter would occasionally visit Marcuse’s and his friends’ (among them Walter Benjamin) left-radical literary group in Berlin. Marcuse’s 1922 doctoral thesis on the German artist novel drew on

Marcuse's 1928 article, however, does not refer to Lukács, who is mentioned for the first time in 1929 in "On Concrete Philosophy": citing *History and Class Consciousness*, Marcuse wrote that "Dasein exists in such a way that the very possibility of its 'reification' is only given at a specific historical stage of the 'fragmentation' of Dasein."<sup>46</sup> Even in the absence of explicit references in the 1928 article, however, Lukács's presence is betrayed by Marcuse's use of the term "reification"—a term that, as Martin Jay remarks, was never used by Marx. Marcuse writes, for instance, that the process of "'reification', 'depersonalization', 'alienation' discovered by Marx, finds its most extreme expression in capitalist society."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Douglas Kellner, Richard Wolin, and John Abromeit emphasize weighty philosophical similarities between Marcuse's reflections and Lukács's philosophically sophisticated criticism of capitalism.<sup>48</sup> For instance, in a key passage where Marcuse gave his own phenomenological description of authenticity, Lukács's presence is tangible:

Knowledge of one's own historicity and conscious historical existence becomes possible at the moment when existence itself breaks through reification. If, for a particular Dasein, the world is no longer given except as a life-space that must be provisioned; if it no longer exists in anything but this provisioning; if, through its existence, it creates the conditions through which the world is first possible at all as life-space—then it can know that the world is, in accordance with being, related to a provisioning Dasein and that all of the reified objectivities are things that have historically come to be in that they have been objects of provisioning by a Dasein living among them. *With the knowledge of the historicity of the world there comes to Dasein as well the knowledge of its own historicity*, which, precisely through its thrownness, can create a new world by means of the transforming act.<sup>49</sup>

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Lukács's pre-Marxist thought, which melancholically contrasted the modern era, emptied of an overarching meaning, with what he saw as the holism of ancient Greece. Kätz, *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 32–33, 46–49; Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 19–32.

46. Marcuse, "On Concrete Philosophy," 39.

47. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 109; Marcuse, "Contributions," 31.

48. Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 39–40; Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 145–146; Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 131–135.

49. Marcuse, "Contributions," 32. My emphasis.

This passage, with an unmistakable allusion to Lukács's stress on self-consciousness and in the spirit of Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," testifies to the fact that Marcuse understood Heidegger's idea of Dasein in terms of the ontology of labor not that of mortality. For Marcuse, authenticity required the overcoming of reification, the condition where human-made social institutions acted as autonomous things and were perceived as autonomous things. Reification could not be overcome by Heidegger's isolated individual who, by facing the inevitability of death, was pushed into a vague anxiety for her own authenticity. From the Hegelian-Marxist perspective, Heidegger's critique of the inauthentic social world, not unlike Weber's critique of the Western rationalization, grasped only the phenomenal level of modernity.

Dialectical method, in contrast, did far better, but only if it was not taken "as a 'rattling scaffold' or as a one-size-fits-all schema." Against misunderstandings of the dialectics, Marcuse argued that Marxism was not primarily about knowledge of empirical states of affairs but rather about ontological self-knowledge by human beings of themselves as objects *and* subjects of history. "The truths of Marxism," he underscored, "are not truths of knowing [*Erkennens*], but rather truths of happening [*Geschehen*]." Marcuse's ideas echoed Lukács's effort to demonstrate that the core of Marxism lay in its dialectical method rather than in its fallible historical predictions. As an acute understanding of the dialectics, Marcuse referred to Lenin's insight that "in order truly to know the object, it is necessary to grasp and to research it from every side," and moreover that "all of human praxis must be included in the 'definition' of the object." Similarly, Lukács had praised Lenin's discovery of Marxism's practical core and his activist politics as "the practical realization" of Marx's Feuerbach theses. Again, like Lukács, Marcuse stressed Marx's debt to classical German philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, who all emphasized the primacy of practical reason, even as they limited their insight to pure thought.<sup>50</sup>

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50. Ibid., 1, 18, 33; Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 1–5, 121–128, 221n60; Vladimir Lenin, *Sammelband*, in *Der Kampf um die soziale Revolution* (Vienna, Austria: Verlag für Literatur und Politik, 1925), 623.

Finally, Marcuse saw capitalism as an ontological rather than a merely economic crisis. It was “an endless sum of activities” that “seem to be detached from the human actors who, in turn, do not seem to live in them, but merely to be occupied with them; or—the ultimate absurdity—one sees here actors carrying out actions not to live, but for the sake of mere survival!”<sup>51</sup> What Marcuse here, following Marx, observed as the “transformation of personal powers into thingly ones” had been of seminal importance for Lukács who saw reactive behavior close to a universal feature of life in late capitalism. Lukács claimed that the “distinction between a worker faced with a particular machine, the entrepreneur faced with a given type of mechanical development, the technologist faced with the state of science and the profitability of its application to technology, is purely quantitative.” Different as these activities are, there was no “*qualitative difference in the structure of consciousness.*” The commodity structure “stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man.”<sup>52</sup>

Lukács’s presence in Marcuse’s first article was, then, notable. To be sure, Marcuse did not agree with Lukács’s politics. He rejected Lukács’s Bolshevism and his idea of the imputed “class consciousness.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, what possibly deterred Marcuse from endorsing Lukács more openly was the latter’s notorious self-criticism after the Soviet ideologues had condemned *History and Class Consciousness* in 1924, but even more, his support of Stalin’s attack on the social democrats as “social Fascists” in the late 1920s.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the Lukácsian imprint of Marcuse’s Freiburg writings was not missed by some of his contemporaries. Siegfried Marck, for instance, characterized “On Concrete Philosophy” as a combination of Heidegger and Lukács.<sup>55</sup> To give more historical depth to our reconstruction of Lukács’s impact on Marcuse, and

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51. Marcuse, “Contributions,” 4; Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 77.

52. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 98, 100.

53. Marcuse, “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” 66–67.

54. Arato and Breines, *Young Lukács*, 208–209; Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 119–120.

55. Siegfried Marck, *Die Dialektik in der Philosophie der Gegenwart*. 1. Halbband (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1929), 150n1.

thereby to his Hegelian-Marxist expectations about Heidegger's development in the late 1920s, we should take a look at another contemporary source, Maximilian Beck's 1928 review of *Being and Time*, which, as noted earlier, anticipated Lucien Goldmann's interpretation of *Being and Time* as a rejoinder to *History and Class Consciousness*.

### Marcuse and the Goldmann Thesis: Maximilian Beck on Heidegger and Lukács

Marcuse's article and Beck's review appeared in the first issue of *Philosophische Hefte*, founded by Beck.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the general success of the journal, its first issue had reached at least Husserl and Heidegger. Husserl thanked Beck for sending a copy, which he had "read with interest." Heidegger was informed by Karl Jaspers about the first issue and its Marxist reading of *Being and Time*.<sup>57</sup> Although Heidegger did not comment on this theme in his reply, it seems that he was well aware of the journal. In 1929, Marcuse reported to Beck that "concerning [Heidegger's] stance toward your review, I heard from Seidemann that he was furious, because several readers have used your summary as a substitute to avoid reading his book and, thus, have either not read *Being and Time* at all or only poorly."<sup>58</sup>

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56. Maximilian Beck (1887–1950), of Bohemian origin, had earned his doctorate in Munich in 1915 under the phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder. In 1933, Beck would emigrate to Prague and in 1938 to the United States where he would, among other things, write philosophical reviews for the Frankfurt School's journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 193; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 168.

57. Husserl to Beck, October 28, 1928, in Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana Dokumente; Bd. 3. Briefwechsel, Teil 2. Die Münchener Phänomenologen*, ed. Elisabeth Schuhmann and Karl Schumann (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1994), 9–10; Jaspers to Heidegger, July 8, 1928, in Martin Heidegger, *The Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence (1920–1963)*, ed. Walter Biemel and Hans Saner, trans. Gary E. Aylesworth (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2003), 101.

58. Marcuse to Maximilian Beck, May 9, 1929, the Herbert Marcuse Archive, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

The most important section in Beck's review was his examination of Heidegger's silence about his debt to contemporary thinkers and his attempt to create an impression that *Being and Time* appeared, as it were, out of nowhere. Unsurprisingly, Beck listed Husserl, Dilthey, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Bergson as the most important precursors of *Being and Time*. Remarkably, however, he added Marx to the list. Beck remarked that several common denominators between Heidegger and Marx, the "Theses on Feuerbach" in particular, were surprising, given Heidegger's quite un-Marxian general disposition. We have already encountered many of these denominators in Marcuse's first article: Heidegger's stress on Dasein's social constitution and Marx's on social being, Heidegger's destruction of the history of philosophy and Marx's view of philosophy as confrontation with problems arising from real life, and Heidegger's critique of detached knowledge and Marx's derision of mere contemplation. Finally, in tune with Marcuse, Beck declared that Heidegger's seemingly new ideas were anticipated a long time ago by Marx: "precisely those ideas, with which Heidegger wants to put philosophy on a totally new basis, have long since become part of the history of philosophy!" Where Beck went further than Marcuse, however, was in his explicit claim that "if the aforementioned similarities between Marx and Heidegger are to be seen as the latter's dependence on the former, then in all likelihood through the detour of Lukács." If this connection between *Being and Time* and Marxism seemed far-fetched, it was in Beck's view because Marx's philosophical contributions had been under-appreciated for so long. To be able to appreciate Marx as a genuine thinker, one had to comprehend Marx's Hegelian background, and this had become possible only recently, thanks to Lukács's pioneering work.<sup>59</sup>

With this proposal concerning Lukács, Beck anticipated Lucien Goldmann's famous claim in the late 1960s, according to which Heidegger had implicitly criticized Lukács in *Being and Time*. When Heidegger criticized what he saw as the persistent Cartesianism of

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59. Maximilian Beck, "Referat und Kritik von Martin Heidegger: 'Sein und Zeit,'" *Philosophische Hefte*, Sonderheft über Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 1 (1928): 5–10.

his contemporaries, he allegedly also attacked Lukács: “*Ontologically*, every idea of a ‘subject’—unless refined by a previous ontological determination of its basic character—still posits the *subjectum*” regardless of how forcefully one objects to “the ‘reification of consciousness.’” The existential analytic of Dasein was required if we wish to “ask what we are to understand *positively* when we think of the unreified *being* of the subject.” And toward the end of the book, Heidegger supposedly hinted at Lukács when he wrote that “there is a danger of ‘reifying consciousness.’ But what does this ‘reifying’ signify? Where does it arise?” On Goldmann’s account, Heidegger would not have been content with Lukács’s explanation of reification as a consequence of capitalism. Heidegger’s explanation would have claimed against Lukács that reification went back to certain philosophical choices, or twists of fate, made in early modern Cartesianism or even in Platonic antiquity.<sup>60</sup>

Two points in Beck’s observations are crucial for us. First, concerning my argument about Marcuse’s merely instrumental use of *Being and Time*, as Marcuse’s and Beck’s articles appeared in the same issue, they likely tried to avoid overlapping in their treatments of Heidegger. As Beck’s review had already engaged in a long criticism of *Being and Time*, Marcuse was saved from the task. That Marcuse’s criticism of Heidegger was rather brief should not be taken to mean that he did not already hold serious reservations about Heidegger’s philosophy in 1928. Thus, the increasingly metaphysical character of Heidegger’s 1929 publications did not come as a complete surprise to him. Second, Beck’s review demonstrates that the Heidegger-Lukács question was certainly in the air at the time Marcuse was reading *Being and Time* with his friend Seidemann in Berlin. Marcuse’s article contains lines that could be read as underwriting Beck’s proposal concerning Marx’s influence on Heidegger mediated by Lukács: “Here we return to the concept, first developed by Marx and newly interpreted by Heidegger, of

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60. Lucien Goldmann, *Lukács and Heidegger: Towards a New Philosophy*, trans. William Q. Boelhower (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1977), 27–29; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 10 (72), § 83 (487).

‘authentic historical existence.’”<sup>61</sup> “First developed” and “newly interpreted”—does Marcuse mean here merely that a thematic connection existed between Marx and Heidegger? Or does he mean that Heidegger had in fact been influenced by Marx and that Lukács had played the mediating role?

Ascertaining Marcuse’s ultimate views of Heidegger’s philosophical intentions is challenging. Most of the time, Marcuse seemed settled in the idea that Heidegger was trapped in metaphysics. For instance, he complained that the insight into the material constitution of historicity was “a breakthrough that Heidegger fails to achieve or even gesture toward.” And in his initial reaction to Heidegger’s new publications in 1929, Marcuse reported to Beck that there “is still little to say about this transformation because it is not yet completed. At its center stands the new Kant-interpretation, which will appear shortly. . . . Perhaps one can provisionally characterize the direction of this change as a tendency to transcendental metaphysics.”<sup>62</sup> But occasionally, Marcuse wrote as if he believed that Heidegger had not yet made up his mind that the metaphysical trajectory of his thought was more important than the historical one. This ambivalence in Marcuse’s expectations was visible in his 1930 review of a survey of contemporary philosophy, in which Marcuse conceded that perhaps the author, Siegfried Marck, was right, perhaps “the entire existential analytic in the first part of *Being and Time* is only a starting point for the elaboration of fundamental ontology and metaphysics.” But he appeared almost surprised, disappointed at least, when he continued in parentheses: “an interpretation that Heidegger himself appears to have adopted since his recent publications.”<sup>63</sup>

If Marcuse thought that Heidegger was still uncertain about the core message of *Being and Time*, why did he entertain the hope that this message might have something to do, of all things, with

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61. Marcuse, “Contributions,” 31.

62. Marcuse to Beck, May 9, 1929, the Herbert Marcuse Archive. Translation of this passage from Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 34–35.

63. Marcuse, “On the Problem of the Dialectic,” 66.



Marxism? When in 1977 Marcuse was asked about his opinion of Goldmann's claim, he doubted that Heidegger had ever read, let alone seriously studied, Marx or Lukács.<sup>64</sup> But was this disillusioned view by an ex-student also the view held by the young Marcuse in the Weimar era? Perhaps it was only after 1933 that he began to think that Heidegger the Nazi and Lukács the Marxist simply could not have anything in common. Beck's review suggests that the young Marcuse may have thought very differently about this matter. While nothing indicates that Marcuse would have seen Heidegger politically as a potential Marxist, Beck's review shows that, at the very least, Marcuse recognized the thematic parallels between Lukács and Heidegger as critics of reification.

What is more, Marcuse may also have thought that, historically, Heidegger's existentialism was a critical response to Lukács's theory of reification. If this was the case, then Lukács's theory could be sharpened, and defended, by grounding it in a phenomenological account of human finitude, but one based on labor rather than mortality. Indeed, concerning Goldmann's claim there is an interesting conjecture to be made. Marcuse's 1928 article seems to be an attempt to improve just those points in Lukács's theory that Heidegger supposedly had complained were missing from it. Heidegger complained that Lukács's omission of an ontology of Dasein prevented him from explaining the roots and possibility of reification. It also prevented Lukács from giving an ontological account of what authenticity beyond reification would look like. Did not Marcuse seek to fill in the gaps left by Lukács by grounding his theory of reification phenomenologically? Marcuse outlined the "fundamental situation" of Marxism, at the heart of which was the view of capitalism as a crisis of the human essence. As Lukács had argued, not only had human beings lost control of social institutions, but they also no longer recognized these as their own creations. To understand reification's phenomenological conditions of possibility, Marcuse sought to modify Heidegger's solipsistic ontology of mortality toward the ontology of intersubjective labor. Admittedly, in 1928, Marcuse's scheme was still sketchy, and he expressed his in-

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64. Marcuse, "Heidegger's Politics," 166–167.

tentions through a frequent demand to understand “material constitution” of historicity. In the Hegel study that Marcuse would start writing in 1929, he would articulate the ontology of labor in more detail through a painstaking reconstruction of Hegel’s notion of life.

## Conclusion: Toward the Hegel Book

Our foregoing analysis of Marcuse at his most Heideggerian should challenge the accusation of decisionism launched against him by critics such as Alfred Schmidt. Judging Marcuse’s 1928 article from the perspective of the mature Marx, Schmidt saw it as advocating abstract cultural radicalism and carrying a threat of irrationalism that came with Heidegger’s philosophy.<sup>65</sup> True, Heidegger’s radicalism fascinated Marcuse, and one may get the impression that Marcuse was closer to Heidegger than historical materialism because he did not make explicit his allegiance to the tradition of rational social criticism. This is something that Marcuse would do in his Hegel book, where he would see in the young Hegel’s meditations on life rational criteria with which to differentiate free and un-free modes of social life, not just individual actions. Robert Pippin aptly summarizes this rational yardstick crucial for Marcuse. What mattered in any historical period was “the extent to which subjects can and do understand the ‘totality’ of that period *as* their own historical doing, and thereby actively *assume* the role of subject. Practices, philosophies, and institutions which help make self-conscious and render concretely possible this ‘free’ subjectivity are what can be said to be essential, or the ‘truly’ historical elements” of human existence.<sup>66</sup>

I agree with Pippin’s reading of Marcuse’s Hegel book as an alternative, rational account of historical human existence. Yet, I disagree with his view of Marcuse’s first article, which he, following

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65. Schmidt, “Existential Ontology,” 51–63.

66. Robert B. Pippin, “Marcuse on Hegel and Historicity,” in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, ed. Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, Charles P. Webel, and contributors (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 78.

Schmidt, sees as unsuccessful in setting out rational criteria for social criticism.<sup>67</sup> No matter how preliminary Marcuse's article may be in its conceptualization of historicity in rational terms, it nonetheless aims toward this. What looks like an unsuccessful effort on Marcuse's part for Schmidt's and Pippin's philosophical reconstruction from hindsight appears to my historical reconstruction as a sign that Marcuse used Heidegger merely instrumentally, that he held it necessary to redirect Heidegger's philosophical revolution to an alternative direction of critical social theory. Authenticity was not about vague individual dissent but rather about a just society that regulated its development in a radical democratic fashion.

We have seen that in 1928, Marcuse already criticized Heidegger's way of viewing *Being and Time* as a contribution to metaphysics rather than to social criticism. To his dismay, Heidegger's new publications, such as the notorious inaugural address, *What is Metaphysics?*, seemed to lead to "the most intractable metaphysics."<sup>68</sup> John Abromeit and Gérard Raulet see this disappointment as starting a new phase in Marcuse's development toward Hegel. Certainly, Marcuse's subsequent writings examined Hegel rather than Heidegger. Yet, they only continued, I believe, on the most essential level, Marcuse's effort to interpret Heidegger's philosophical revolution from the perspective of the ontology of labor. Concluding his 1928 article, Marcuse noted that the "historicity of the world and its dialectical motility already permeate, as living truth, the externally rigid architectonics of Hegel's teachings." Marxism sought to concretize this Hegelian insight, not "to pose the philosophical problem in a new way, but rather because it was forced, out of the necessity of an existence that had become unbearable, to comprehend anew that which happens [*das Geschehen*]."<sup>69</sup> Bespeaking the continuity of Marcuse's writings is his letter to an ex-Heidegger student, Karl Löwith, where he described his Hegel study as "a

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67. Ibid., 74–80.

68. Siegfried Marck quotes Marcuse's own words in a response letter to Marcuse on April 1, 1930, quoted in Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 149n46.

69. Marcuse, "Contributions," 33.

necessary preparation for articulating the fundamental nature of historical happening [*geschichtliches Geschehen*].<sup>70</sup>

As already emphasized, the year 1929 by no means marked a simple breakup between Marcuse and Heidegger. Marcuse's letter to Beck contains an intriguing description of his ambivalent impression of Heidegger:

who lectures in an overflowing auditorium with at least six hundred listeners (mostly women) in brilliant lectures with unshakeable certainty, talking with that pleasant tremor in his voice which so excites the women, dressed in a sports suit that almost looks like a chauffeur's uniform, darkly tanned, with the pathos of a teacher who feels himself completely to be an educator, a prophet and a pathfinder and whom one indeed believes to be so. The ethical tendencies found in *Being and Time*—which aim at philosophy becoming practical—really seem to achieve a breakthrough in Heidegger himself, although, to be sure, in a way that is somewhat alienating. He is all in all too rhetorical, too preachy, too primitive. . . . Overall impression: he is a fine fellow, a lively personality, a genuine teacher, a true philosopher (if all this really belongs to philosophy) and that is today more than enough.<sup>71</sup>

Marcuse distanced himself from Heidegger's famous aura. He detested devotional students who "are completely drilled in his philosophy, know sufficient Aristotle—in order to be able to use the right vocabulary at an appropriate moment."<sup>72</sup> This letter, however, also discloses his ongoing appreciation of his supervisor. Not only did Marcuse continue to endorse the "ethical tendencies" of *Being and Time*, he also praised Heidegger as a teacher and a thinker. As we shall see next, if Marcuse found the metaphysical thrust of Heidegger's 1929 publications disappointing, he continued to find stimulation in Heidegger's lectures. Especially intriguing for Marcuse was Heidegger's entirely unexpected turn to Hegel.

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70. Marcuse to Löwith, July 28, 1931; quoted in Benhabib, translator's introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, xii.

71. Marcuse to Beck, May 9, 1929, the Herbert Marcuse Archive. Translation of this passage from Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 34–35.

72. *Ibid.*

## THE HEGEL DEBATE

### *The Pinnacle of Marcuse's Freiburg Years*

Hegel's ontological framework was originally governed by the *full ontological concept of life*. Included in this concept was also an analysis of historicity as the ontological character of life.

—HERBERT MARCUSE, *HEGEL'S ONTOLOGY  
AND THE THEORY OF HISTORICITY*

If reading the problematic of *Being and Time* into some other text is ever nonsensical, then this is the case with Hegel.

—MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *HEGEL'S  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF SPIRIT*

The publication of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's early writings and Wilhelm Dilthey's study on the young Hegel (*Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels*) in the first decade of the twentieth century laid the ground for a European-wide "Hegel renaissance"

in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> The neo-Hegelians saw in the young Hegel a concrete, worldly thinker better in touch with the harsh postwar realities than the later metaphysical system builder. Richard Kroner claimed that “Hegel converges with the contemporary needs of thought in anthropological questioning,” and Hermann Glockner declared that many of today’s most cherished philosophical demands—concrete thought, concern with the things themselves, and the philosopher’s substantial existence—had already been essential for Hegel.<sup>2</sup> Amid the social and political upheavals of the Weimar era, the popularity of Hegel, accompanied by the simultaneous decline of progressive neo-Kantianism, signified a loss of faith in the prospects of cultural modernity. Neo-Hegelianism reached its climax with the foundation of the International Hegel Society and the celebrations of the hundredth anniversary of Hegel’s death at major Hegel congresses in 1931. Outside the spotlight of the official festivities, representatives of the emerging subculture of Hegelian Marxism, Georg Lukács and Max Horkheimer, judged neo-Hegelianism as bourgeoisie’s irrational lust for meaning and planned for a shadow conference to discuss the connection between Hegel and Marx—a theme utterly alien to official academic conferences.<sup>3</sup>

By 1929, the waves of the Hegel revival had reached even the most unlikely location, Freiburg, home of the resolutely anti-

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1. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 4, *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels und andere Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des deutschen Idealismus*, ed. Herman Nohl (Leipzig, Germany: Teubner, 1921).

2. Helfried Hartmann, “Bericht über den II. internationalen Hegelkongress in Berlin (18. bis 22. Oktober 1931),” *Kant-Studien* 37 (1932): 317; F. J. Brecht, “Die Hegelforschung im letzten Jahrfünft,” *Literarische Berichte aus dem Gebiete der Philosophie* 24 (1931): 5. On the Hegel renaissance, see Heinrich Levy, *Die Hegel-Renaissance in der deutschen Philosophie* (Charlottenburg, Germany: Kant-Gesellschaft, 1927) and Hermann Glockner, “Hegelrenaissance und Neuhegelianismus: Eine Sekulärbetrachtung,” *Logos* 20 (1931).

3. Lukács to Horkheimer, November 23, 1931, in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 15: *Briefwechsel 1913–1936*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1995), 89–93. See also Siegfried Kracauer, “Philosophische Brocken: Vom internationalen Hegel-Kongress” (23.10.1931), in *Berliner Nebeneinander: Ausgewählte Feuilletons 1930–33*, ed. Andreas Volk (Zürich: Edition Epoca, 1996), 202–206.

Hegelian phenomenological movement and its new leader, after Edmund Husserl's retirement, Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had judged Hegel's idealist conception of history as the unfolding of spirit as an exact opposite of his own concern with human finitude, or *Dasein*. Yet, in his 1929 lectures on German idealism, Heidegger surprisingly conceded that Hegel too could be considered a thinker of Heidegger's own theme, human finitude. Herbert Marcuse followed Heidegger's lectures as he was working on his habilitation thesis, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, written in 1929–1930 and published in 1932. Inspired by Heidegger's lectures, and in tune with the neo-Hegelian focus on the young Hegel, Marcuse argued that the early Hegel understood by "life" not a feature of the world spirit but of finite human existence. "Any contribution this work may make to the development and clarification of problems," he paid tribute to his supervisor, "is indebted to the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger."<sup>4</sup>

In September 1930, Heidegger wrote to Marcuse from his famous hut in the Black Forest: "I have already gone through your Hegel work once in its totality here in Todtnauberg." Heidegger found Marcuse's study "very successful" and "as a preliminary work already worthy of publication." "In certain decisive points," however, he deviated from Marcuse's interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Both Heidegger and Marcuse criticized contemporary interpretations of Hegel as a Christian theologian, a mystical pantheist, or a precursor to the irrational vitalism of the 1920s. Both saw him as a rigorous philosopher, indeed as an ontologist, in the tradition of Western metaphysics, whose thought grew out from a painstaking confrontation with Aristotle and Immanuel Kant. Finally, both acknowledged that the phenomena of finitude and history occupied a considerable place in Hegel's thought. Yet, they drew very different conclusions about the centrality of these dimensions for Hegel's philosophy as a whole.

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4. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 5.

5. Heidegger to Marcuse, September 27, 1930, quoted in Peter-Erwin Jansen, "Marcuses Habilitationsverfahren—eine Odyssee," in *Befreiung Denken—Ein politischer Imperativ: Ein Materialienband zu Herbert Marcuse*, 2. enlarged edition, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen (Offenbach, Germany: Verlag 2000, 1989), 145.

As Heidegger's letter to Marcuse shows, besides considerable merits, he found serious problems in Marcuse's study. Eventually, these came to weigh more heavily, and Heidegger rejected Marcuse's study as a habilitation thesis.

Chapter 1 challenged the view that Marcuse's disappointment with Heidegger's 1929 publications, such as *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, made him lose all interest in Heidegger. The present chapter shows that Marcuse continued to draw inspiration from Heidegger's lectures. Contrary to John Abromeit's view that in 1929 Heidegger's and Marcuse's paths were simply moving in opposite directions—as Marcuse focused on Hegel, and Heidegger was preoccupied with finishing his radical interpretation of Kant<sup>6</sup>—I argue that Hegel was essential for both. Jacques Taminiaux and Catherine Malabou have called attention to the fact that in 1929 Heidegger unexpectedly called for a fruitful contestation with Hegel, allotting him a key place, alongside Aristotle and Kant, in the destruction of the history of philosophy outlined in *Being and Time*.<sup>7</sup> This chapter brings a historical dimension into Heidegger's preoccupation with Hegel, as the debate with Marcuse shows him struggling with the influence generated by his lectures, which inspired Marcuse, but also other younger German scholars, to scrutinize Hegel's thought from the perspective of modern existentialism.

Robert Pippin, Seyla Benhabib, and Andrew Feenberg have interpreted Marcuse's Hegel study as an alternative account of human finitude, or *Dasein*.<sup>8</sup> But because they, like previous research in general, have focused solely on Marcuse's appropriation of *Being and Time* without paying attention to Heidegger's lectures, they have overlooked the centrality of the Hegel debate in Marcuse's ill-fated Freiburg period. To anticipate Chapter 3 and the question

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6. Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 139–140.

7. Jacques Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, trans. and ed. Michael Gendre (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 145–159; Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005).

8. Benhabib, translator's introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, xxix–xxx; Pippin, "Marcuse on Hegel and Historicity," 68–89; Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse*, 43–50.



of Heidegger's motivations for rejecting Marcuse's study, it should be noted that *Hegel's Ontology* also contributed, if only implicitly, to the smaller Marxist current of the Hegel renaissance, which in the footsteps of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* tried to cast Hegel as a precursor to Marx. Many scholars have observed that *Hegel's Ontology* was written for a conservative philosophical faculty and a supervisor not known for harboring Marxist sympathies.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Marcuse could not mention Marx, or Lukács. To Karl Löwith, however, he reported that although the "*Hegel-Marx* question is not explicitly addressed" in *Hegel's Ontology*, he hoped "that his interpretation will throw some new light on this connection."<sup>10</sup>

The chapter begins with Heidegger's call for an *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel in his summer semester 1929 lectures on German idealism. After this, it turns to Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology*. Heidegger's letter to Marcuse shows that the first version was written by the fall of 1930. The final version must have been finished only during or after Heidegger's winter semester 1930–1931 lecture course on Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*) because in the published version, Marcuse commented on Heidegger's introduction to his course. The chapter concludes by examining Heidegger's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, where he expressed his dissatisfaction with recent readings of "the problematic of *Being and Time*" into Hegel—my claim being that Marcuse was the main target of this criticism.

## Heidegger's 1929 Call for a Contestation with Hegel

Shortly after his Davos disputation with Ernst Cassirer in April 1929, Heidegger began his lecture course on German idealism, which apparently caused him much joy: "Now I am lecturing for the first time on Fichte, Hegel, Schelling—and a world has opened up for

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9. Benhabib, translator's introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, xxx; Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 153; Abromeit, "Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Heidegger," 148n36.

10. Marcuse to Löwith, July 28, 1931, quoted in Benhabib, translator's introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, xii.

me again, the old experience that others cannot read for you.”<sup>11</sup> These lectures continued *Being and Time*’s critique of the sciences by complaining that they ignored the question of “what a particular human being as an acting being makes, can make, or should make of himself.” Heidegger claimed that rather than delineate the empirical characteristics of the human animal, it was urgent to inquire about “the being and time of this being, which we ourselves are.”<sup>12</sup> *Being and Time* had also claimed that Hegel’s idealism, indebted as it was to the impersonal natural-scientific notion of time, had nothing in common with Heidegger’s concern with the peculiar temporality of Dasein. Criticism along these lines had been commonplace since Kierkegaard’s polemic against Hegel. What was novel in *Being and Time* was the observation of a connection between Hegel’s narrative of the world spirit and a certain prejudice concerning time. Heidegger claimed that Hegel’s conception of time—the locus of which was the second part, “Philosophy of Nature,” of *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (*Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*) from 1817–1830—was the most radical formulation of the “ordinary” conception of time, which went back to Aristotle’s *Physics*. Here, time meant a quantitative succession of abstract now points, where the past and the future were merely now points that were no longer or had not yet arrived. This conception differed drastically from Heidegger’s mortal Dasein, for whom time was no indifferent continuum but something that passed away.<sup>13</sup>

By 1929, however, Heidegger’s tone had undergone a striking change. He no longer held Hegel as a vulgar epigone of the Greeks but rather praised his thought as a conscious consummation of Western philosophy. Hegel had masterfully brought possibilities contained in the Greek philosophy to their logical conclusion.

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11. Heidegger to Jaspers, June 25, 1929, in Heidegger, *Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence*, 119.

12. Martin Heidegger, *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart. Gesamtausgabe 28*, ed. Claudius Strube (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 1997), 12, 14. Hereafter cited as *German Idealism*.

13. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 82 (480–486).

Heidegger belittled the recent “restoration of Hegelianism (‘Hegel-Renaissance’).” By treating Hegel as a mystic pantheist or a Christian theologian, this “strange spectacle” blocked the path to an appreciation of Hegel’s greatness as a philosopher. “The groundlessness of today’s philosophy,” Heidegger bemoaned, “is nowhere so comprehensible as in the wide chitchat about Hegel, which becomes louder every day.”<sup>14</sup> The only reason to struggle with Hegel’s legacy, he claimed, was to treat him as a fundamental ontologist, as a questioner of being. To avoid a superficial comparison between Heidegger and Hegel, an acknowledgment was required that at stake was a contestation not only with Hegel but, because “the absolute idealism belongs to the *history* of our own Dasein,” with our own current selves<sup>15</sup> or, in other words, with our concern or indifference toward our own being and time.

On Heidegger’s account, Hegel’s understanding of being went back to Aristotle’s metaphysics, which consisted of a twofold questioning of “being as such” (ontology) and “being as a whole” (theology). Aristotle defined being as such by motility (*kinesis*) of potentiality (*dynamis*) and actuality (*energeia*). The highest or exemplary being was the most actual being: a being that had completely actualized its inherent potentialities. The ensuing hierarchy of beings, their place in the whole, was therefore determined by the extent of actuality reached. The ultimate horizon of Aristotle’s philosophy was, then, set by the ideal of permanent presence, and this ideal was reached in the most perfect fashion in pure thought, Logos.<sup>16</sup> “It looks indeed as if Hegel had destroyed every trace of his engagement with Aristotle,” Heidegger admitted. Yet, he underscored that “the connection between the two is not an external one.”<sup>17</sup> Hegel’s debt to Aristotle could be seen in that work where his account of being was most readily visible, *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Science of Logic*) from 1812–1816, which as a result of the dialectic of being and nothing introduced becoming (*Werden*) as the key category of “being as

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14. Heidegger, *German Idealism*, 209, 214, 333.

15. *Ibid.*, 231.

16. *Ibid.*, 23–35.

17. *Ibid.*, 335.

such.” While this category translated Aristotle’s motility, the categories of in-itself (*an sich*) and for-itself (*für sich*) translated potentiality and actuality. Becoming pervaded all of reality as beings were initially not what they could potentially be but were moving toward their proper actuality. Thus, finitude, in the sense of becoming and motility, was an integral part of their essence.<sup>18</sup>

In a remarkable contrast to *Being and Time*, Heidegger called attention to “the greatest and hidden secret of Hegelian philosophizing.” Hegel had in fact “discerned, recognized, postulated the positive, primordial function of the negative—but only to sublimate it . . . in the inner life of the Absolute.”<sup>19</sup> Heidegger thus conceded that Hegel had captured something of the essential finitude of being. Yet, in the same breath, he emphasized that Hegel always lost this insight under his idealist speculations. Heidegger’s more nuanced approach to Hegel was visible in his discussion of Hegel’s conception of time. Drawing, as in *Being and Time*, on the account of time given by the later Hegel in the second part of *Encyclopedia*, “Philosophy of Nature,” Heidegger noted how, for Hegel, the spirit is eternal, not subordinate to time. Yet, Heidegger quoted Hegel’s words that the “notion of eternity must not be grasped negatively as abstraction from time, as existing, as it were, outside of time; anyhow not in the sense which makes eternity come *after* time, for this would turn eternity into future, one moment of time.” Rather, Hegel’s eternity meant “the absolute present.”<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, the time of Hegel’s spirit was still far from the ecstatic temporality of Heidegger’s Dasein; as being-toward-death, individual Dasein’s time passed and was not reducible to a continuum of indifferent now points or to the objective course of world history.

Hegel’s debt to Aristotle was further visible in his concept of life, which Heidegger here discussed only in passing. He quoted *Science of Logic*, where Hegel equated life with the absolute idea: “the absolute Idea alone is *being*, imperishable *life*, *self-knowing truth*,

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18. *Ibid.*, 220, 259.

19. *Ibid.*, 260.

20. *Ibid.*, 211–212; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature, Vol. 1. Introduction, Foreword and Mechanics*, ed. and trans. M. J. Petry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), § 258 (231–232).

and is *all truth*. . . . Nature and spirit are in general different modes of presenting *its existence*.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, history was not, in the final analysis, about the struggles of empirical human beings but about the spirit falling into history and gradually overcoming this alienation and returning back to itself. Heidegger noted how Hegel’s conception of authentic being as imperishable life came to the “proximity of the ancient philosophy, according to which it is the determination of life, that in eternity life possesses itself, ‘*sein ganzes Sein zugleich habend*.’”<sup>22</sup> As with the concept of time, the concept of life did not refer to the being of finite human existence but rather to that of absolute spirit.

Even more pressing than Hegel’s Aristotelian baggage was to address the question of Hegel’s relation to Kant. This was urgent not only because Hegel saw himself as having surpassed Kant’s merely finite philosophy, but also because *Being and Time* had cast Kant as the only precursor of Heidegger’s idea of Dasein—a point restated in the Davos disputation with Cassirer and in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, published later in 1929. Heidegger challenged the decades-old neo-Kantian reading of Kant as an epistemologist of natural science. For Heidegger, Kant was a metaphysician who had revolutionized the Aristotelian tradition by taking as his exemplary being not some eternal entity but human existence in its finitude. For Heidegger, however, Kant’s emphasis on human finitude was visible not in the timeless categories of the understanding but in his idea of the transcendental faculty of imagination as the common root of both intuition and understanding. Unfortunately, the centrality of imagination was already suppressed by Kant himself in the second edition of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*) and even more so in the subsequent neo-Kantian tradition. Yet, when addressed from the perspective of the imagination, Heidegger claimed, Kant’s famous question “What is the human being?” appeared in a different light. No longer about the universal cognitive properties, this question now formed a plea for a hermeneutic

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21. Heidegger, *German Idealism*, 230; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Routledge, 1969), 825.

22. Heidegger, *German Idealism*, 341.

of historical human existence in its finitude.<sup>23</sup> As Hegel had already emphasized the fruitfulness of Kant's idea of transcendental imagination for his own thought, a quarrel with Hegel was necessary.

Here, we find Heidegger's most sympathetic words about Hegel. He admitted that in Hegel's early works, there were sentences "about imagination, which I myself could have copied from Hegel!" And yet, in the interpretation of this phenomenon, we have "the place at which the most poignant opposition becomes obvious and the scope of the confrontation is to be determined."<sup>24</sup> Why did Hegel appreciate the idea of imagination? Criticizing the Cartesian dualism of subjectivity and objectivity, Hegel thought that if absolute knowledge was supposed to be self-knowledge of reality of itself, then subject and object must already form an identity in the beginning. Hegel had to show that the absolute was already present in a non-perfect form in the early stages of human thought, that is, that the thinking subject was integrally connected to "outer reality." But had not Kant's Copernican turn already accomplished this by showing how the categories of understanding structured our perception of nature? Yes, but Hegel figured that understanding took place only in scientific knowledge and, more importantly, as a merely subjective capacity. The idea of imagination, in contrast, showed Hegel how the subject and the object were united more originally. Hegel "appreciates the transcendental imagination," Heidegger stressed, because he sees in it the "appearance of the absolute as identity." Heidegger, in contrast, approached the imagination "from the problematic of temporality as the fundamental-ontological problematic."<sup>25</sup> For Hegel, the imagination was the first stage of the absolute knowledge. For Heidegger, it served to illuminate our helplessly finite existence in the world amid beings that were essentially different from us.

Heidegger saw Hegel strengthening the fateful Cartesian omission of posing the question of being in connection with the question of what it means to be human. In his estimation, Hegel's absolute was a version of Cartesian *ego*, that is, a fixed, non-historical

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23. Ibid., 35–40, 198–203, 234–236.

24. Ibid., 200.

25. Ibid., 261–263.

subject who merely contemplates the world without itself undergoing essential change. Whereas Hegel saw himself as drawing the right conclusions from the premises of the Greek philosophy, Heidegger stressed that our relation to these premises should be about a more primordial questioning. This did not mean, however, that we would simply “sublate” Hegel in the manner he had sublated his predecessors. Rather than building on the Greek premises, Heidegger sought to question them.<sup>26</sup> He concluded his lecture course with words that look like his appropriation of Hegel’s dictum that philosophy “is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*”: “Every philosophy is the philosophy of its time and only thus is it *genuine* philosophy. And that means: philosophizing, whether it knows this about itself or not, must be so in order that it is there for its time when its time has come.”<sup>27</sup>

Heidegger acknowledged, then, the place of finitude in Hegel’s philosophy. Yet, he unequivocally separated Hegel’s ontological fundamentals from his own. Hegel understood being as life, but this life was not that of human beings but rather that of world spirit on its way to absolute knowledge. The same went for Hegel’s view of time, which was that of world spirit, not of mortal individuals. Despite Heidegger’s more nuanced view of Hegel, he saw a truly kindred spirit only in Kant. What Heidegger could not foresee, however, and what he soon came to regret, was that his call to an *Auseinandersetzung* with Hegel would inspire radically divergent interpretations of the role of finitude in Hegel’s thought, interpretations that, moreover, would challenge Heidegger’s self-understanding as *the* thinker of the human condition.

### Hegel’s Concept of Life: The Origin of the Problematic of “Being and Time”

In *Hegel’s Ontology*, Marcuse set as his task the understanding of what historical being (*Sein*) is. His point of departure was the con-

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26. Ibid., 262, 336–337.

27. Ibid., 344.

temporary philosophical theorizing about history, especially Wilhelm Dilthey's late work *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences* from 1910. In his epistemological earlier works, Dilthey had defended such human phenomena as meaning, purpose, and freedom from being reduced to causality of the natural sciences, but in his later works, he had come to recognize the presence of structural, non-purposeful factors in history as well.<sup>28</sup> Dilthey contended that understanding of history required concepts combining causality and agency, necessity and freedom, nature and history, or subjectivity and objectivity. The key concept he chose for this task was the concept of life (*Leben*). While this choice had earned Dilthey a reputation as an irrational *Lebensphilosoph*, Marcuse aspired to show that Dilthey was rather building, without explicitly stating so, on the ontological insights of the young Hegel.<sup>29</sup>

The reconstruction of Dilthey's debt to Hegel required criticism of the conventional image of Hegel as a metaphysician of world history, a view based on his later writings such as *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* (*Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*) from 1822–1823. For Marcuse, these works suppressed the earlier driving force of Hegel's thought, the concept of life, which as a concrete, historical, and intersubjective concept had guided Hegel's thought from *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (*Early Theological Writings*) of 1795–1800 up to *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Marcuse stressed that with this concept, Hegel had sought to overcome not only the Cartesian dualism in philosophy but also the larger cultural-political situation characterized by the alienation (*Entfremdung*) of individual and community. When

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28. Rudlof A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, Introduction to Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences, Selected Works, Volume III*, ed. Rudlof A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, trans. Rudlof A. Makkreel, John Scanlon, and William A. Oman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 4–6.

29. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 1–3. With this claim, Marcuse was apparently taking up Heidegger's discussion of Dilthey in *Being and Time*. Heidegger had praised Dilthey's efforts to grasp the ontological phenomenon of life but criticized him for his failure to anchor his effort phenomenologically; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 77 (449–455). Before adopting the term *Dasein* around 1923, Heidegger had used, among others terms, the term "life" to denote his idea of ecstatic sense of human existence; Kisiel, *Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 141, 147.



divorced from its originally theological context, Hegel's revolutionary concept could help us understand and appreciate Dilthey's meditations on the historical life.<sup>30</sup>

Marcuse mentioned Heidegger only twice in the entire study. Yet, his influence—which “is emphasized at the beginning instead of being indicated throughout with special references”—was palpable.<sup>31</sup> Echoing Heidegger's view of the interpretation of historical texts, Marcuse clarified that his goal was neither to reconstruct Hegel's philosophy as a whole nor to remain faithful to Hegel's own self-understanding but rather to pay attention to suppressed possibilities in Hegel's philosophy obscured by the tradition and even by Hegel himself.<sup>32</sup> Marcuse's concern was with Hegel's ontology, with “Hegel's thesis on the meaning of being in general.”<sup>33</sup> Heidegger's influence was pronounced in the claim that Hegel's thought was “governed by the question of being (*die Frage nach dem Sein*) and, in the final analysis, by the question of the most *authentic* form of beings.”<sup>34</sup> This ontological framework, centered on the concept of life, contained the seeds of both Hegel's better-known metaphysical tendency toward absolute knowledge and an under-appreciated historical tendency toward concrete human existence. Marcuse's point was to locate “a crucial point of Hegelian philosophy, where its guiding ideas meet and where the original and guiding idea of life is displaced by the later conceptions of knowledge or Spirit.” This interpretive task was challenging because in Hegel, these “guiding motifs are not isolated from and juxtaposed to each other but are brought into close struggle with each other and get intertwined.”<sup>35</sup>

Let us follow Marcuse's reconstruction of Hegel's development in *Hegel's Ontology*, which in its two parts moved, in chronologi-

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30. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 3–5, 9–14.

31. *Ibid.*, 5.

32. *Ibid.*, 3.

33. *Ibid.*, 325n2. Translation modified; unlike Seyla Benhabib's translation of *Hegel's Ontology*, for the sake of consistency, I will not capitalize the terms “life” and “being.”

34. *Ibid.*, 248.

35. *Ibid.*, 226.

cally reverse order, from the late Hegel's understanding of life as a moment of the metaphysical system of *Science of Logic* to Hegel's youthful treatment of life as a human category in *Early Theological Writings* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Like Heidegger in his 1929 lectures, Marcuse's scrutinized Hegel's philosophy as a critical encounter with Kant and Aristotle. Marcuse argued that Hegel acquired "a new concept of being through his critical confrontation with Kant."<sup>36</sup> He highlighted Hegel's philosophical point of departure in Kant's idea of the transcendental imagination: "Through this critical analysis of Kant Hegel succeeds in securing his own ground . . . and attains for the first time that concept of being which remains at the basis of all his future investigations and conclusions." In a glaring contrast to Heidegger, however, Marcuse stated that "Hegel's achievement assimilates the decisive gains of Kant's critique of reason and does not lose any of its attainments."<sup>37</sup> Why did Marcuse think this was the case? Because in Hegel's concept of life, the synthetic unity of subjectivity and objectivity is not "the 'empty identity' of the pure I-think" as in Kant. "Rather, it is a concrete, actual synthetic happening, to which 'manifoldness, body, matter or however one wishes to express it' already belong." In other words, "in the transcendental unity of pure self-consciousness Hegel includes the full being of *life*."<sup>38</sup> Hegel had won the idea of life by rejecting Kant's overemphasis on the categories of understanding and by stressing the fruitfulness of Kant's idea of imagination. Whereas Kant, in Marcuse's rather neo-Kantian reading, reduced the human being's relationship to the world to cognition, Hegel provided a far richer picture. Unlike Heidegger, Marcuse did not allot to Kant the role of the significant revolutionizer of the philosophical tradition but rather saved this role for Hegel, whose concept of life disclosed the multiple ways in which human beings related to their environment. "Grasped at a deeper level," Marcuse argued, "the Kantian problematic turns by

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36. *Ibid.*, 4.

37. *Ibid.*, 17, 23–24.

38. *Ibid.*, 27; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke. 1. Erste Druckschriften*, ed. Georg Lasson (Leipzig, Germany: Meiner, 1928), 239.

itself into universal ontology. Hegel acquires the ontological framework of his analysis through an examination of Aristotle's work."<sup>39</sup>

Kant's Copernican turn had influenced Hegel to come up with a new concept of being: the synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity. Drawing on Aristotle, Hegel's *Science of Logic* examined the general ontological characteristics of all reality by viewing this synthetic unity as characteristic of all beings. Stones, plants, animals, and human beings consisted of "unity in difference," of "equality-with-self-in-otherness." Every being *is* dialectical movement, becoming (*kinesis*) between its potentiality and actuality. Beings were not encapsulated in themselves but constituted themselves in relation to others as well as to their own possibilities. What they had been in the past and what they would become in the future were essential dimensions of their being here and now. This was Hegel's understanding of the ontological dimension (being as such) of Aristotle's metaphysics. The other dimension (being as a whole) concerning the highest being was visible in Hegel's view that what was essential in this movement was the capacity of a being to control its transformation from one state to another and in relation to other beings. In inorganic nature, this capacity was basically non-existent—movement here was mere change brought about by external forces—but in organic nature it was already more advanced. Yet, only in human beings was the capacity for active subjectivity reached. Human beings were conscious, living creatures who could remember their past and anticipate their future. They could change their life circumstances. Only in the case of human life could one say, therefore, that substance has become subject.<sup>40</sup>

In *Science of Logic*, however, Hegel treated life as a part of the general ontological system. The human being certainly occupied a central role even in this framework, yet not as a concrete existing being but rather as the subject of absolute knowledge, as the philosopher, who grasped conceptually the universal ontological structure of reality. Here, we come to Marcuse's main argument: whereas

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39. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 18.

40. *Ibid.*, 39–50, 55–58, 153–179.

*Science of Logic* held the knowing I as the highest form of equality-with-self-in-otherness, in Hegel's early writings, "the question of being as one of *unity* emerges out of a presupposition which is even more basic than the one uncovered in the *Logic*."<sup>41</sup> With this claim, *Hegel's Ontology* entered its second part, which analyzed Hegel's concept of life in its original fullness in *Early Theological Writings* and in its already constricted, but still explosive, status in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Marcuse stressed that Hegel's *Early Theological Writings* tied question of truth with "*human existence*" and set the world ontologically "in a significant relation to human life" as "the work of humans who develop themselves." Despite their theological bent—for Hegel, human life was finite not "pure life"—in these writings, Hegel reached the basic ontological categories of his later system (manifoldness, duality, unification) through an examination of human life in its historicity. Again, the exemplary being was already introduced here: "The most complete unification, the completed unity would also be the highest being. But which being fulfills this condition?" And here was the major contrast to the late Hegel: "True union, true love can only take place among the living who are equal in power and thereby thoroughly alive for one another; such love excludes all opposition." Authentic existence was to be found not in philosophical contemplation but in the life of the Christian community.<sup>42</sup>

"One can in no way say," Marcuse stated in a striking contrast to Heidegger, "that already here life is the basic category for a general ontology." For Marcuse, Hegel's later system was not yet the goal of these early meditations. And yet, as Marcuse had stressed early on, the two tendencies of Hegel's philosophy, the metaphysical and the historical, already showed themselves here. "In two instances where 'pure life' is mentioned," Marcuse remarked, "Hegel had first written 'self-consciousness' or 'pure

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41. *Ibid.*, 202.

42. *Ibid.*, 207–211; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 254, 258, 304.

self-consciousness.” This signified a “significant vacillation on Hegel’s part through which the two original and leading categories of his ontology [i.e., life and knowledge] had been weighed against each other!”<sup>43</sup> A major change in Hegel’s development occurred in his Jena period (1801–1807), when “one of the possible directions in which the concept of life could have been further developed is cut off.” In the *Early Theological Writings*, spirit had still “signified a mode of *life*.”<sup>44</sup> It had referred to a reconciled human community’s autonomy over natural and social constraints. But now, spirit came to refer to the cognitive mastery of reality by the philosopher.

Marcuse dedicated the remainder of *Hegel’s Ontology* to the most important of Hegel’s Jena works, *Phenomenology of Spirit*—Hegel’s “first and last attempt to unite as equally fundamental both motifs,” metaphysical and historical. On the one hand, *Phenomenology* pointed forward to the *Science of Logic* and its surrender of historicity to general metaphysics. On the other hand, it pointed back to *Early Theological Writings*, where historicity originated as a category of human life. What made this work crucial for Marcuse were its insights into social ontology. Sections such as “Independence and Dependence” and “Lordship and Bondage” aimed at ontology of human existence “in all its historicity and concrete happening in the world.” Marcuse cautioned that “in no way does this mean, however, that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* provides a phenomenological analysis of human life in its historicity.” Unlike in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, human beings are “not an independent object of analysis at all. Rather, the being of this form of life is viewed from the beginning as constitutive of the mode of being of absolute *Spirit*.”<sup>45</sup>

With these reservations in mind, Marcuse proceeded to identify those ideas of *Phenomenology* that could be developed in a more genuinely historical direction than the metaphysically inclined Hegel himself chose to do. We can here disregard Marcuse’s discussion of

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43. Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, 210–211; Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, 254.

44. Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, 219, 221.

45. *Ibid.*, 227–228.

the first section, “Consciousness,” and move on to the section “Self-Consciousness,” for it was in the opening pages of this section that Hegel examined the concept of life in a way that intrigued Marcuse. This section is also crucial for the Hegel debate because in his 1930–1931 lectures on *Phenomenology*, Heidegger would attack recent Hegel interpretations for their erroneous readings of these very pages.

Characteristic of life, Marcuse noted, was “to demand not only to be cognized but also to demand recognition. Qua life, it *exists* not only for a self-consciousness but for *another* self-consciousness.” He embraced the discovery of this “we-like process of life” as Hegel’s “greatest discovery and the source of a wholly new outlook on the character of the historical process (which nonetheless was soon to be covered over).” Noteworthy was the way Hegel’s phrase “I that is *we*, and we that is *I*” could be understood in two ways. When viewed from the perspective of Hegel’s later system, this talk of intersubjectivity referred to philosophers’ dialogue with their predecessors as the necessary element in spirit’s unfolding. But if viewed from the perspective of the early Hegel, it held the key to a conceptualization of societal alienation. Decisive here were “the existential categories (*Lebenskategorien*) of ‘desire’ and ‘recognition.’”<sup>46</sup>

Desire always contains two crucial elements, Marcuse emphasized: “life in its inessentiality *and* the longing for essentiality.” To achieve one’s authentic being, other people are needed. The desired freedom can be achieved only in what Hegel called “the struggle for life and death.” But the freedom gained at this early stage was unfreedom, as “the other is not sublated but simply annihilated.” What is required was a reciprocal and conscious recognition of each other. Here, the state of nature begins to transform into the dialectic of the master and the slave. This new phase signifies “animation of the (objective) world. Through ‘labor’ the “purely thinglike quality of objects is stripped away” and as “products of labor, they are transformed into forms of *life*.” Notwithstanding the unjust nature of this asymmetrical stage, the master “recognizes” the slave instead of aiming to destroy the latter. Moreover, eventually the slave no longer

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46. Ibid., 239, 246–247; Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 110.

perceives the world as an alien realm but finds itself there once more. Thereby, the slave's relationship to the world changes to a positive one. The world need not be antagonistic but can become reconciled.<sup>47</sup>

This happens in the transition from "Self-Consciousness" to "Reason." When read from the viewpoint of Hegel's historical tendency, reason (*Vernunft*) refers to the social world in its higher form. The world of reason comes about with the appearance of a just community. It is constituted by "free individuals who comprehend and generate their actuality as their deed" or, in Hegel's words, by "the deed of each and everyone." With the free people, we have reached the truth—what Hegel calls the "thing itself or the fact of the matter (*die Sache selbst*)."<sup>48</sup> Any talk of the absolute in this context, Marcuse stressed, can only refer to worldly action, not detached knowledge. Indeed, through the fact of the matter, the realm of truth turns out to be "the realm of the ethical [*sittlichen*]."<sup>48</sup> For Marcuse, Hegel's original, full concept of life reached its climax here.

As for Hegel's place in the history of Western philosophy, Marcuse shared Heidegger's view that the mature Hegel did indeed succumb to Cartesianism. But things were different with the early Hegel. Instead of seeing Hegel as the fateful endpoint of the Aristotelian tradition, Marcuse insisted that Hegel had developed Aristotle's insights further. "Nowhere in Western philosophy since the Greeks," he declared, "have life and its activity and the world of life as work and *pragma* been placed at the center of ontology."<sup>49</sup> For Marcuse, Hegel's grand achievement was his orientation of "the very meaning of being in a certain direction which then remains decisive in the development of post-Hegelian theories of historicity." For Hegel, being signified the concrete struggle of beings to make their potential actual: "imprisonment in the objectified world, the 'desire' to sublimate and to take back this alienation." Exactly these categories, Marcuse argued, were the ones "through which the spe-

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47. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 243, 253–261; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114–119.

48. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 269, 273–274; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 185, 212.

49. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 5, 284, 290.

cific historicity of human life is treated in post-Hegelian discussions on the subject of ‘history.’” Returning to the opening question of his study, the status of Wilhelm Dilthey’s meditations on history, Marcuse concluded that Dilthey, rather than a pioneer of modern irrational *Lebensphilosophie*, “continues the philosophy of life in most profound fashion from that point on where Hegel has abandoned it.”<sup>50</sup>

### Heidegger’s Lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: Critique of Marcuse?

We saw that in September 1930, Heidegger wrote to Marcuse about his ambivalent feelings about *Hegel’s Ontology*. At the time, Heidegger was beginning his winter semester 1930–1931 lecture course, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the introduction, Heidegger spent a considerable amount of time in arguing that the function of *Phenomenology* in Hegel’s system changed significantly over the years. Initially envisioned as the first part of the system, in the final *Encyclopedia*, it appeared as a mere subsection of Philosophy of Spirit.<sup>51</sup> Implied in Heidegger’s observation was the conviction that despite *Phenomenology’s* rich sections on historical existence, these could not be taken as the main motif of Hegel’s philosophy.

Interestingly, Marcuse’s only comment on Heidegger in *Hegel’s Ontology*, besides the dedication, is on just these observations about *Phenomenology*. Describing the two antagonistic tendencies structuring Hegel’s philosophy, he wrote that this ambiguousness first became visible in the lessened status of *Phenomenology* at the time Hegel was writing *Science of Logic*. Marcuse added in parentheses that “Heidegger first drew attention to the complete significance of this change in his lectures during the winter of 1930–31.”<sup>52</sup> This reference to Heidegger tells us, first, that Marcuse revised the initial draft of *Hegel’s Ontology*, which Heidegger had commented

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50. *Ibid.*, 245, 298, 319.

51. Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1–42.

52. Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, 201.



on in September 1930. But it also suggests that the core disagreement in the Hegel debate between Heidegger and Marcuse is visible in their divergent interpretations of *Phenomenology*. The question is whether this work, especially the opening pages of the section “Self-Consciousness,” supports the view that Hegel’s philosophy contained only one tendency—a metaphysical one—as Heidegger maintained, or two competing tendencies—metaphysical and historical—as Marcuse claimed.

In his lectures on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Heidegger focused almost entirely on its first part, “Consciousness,” and only in the end did he reach the important transition to “Self-Consciousness,” where Hegel examines the concept of life. Jacques Taminiaux, however, notes that in this lecture course, Heidegger views this transition as the “true center of gravity” of Hegel’s thought.<sup>53</sup> It is, then, in the opening pages of “Self-Consciousness”—and not in *Science of Logic* as was still the case in 1929—where Heidegger now thinks Hegel’s most original insights as well as most fateful blind spots are to be found. What interests us in Heidegger’s lecture course is its last section, titled “The new concept of being as inhering-in-itself, life. Being and time in Hegel—*Being and Time*.” It is here that Heidegger expressed his criticism of recent readings of his own problematic of being and time into Hegel:

Several repeated attempts have recently been made to prove that the problematic of “being and time” already exists in Hegel. This exercise is perfectly acceptable as long as the aim is energetically to find fault with my presumed originality. . . . The energetic efforts to prove that *Being and Time* is an old story should be a wholesome and moderating factor for its author. This moral concern for the modesty of the author is entirely acceptable. It is, however, quite different and decisive whether with such devious tricks we do Hegel a favor or even honor him. This must, of course, be called into question. If reading the problematic of *Being and Time* into some other text is ever nonsensical, then this is the case with Hegel.<sup>54</sup>

Heidegger made it plain here that by calling for a fruitful contestation with Hegel, he had not thereby meant that one should simply

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53. Taminiaux, *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, 157.

54. Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 144–145.

turn Hegel into Heidegger. He was adamant that his own “thesis that *the essence of being is time* is the exact opposite of what Hegel tried to demonstrate in his entire philosophy.” For Hegel, the reverse was true: “being is the essence of time—being, that is, as infinity.” Heidegger continued by commenting on Hegel’s reflections on life in *Phenomenology*. By life, Hegel understood “the simple essence of time, which, in this equality with itself, has the pure shape of space.” This cryptic formulation, Heidegger noted, was “one of those many compressed statements made in the *Phenomenology* which are the results of entire treatises and investigations written in the Jena period.” And what was the theme of Hegel’s Jena writings, he asked? Philosophy of nature.<sup>55</sup>

It must be pointed out emphatically that, from the beginning and throughout his entire philosophy, *time and space* are for Hegel *primarily* problems of the *philosophy of nature*; this conforms entirely with the tradition. And whenever Hegel speaks about time in connection with the problematic of history and even of spirit, this happens each time in a formal displacement of the concept of time beyond the philosophy of nature into the realms of history and spirit. Conversely, the problematic of time is not primarily developed in terms of history and even spirit, for the simple reason that this would run as counter to Hegel’s basic intention as anything could.<sup>56</sup>

This passage went against everything Marcuse had stated about Hegel’s suppressed historical tendency. To be sure, Marcuse drew similar conclusions as Heidegger from the above passage in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. “We must keep in mind that time is only the ‘expression’ of a determinate ‘form’ through which Spirit ‘appears’. It is one form of its appearance alongside the other, represented by space.” He even cautioned that his analysis in *Hegel’s Ontology* “should not lead us to overemphasize the role of time in Hegel’s ontological framework.”<sup>57</sup> For Marcuse, however, *Phenomenology* was a work in which Hegel’s two tendencies were intimately entwined; some elements pointed toward the later system, others

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55. Ibid.; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 106.

56. Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 144.

57. Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, 233, 303.

backward to Hegel's early writings. The goal of *Hegel's Ontology* had been to disclose a suppressed tendency in Hegel's philosophy. This tendency came into its own in Dilthey's meditations on history, which saw human life as "characterized through a specific kind of 'temporality.'" This was genuinely historical time, not a succession of indifferent now points. For Dilthey, "the world of historical life," Marcuse underscored, "exists and is actual in each case only as the world of a past historical form of life. The future of every historical present is based on the past which sustains itself as actuality." Characteristic of Dilthey's view of human history was "the specific mode in which life *behaves* within and toward this temporality, thus *relating itself to it*." The revolutionary implications of this conception of life reached far. As Dilthey himself put it, life was "not only the beginning point of the human sciences but of *philosophy* as well."<sup>58</sup>

But had not Heidegger already provided an image of the human being as a temporal, worldly creature thrown into the natural environment and cultural world of historical heritage? Why was Marcuse not satisfied with this image? The answer becomes clear when we recall his criticism of *Being and Time's* lack of social ontology in his 1928 "Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism." Heidegger's view of the social-historical world as a permanently inauthentic realm was the prejudice sanctioning his ignorance of empirical observation as ontic superficiality. In contrast, Hegel's idea of life contained creative connotations. Beyond the economic production of goods, humans also produce the institutional structures of their shared world—in Dilthey's terms, the "objectifications of their life." Human life created qualitatively different situations and institutions that required contextual scrutiny, a dialectical rather than a transcendental approach. Decisive in Hegel's idea of life was that as an intersubjective category, it provided Marcuse with an account of human finitude with a rational yardstick to differentiate free and unfree social institutions, not just individual acts.

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58. Ibid., 319, 321 (Marcuse's emphasis); Wilhelm Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences, Selected Works, Volume III*, ed. Rudlof A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, trans. Rudlof A. Makkreel, John Scanlon, and William A. Oman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 249, 258, 153, 280.

How do we know that Marcuse was the target of Heidegger's criticism of projections of *Being and Time* to Hegel? A 1931 survey of recent Hegel literature by F. J. Brecht is instructive. Brecht noted that owing to the challenge posed by Heidegger's philosophy, several thinkers had tried to face it by turning to Hegel. But unlike the Hegelians of the previous century, these neo-Hegelians of the 1920s searched in Hegel for "solicitude not for metaphysics of culture, but for that of existence." Rather than refer, however, to such major neo-Hegelians as Richard Kroner, who overlooked the fact that Hegel's philosophy is "constituted by the most radical prompting to the ontological fundamentals," Brecht referred to younger scholars who owed their methodological approach to Heidegger. He praised Curt Schilling-Wollny's 1929 work, "the most philosophical of all books written about Hegel," for making use of "the possibilities of interpretation in history of philosophy forced open by Heidegger." Again, Fritz Ephraim's 1928 book on the young Hegel's concept of freedom deserved appreciation because, "entirely in accordance with Heidegger," it "refers the problematic of freedom, in the final analysis, to the individual as individual in his concrete situation."<sup>59</sup> In addition, another review mentioned Justus Schwarz's 1931 dissertation and its application of "Heideggerian concepts to its interpretation of Hegel's early writings."<sup>60</sup>

We should definitely add Marcuse to the list. Edmund Husserl, whose apartment Marcuse would visit periodically while writing his

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59. Brecht, "Die Hegelforschung," 5, 16, 20–24; Curt Schilling-Wollny, *Hegels Wissenschaft von der Wirklichkeit und ihre Quellen, Bd 1. Begriffliche Vorgeschichte der Hegelschen Methode* (Munich, Germany: Ernst Reinhardt, 1929); Fritz Ephraim, *Untersuchungen über den Freiheitsbegriff Hegels in Seinen Jugendarbeiten, Erster Teil*, ed. Karl Jaspers (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1928).

60. Johannes Hoffmeister, "Bericht über neue Hegel-Literatur," *Kant-Studien* 39 (1934): 90; Justus Schwarz, *Die anthropologische Metaphysik des jungen Hegel* (Hildesheim, Germany: Fikuart, 1931). In 1928, Heidegger wrote to Jaspers about "Dr. Justus Schwarz" who "has studied and worked with me for a series of semesters. . . . He is working on Hegel and would presumably like to speak with you about including his work in your collection. In my opinion, his dissertation isn't good enough for this. On the other hand, a later piece of work, of which I have seen a small part, would merit consideration. As to what kind of philosophical ability stands behind it, I can't say." Heidegger to Jaspers, June 11, 1928, in Heidegger, *Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence*, 99.

study, praised *Hegel's Ontology's* thoroughness and lucidity, but expressed his disappointment that Marcuse's meditations on Hegel, like those of the younger philosophical generation in general, "move indeed on anthropological grounds."<sup>61</sup> Another commentator described *Hegel's Ontology* as a "bold, somewhat violent" book, which is in its "approach to the problems and concept-formation indebted to Heidegger" but which in "its philosophical position and contents lives thoroughly off Hegel."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Marcuse's soon-to-be colleague, Theodor W. Adorno, called attention to the fact that "Marcuse appears to depart decisively from Heidegger's public teaching, which he otherwise represents with the strictness of a disciple."<sup>63</sup> What is more, elsewhere, Adorno implied that *Hegel's Ontology* may have been the most radical representative of the entire Hegel renaissance. If Heidegger had made openings to the second, ontological phase of the Hegel revival, it was only in Marcuse's "radical ontological interpretation" that Hegel's thought "eventually changes into the neo-ontological problematic itself."<sup>64</sup>

What took off as a fruitful collaboration on the "ontological fundamentals" of Hegel's dialectics ended up in Heidegger's rejecting Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology*. Was this a forgone conclusion? Marcuse dedicated his book to Heidegger, implying that without his supervisor's stimulating openings, his own contributions to Hegel scholarship would have been unthinkable. Yet, Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel as the originator of the problematic of "being and time" ended up pulling the rug from under Heidegger's own self-understanding as *the* thinker of human finitude.

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61. Husserl to Marcuse, January 14, 1932, in Edmund Husserl, *Husserliana Dokumente; Bd. 3. Briefwechsel. Teil 4, Die Freiburger Schüler*, ed. Elisabeth Schuhmann and Karl Schumann (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1994), 401; Kätz, *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 85.

62. Hoffmeister, "Bericht über neue Hegel-Literatur," 91.

63. Theodor W. Adorno, Review of *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit*, by Herbert Marcuse, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1 (1932): 409–410.

64. Theodor W. Adorno, Review of *Das Grundproblem der Hegelschen Philosophie. I. Bd.: Die Entdeckung des Geistes*, by Theodor Steinbüchel, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 2 (1933): 107–108.

## STAKES OF THE HEGEL DEBATE

### *Davos, Marxism, and the Black Notebooks*

[The Nazi ideologue Alfred Baeumler] doesn't consider communism to have been repelled at all. . . . The whole Jewish intellectual world is going over to it now; the *Berliner Tageblatt* has been a communist paper for a year now. Behind it is the systematic dialectic founded upon Hegel.

—MARTIN HEIDEGGER TO ELFRIDE HEIDEGGER  
JUNE 9, 1932

In September 1930, the Freiburg philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote to his graduate student Herbert Marcuse to report his mixed feelings about the latter's habilitation study on Hegel. Heidegger applauded Marcuse's study as a "very successful" work, but then added that "in certain decisive points" he disagreed with his student's interpretation of Hegel.<sup>1</sup> In the same month, an event of far-reaching

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1. Heidegger to Marcuse, September 27, 1930, quoted in Jansen, "Marcuses Habilitationsverfahren," 145.

consequences for the future of Heidegger, Marcuse, and Germany occurred. On September 14, the Nazis won their first major electoral victory, increasing their seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107. Three years later, Heidegger would cast his lot with Adolf Hitler, while the German Jewish Marcuse would emigrate to the United States with his new Frankfurt School companions. Yet, already before 1933, Heidegger, who initially had endorsed Marcuse's Hegel study, decided to reject it. Why? Drawing on sources unavailable to previous commentators, the chapter argues that the fate of Marcuse's study was related to Heidegger's ideological transformation in the late Weimar era.

The testimonies Marcuse himself later offered on the fate of his *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, written in 1929–1930 and published in 1932, are contradictory. In a discussion with Jürgen Habermas and others, he claimed that he had withdrawn the work from the formal academic procedures in 1932 after sensing that, for a Marxist Jew, Germany's political climate offered few chances for habilitation. In private, however, Marcuse told Habermas that Heidegger had rejected the work for reasons unknown to him.<sup>2</sup> This last testimony seems the most convincing one. In 1989, Peter-Erwin Jansen sought to clarify what he called Marcuse's "habilitation odyssey" by drawing on Marcuse's correspondence with Heidegger and Kurt Riezler, the rector of the University of Frankfurt. In March 1931, Heidegger was still willing to write a letter of recommendation when Marcuse applied for funding from the Emergency Association of German Science (Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft). Yet, Heidegger's objections to Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology* turned out to be so severe that in the next fall, Marcuse tried to negotiate with Riezler to habilitate in Frankfurt, eventually bringing him into contact with Max Horkheimer's circle at the Frankfurt-based Institute for Social Research.<sup>3</sup> A 1932 letter from Edmund Husserl to Riezler testifies further to Heidegger's key role; Husserl wrote that Heidegger had blocked Marcuse's

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2. Marcuse, "Theorie und Politik," 12; Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 406n1.

3. Jansen, "Marcuses Habilitationsverfahren," 146–147.

habilitation. In 2005, Richard Wolin cited this letter to surmise that for one reason or another, Heidegger had objected to *Hegel's Ontology*, after which Marcuse decided not to submit the work officially.<sup>4</sup>

It seems, then, that even if Marcuse in 1932 perceived Germany's political climate as hostile to his academic plans, in the preceding years, it was only the atmosphere in Freiburg—Heidegger, that is—that proved unwelcoming. But why did Heidegger reject *Hegel's Ontology*, which was not without merits for him? A philosophical disagreement looks like the most obvious reason. But given Marcuse's Marxist sympathies and Heidegger's anti-Marxist sentiments, a political difference has also been offered as an explanation. Indeed, in their bitter exchange after the war, Heidegger replied to Marcuse's inquiries about his Nazism by listing anti-communism among his main motives.<sup>5</sup> Seyla Benhabib notes that Marcuse's "proto-Marxist reading of Hegel" in *Hegel's Ontology* "hardly escaped Heidegger's acute knowledge of and sense for the history of philosophy." Finally, Wolin concludes that faced with contradictory evidence, we cannot say for certain what happened. Still, he suggests that it is likely that Heidegger's anti-communism played a role.<sup>6</sup>

I believe we can learn a great deal more about the question by examining it in view of recently published sources in *The Heidegger Case*, the debate over the link between Heidegger's thought and politics. The most important of these are Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* from 1931 to 1948. Besides toxic anti-Semitism, they reveal that his interest in Nazism goes back to 1930. Apparently alluding to the Nazis' electoral victory in 1930, Heidegger wrote around

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4. Richard Wolin, "Introduction: What Is Heideggerian Marxism?" in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xxi–xxii. Husserl's letter was discovered by Rolf Wiggershaus in the 1980s; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 104.

5. Heidegger to Marcuse, January 20, 1948, in "An Exchange of Letters: Herbert Marcuse and Martin Heidegger," trans. Richard Wolin, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 162.

6. Benhabib, translator's introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, xxx; Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 162.



1939 that “thinking purely in ‘metaphysical’ (i.e., being-historical) terms, in the years 1930–1934 I held National Socialism as the possibility of a transition to a second beginning and gave it this interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> Taken together with Heidegger’s later anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic remarks on Marcuse, the notebooks and other under-appreciated sources give us three lines of interpretation for his decision to reject *Hegel’s Ontology*: philosophical objections, anti-Marxism, and anti-Semitism.

Why is this relevant? *Hegel’s Ontology*’s important place in the history of the Frankfurt School should not be under-appreciated. It was Marcuse’s calling card to Horkheimer’s circle, where Theodor W. Adorno took notice of its promising deviation from Heidegger’s views. Moreover, the examination of Heidegger’s perspectives on *Hegel’s Ontology* illuminates the complex personal relationship between him and Marcuse, as well as the concrete consequences of their divergent conceptions of the problematic of “being and time.” Most importantly, Heidegger’s remarks on Marcuse, Hegel, and Marx over the years support my main argument that Marcuse’s Freiburg writings formed a continuous effort to bend *Being and Time* toward a critical theory and, thereby, to challenge Heidegger’s own understanding of the meaning of his major work. After demonstrating the Marxist motivations behind *Hegel’s Ontology*, the chapter examines the three lines of interpretation—philosophical, political, and racial—for Heidegger’s decision to reject Marcuse’s study.

### Marcuse’s Philosophical Grounding of Marxism in Hegel’s Ontology

The Heideggerian vocabulary of *Hegel’s Ontology* caused leftist reviewers to raise suspicions about Marcuse’s political preferences. Georg Lukács, for instance, judged Marcuse’s book as a piece of ir-

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7. Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938–1939)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 95, ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2014), 408.

rational neo-Hegelianism. Strengthening these suspicions was the fact that many of Marcuse's articles appeared in the official organ of the mainstream Social Democrats, *Die Gesellschaft*, or in mainstream academic journals such as Max Weber and Werner Sombart's *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*.<sup>8</sup> But had Lukács consulted Marcuse's openly Marxist writings from this period, he would have realized that Marcuse's aim was not to lump Hegel together with the modern philosophy of life. Indeed, there is little doubt that *Hegel's Ontology* belonged to the Marxist side of the Hegel renaissance. Marcuse's two articles from 1931 are a clear testimony of this.

In "Das Problem der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit" ("The problem of historical reality"), Marcuse argued that besides Wilhelm Dilthey, Marx should also be seen as Hegel's heir. While Dilthey viewed political, economic, and cultural phenomena as "historical life expressions" or as "manifestations of life," Marcuse pointed to equivalent ideas in Marx's works such as *German Ideology*: "To see the significance of these issues, disclosed once more by Dilthey, in connection to the *Marxian* problematic, one should see Marx's formulation of categories as 'forms of existence', [as] 'existential determinations.'"<sup>9</sup> Marcuse gave an even clearer proof of Marx's centrality for *Hegel's Ontology* in "On the Problem of the Dialectic." He wrote: "Many of Hegel's later philosophical concepts are already present in his early theological writings. Not a mystical conviction, but a critical confrontation with ancient (especially Aristotelian) metaphysics, carried out in a rigorously conceptual manner, gives Hegel's system its inner form. I have attempted to work out these connections in an interpretation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic* that will be published soon."<sup>10</sup> Nowhere is the continuity of Marcuse's Freiburg writings more readily

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8. Barry Kätz's conversation with Leo Löwenthal; Kätz, *Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 84; Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980), 565–566.

9. Herbert Marcuse, "Das Problem der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit," in *Schriften, Bd. 1, Der deutsche Künstlerroman: Frühe Aufsätze* (Springe, Germany: Klampen, 2004), 480n7, 472–474.

10. Marcuse, "On the Problem of the Dialectic," 69–70.

visible than in the following passage, which leaves little doubt what he had before his eyes in *Hegel's Ontology* as he set to reconstruct Hegel's intellectual path as a vacillation between historical and metaphysical tendencies. Marcuse here also connects Hegel's key concept of life to Marx:

A sufficiently in-depth interpretation of Marx would have to show that his critique of Hegel starts at exactly the point where Hegel began falling away from the original and full concept of history. Marx recovered the original concept of history and the essential character of historical life, but not—and this *separates his work decisively not only from Hegel but from all philosophy*—to establish a philosophical determination of life within all being. Instead Marx undertakes an analysis of the contemporary historical situation of this life with the aim of a revolutionary upheaval.<sup>11</sup>

In *Hegel's Ontology*, Marcuse had bemoaned how the focus of nineteenth-century Hegel scholars on Hegel's later writings had obstructed an appreciation of his more concrete early meditations on human life. Here, he added an important layer to this criticism by claiming that this selectivity has “concealed the internal relationship between Hegel and Marx to the present day.”<sup>12</sup> Marcuse's two articles from 1931 thus clearly demonstrate that *Hegel's Ontology* was shot through with Marxist motives.

Hence, I disagree with Gérard Raulet's interpretation of *Hegel's Ontology* as a sign of political disillusionment, that is, as a leap from real world to metaphysical speculation for its own sake.<sup>13</sup> While this charge may apply to the later Marcuse's turn away from activist New Left politics toward aesthetic concerns in the 1970s, I do not think that it applies to the early Marcuse. My claim is not so spectacular if we recall that Marcuse's move from Berlin to Freiburg in 1928 did not reflect his heightened political expectations about the Weimar left, but rather his view that Heidegger's *Being and Time* could provide a lacking philosophical supple-

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11. Ibid., 84. Translation modified.

12. Ibid., 83.

13. Raulet, “Marcuse's Negative Dialectics of Liberation,” 116–117, 122–125.

ment to Marxism. Again, the abstract nature of *Hegel's Ontology* was due both to its philosophical subject matter and to academic constraints rather than to, as Martin Jay suggests, Marcuse's interest in Hegel's metaphysical identity theory for its own sake.<sup>14</sup> From the start, Marcuse had shown no interest in *Being and Time's* *Seinsfrage*, only in the existential analytic, and in 1929, he had become disappointed with Heidegger's growing interest in metaphysics. Given Marcuse's anti-metaphysical attitude, why would he have turned from one form of metaphysics to another? Academic thesis offered Marcuse a change to explore, implicitly, the Hegel-Marx question and to detect the conceptual roots of Marx's social criticism in Hegel's ontology. On the other hand, by emphasizing intersubjectivity and objectification as features of life, Marcuse's Hegel book sought to legitimize what his 1928 article had called for: the reinterpretation of Heidegger's *Dasein* from the perspective of the ontology of labor.

Let us address a possible critique of my central argument, that is, that Marcuse emphasized labor as the prime ontological *existentiale* of *Dasein*. Richard Wolin calls attention to Marcuse's lifelong interest in Friedrich Schiller's idea of the "play impulse," an interest that went as far back as the early 1920s when Marcuse, while living in his "inner emigration" in Berlin, worked on a Schiller bibliography. The first textual manifestation of this interest can be read in Marcuse's 1933 article on the ontological concept of labor, where he celebrated the freedom of play in the spirit of Schiller's maxim: "Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing.*"<sup>15</sup> Does not Marcuse's embrace of play show that labor was not so essential for him after all? My argument would indeed be in trouble if, by labor, Marcuse had referred to the economic production of goods. But as

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14. Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 73–74.

15. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 156–161; Herbert Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Foundations of the Concept of Labor in Economics," trans. John Abromeit, in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 122–150; Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: A Series of Letters*, trans. R. Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), 80.

I have tried to show throughout Part I, by labor, Marcuse meant something other than the production of wealth, let alone the Lockean-Puritan ethos of “the sweat of our brow, the blood of our hands.” Marcuse certainly shared the Marxist view that material affluence, brought about by technology, was a precondition for emancipation from an alienated life at the mercy of natural constraints such as scarcity. But material wealth was an insufficient condition for overcoming socially produced alienation. It did not guarantee that humanity had overcome social constraints such as the anarchist capitalist market. For Marcuse, the enlightenment was an unfulfilled project. To fulfill it required an insight into the ontological status of labor. Articulating this Hegelian-Marxist insight was the aim of Marcuse’s early period, known slightly misleadingly as “*Heideggerian* Marxism.” His first article from 1928, written at the high point of his interest in *Being and Time*, sought to outline Marxism’s “fundamental situation” and to reconstruct Marxism as a concrete philosophy at the service of “the whole person.” For Marcuse, the Hegelian-Marxist emphasis on labor and the Schillerian elevation of play were not incompatible. The former was concerned with making human beings subjects of societal development; the latter anticipated what human flourishing in the realm of freedom would comprise.

### **Philosophical Interpretation: A Struggle over the Meaning of “Being and Time”**

Why did Heidegger reject Marcuse’s Hegel study as an academic thesis? The simplest explanation would be that he did not see in Hegel the concern with human finitude that Marcuse did. He would have judged Marcuse’s study as unfounded according to the normal academic criteria of historical interpretation. Yet, I think Peter-Erwin Jansen is correct to suggest that Heidegger’s criticism was hardly about mere formalities.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in his approach to historical texts—an approach searching for unused possibilities, for

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16. Jansen, “Marcuses Habilitationsverfahren,” 145.

“the unsaid”—Heidegger showed that he was no stranger to unconventional, “destructive” interpretations. Thus, a bold study like Marcuse’s could appear as a genuine achievement. We should ask, then, whether Heidegger found *Hegel’s Ontology* objectionable not because, as a *historical* reconstruction, it failed to meet the standards of historiography but because, as a *philosophical* reconstruction, it challenged certain key premises of Heidegger’s philosophical self-understanding. In this interpretation of the Hegel debate, Heidegger would have seen Marcuse’s projection of “being and time” into Hegel as an attempt to domesticate *Being and Time*’s radical idea of Dasein, as an attempt to fuse the latter with doctrines that had not understood the Nietzschean message that philosophical idealism was a thing of the past.

In the late Weimar era, Heidegger regarded as the prime example of such domestication the work of Ernst Cassirer, the towering representative of Marburg neo-Kantianism and Heidegger’s opponent in the famous Davos disputation in April 1929. A brief look at their debate in Davos helps us assess the philosophical stakes in the subsequent Heidegger-Marcuse quarrel.

In hindsight, the Davos debate has often been viewed as a political divide between declining liberalism, represented by the German Jewish Cassirer, and surging Fascism, embodied by Heidegger. Yet, Peter E. Gordon suggests that the debate was about a philosophical schism over Kant’s question “What is the human being?” Cassirer held to modern scientific rationality and cultural modernity grounded in Kant’s Copernican turn. Heidegger, also drawing on Kant’s authority, opposed to this a view of the human being as finite Dasein, thrown into historical circumstances not of one’s own making. Cassirer welcomed Heidegger’s attempt to disclose more primordial dimensions of human existence. He even claimed that this was also the goal of his own recent efforts to analyze not just science but also myth as an equal expression of human capacity at symbolization. But while Cassirer gave credit to Heidegger’s stress on human finitude, he thought very differently about its alleged pervasiveness. Certainly humanity had progressed from lower to higher stages of civilization, from a mythic to a scientific consciousness epitomized cognitively by the mathematical physics and

ethically by the categorical imperative. In Cassirer's view, Heidegger failed to give due credit to the advances of cultural modernity. In his response, Heidegger insisted that what he meant by thrownness was not something that could be done away with. For him, Cassirer's views bespoke fleeing the finite human condition into delusions of rational mastery of reality.<sup>17</sup>

Another point of contention in Davos was the protagonists' view of the relationship between philosophy and anxiety, the latter functioning in *Being and Time* as the privileged mood disclosing to the human being her thrownness into history. Heidegger answered that "the question concerning the essence of human beings only makes sense and is only justifiable insofar as it" succeeds in "throwing man back, so to speak, into the hardness of his fate from the shallow aspect of a man who merely uses the work of the spirit." From the viewpoint of Heidegger's existentialism, Cassirer's enlightened humanism appeared as a withdrawal from the real world into the shallow idealist sphere of culture, a position captured in Schiller's verse, quoted by Cassirer in his reply: "Cast off from yourself the anxiety of earthly things! [*Werft die Angst des Irdischen von euch!*]"<sup>18</sup>

What was Marcuse's connection to this major event in twentieth-century philosophy, which according to one Freiburg-based commentator "reminded us of the period of the important *disputations* during the Middle Ages, when the best minds of the time struggled with one another. It seemed that a rich tradition, which protected goods declared holy, was again under attack"?<sup>19</sup> Some studies claim that Marcuse attended the Davos conference.<sup>20</sup> Yet, we have

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17. Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 1–11, 154–159, 224–229, 237–245, 329–338.

18. Martin Heidegger, "Davos Disputation between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger," in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed., trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 200–201, 204. Modified translation of Cassirer's maxim from Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 187.

19. Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 13.

20. Grondin, *Hans-Georg Gadamer*, 170; Denker, *Unterwegs in Sein und Zeit*, 99.

no evidence proving his presence in Davos. Nonetheless, there is an interesting source that connects Marcuse to the Heidegger-Cassirer debate. In his letter to Maximilian Beck shortly after the Davos conference, Marcuse mentioned Heidegger's "discussion with Cassirer (whose entire stenographic transcription, 45 type writer pages, I received from Seidemann)."<sup>21</sup> The text Marcuse is referring to is a copy of a transcription of the Davos disputation that was distributed to all attendants. Thus, Marcuse's close friend, Alfred Seidemann, with whom he had enthusiastically studied *Being and Time* in 1927, apparently witnessed the Davos disputation first hand. Moreover, whereas the official transcription of the disputation gives Heidegger as the person who asked the question concerning philosophy's relationship to anxiety, in Marcuse's copy of this transcription, "stud. Seidemann" is marked as the person who posed this question.<sup>22</sup>

This question likely preoccupied Marcuse and his friends at the time. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger had demarcated anxiety from fear by defining fearsome as something that is "encountered as an entity within-the-world." "That in the face of which one has anxiety," in contrast, was "being-in the-world as such."<sup>23</sup> After Heidegger's Nazi turn, Marcuse would not hesitate to denounce his notion of anxiety as reactionary *tout court*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, before 1933, Marcuse did not similarly attack this notion. His more gracious

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21. Marcuse to Beck, May 9, 1929, the Herbert Marcuse Archive, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

22. Heidegger, "Davos Disputation between Cassirer and Heidegger," 200; "Bericht von den II. Davoser Hochschulkursen," 20, the Herbert Marcuse Archive: "Die Heideggeriana," 0011.01, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

23. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 40 (230–231).

24. "If you look at his view of human existence," Marcuse said about Heidegger and *Being and Time* in 1978, "you will find a highly repressive, highly oppressive interpretation." On Marcuse's account, Heidegger's notions such as being-toward-death and anxiety played "well on the fears and frustrations of men and women in a repressive society." Marcuse conceded that from hindsight, he saw in Heidegger's book "a very powerful devaluation of life, a derogation of joy, of sensuousness, fulfillment. And we may have had the feeling of it at that time, but it became clear only after Heidegger's association to Nazism became known." Marcuse, "Heidegger's Politics," 169–170.



stance is explained by the likely possibility that he saw it as expressing Heidegger's sensitivity to alienation—a theme central to Marcuse as well. Here, we may again have an example of Marcuse's Hegelian-Marxist modification of Heidegger's categories. In *Hegel's Ontology*, Marcuse cited Hegel's remark on anxiety that, interestingly, resembles Heidegger's definition: "In 'experiencing fear of the lord' in the course of its struggle unto life and death, the slave 'has been fearful [*Angst*], not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread [*Angst*]." <sup>25</sup> Like Hegel, Marcuse did not accord to anxiety a privileged ontological status, even as he saw it as an understandable mood of oppressed people.

Be that as it may, the question "What is the human being?" was present in Marcuse's debate with Heidegger as the question of whether human finitude—or the problematic of "being and time"—was to be understood in terms of Heidegger's "ontology of mortality" or Marcuse's "ontology of labor." Heidegger saw the human being as being-toward-death, thrown into historical occurrences forever beyond its control. Marcuse appreciated Heidegger's idea of thrownness, but instead of overemphasizing human beings' incapacity to control their common social world in a rational manner, he maintained that this world could be that of freedom too. Unlike Heidegger's *Dasein*, Hegel's idea of life emphasized the other side of the coin too: that human beings were, or could at least become, subjects of history.

Besides conceiving the problematic of "being and time" differently from Heidegger, by detecting this problematic in Hegel, Marcuse also challenged Heidegger's account of the history of modern philosophy in which Kant held the key place as precursor to *Being and Time*. In *Hegel's Ontology*, Marcuse maintained that "Hegel's achievement assimilates the decisive gains of Kant's critique of reason and does not lose any of its attainments." <sup>26</sup> In contrast, no matter how much attention Heidegger gave to Hegel in these years, for him, there was no question of Kant's superiority. In his 1930–

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25. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 259; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117.

26. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, 23–24.

1931 Hegel lectures, Heidegger reminded his audience of this. Following his attack on recent existentialist Hegel interpretations, he declared that philosophy “is unfortunately not so easy that one simply picks up something called *Being and Time* and then subsequently moves around at random in the history of philosophy, in order to flush out similarities as proof that the matter has already been said a long time ago.” He found it frustrating that “precisely at that juncture—where in fact the problematic of ‘being and time’ flares up for the first and *only* time, namely, in Kant—people *refuse* to see the problem and speak rather of my arbitrarily reading my own views into Kant.”<sup>27</sup>

We can say, then, that Heidegger could have found Marcuse’s Hegel book philosophically provocative for three reasons. First, instead of being merely a regional ontology of labor, and thereby improving *Being and Time*’s notion of ready-to-handness, *Hegel’s Ontology* was an attempt at fundamental ontology, but one centered on labor not mortality. Second, Marcuse’s downplaying of Kant’s role and emphasis of Hegel’s called into question Heidegger’s narrative of the history of Western philosophy. Third, Marcuse’s stress on Hegel as the originator of the problematic of “being and time” also set him above Heidegger himself and thereby challenged the latter’s status as *the* author on human finitude.

As Seyla Benhabib aptly notes, “depending on what degree of individual self-reliance and autonomy of thought Heidegger could tolerate among his disciples, he might have had grounds to reject” *Hegel’s Ontology*.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, despite considerable philosophical disagreement, in 1928, Heidegger had not rejected the habilitation thesis of his first graduate student Karl Löwith, which criticized, from a Left-Hegelian angle, *Being and Time* for solipsism and ignorance of intersubjectivity.<sup>29</sup> Why would a similar philosophical disagreement with Marcuse just a few years later have

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27. Heidegger, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, 146–147.

28. Benhabib, translator’s introduction to Marcuse, *Hegel’s Ontology*, xxx.

29. Karl Löwith, *Das Individuum in der Rolle des Mitmenschen*, in *Sämtliche Schriften 1. Mensch und Menschenwelt: Beiträge zur Anthropologie*, ed. Klaus Stichweh (Stuttgart, Germany: Metzler, 1981), 9–197. On Löwith’s study, see Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 80–82.

caused Heidegger to act in a different manner? A likely answer is that by 1931, Heidegger had come to reassess the relationship of his philosophy to the wider cultural-political situation in a way that cast Marcuse's Hegel book in a new light.

Indeed, given Heidegger's ideological transformation around 1929, how convincing is the interpretation of the Hegel debate as a merely philosophical schism? If before, Heidegger had demanded only a new philosophical beginning, from 1929 onwards, his philosophical radicalness was accompanied by a more far-reaching crisis-consciousness concerning Germany and Western civilization. Although *Being and Time's* late sections on historicity, fate, and community are already open to an ideological interpretation, only in 1929 did Heidegger begin consciously to fuse his philosophy with diagnoses of the age by figures such as Oswald Spengler, the author of the best-selling *Decline of the West* (1918/1922), and Ernst Jünger, the militarist antipode to Erich Maria Remarque.<sup>30</sup> These radical conservatives differed from traditional guardians of German *Kultur* (such as Thomas Mann of the *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*) in their apocalyptic visions and willingness to use modern technology to advance their Proto-Fascist and anti-communist cause.<sup>31</sup>

Not everybody has agreed with Gordon's interpretation of the Davos disputation. William H. F. Altman contends that Heidegger's confrontational attitude toward Cassirer and his emphasis on "hardness of fate" betrayed his Jüngerian predilections. Altman points to the extraphilosophical connotations of Heidegger's final words in

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30. Otto Pöggeler, "Heidegger's Political Self-Understanding," trans. Steven Galt Crowell, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 205, 210–214; Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 67–85; Marion Heinz, "Politisierung der Philosophie: Heideggers Vorlesung 'Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit' (WS 1929/30)," in *Philosophie und Zeitgeist im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Marion Heinz and Goran Gretic (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen and Neumann, 2006), 269–290.

31. Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

his 1929 lectures on German idealism: “Every philosophy is the philosophy of its time and only thus is it *genuine* philosophy. And that means: philosophizing, whether it knows this about itself or not, must be so in order that it is there for its time when its time has come.”<sup>32</sup> Remarkably, Altman’s speculation finds support in Heidegger’s recently published lecture “Hegel and the Problem of Metaphysics,” delivered in the Netherlands in March 1930. Heidegger stated that the contestation with Hegel can surpass a mere scholarly matter only if we realize that the question of being is about “the transformation of philosophy as a whole out of a real distress of *Dasein*.” Rather than about “the petty anxieties of the individual,” this distress “awakens because the world-spirit itself begins to step into a new epoch.” Heidegger stressed that we need “to hear this happening, to feel this jolt!” Should we be capable of this, then “we serve the mysterious assignment that Hegel had already grasped in all its grandeur—the assignment to give back to a people [*Volk*] the lost metaphysics.”<sup>33</sup> This happening was the rise of Nazism, or Germany’s “national awakening.”

### Political Interpretation: Heidegger’s Anti-Marxism

Laurence Paul Hemming proposes that Heidegger’s struggle with Hegel was connected to his awareness about the rising current of Hegelian Marxism. This was a time when several critical Marxists sought to cast Marxism as a philosophical heir of German idealism, not a mere economic theory. Heidegger’s 1932 letter to his wife,

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32. William H. F. Altman, *Martin Heidegger and the First World War: Being and Time as Funeral Oration* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 47–78, 63; Heidegger, *German Idealism*, 344.

33. Martin Heidegger, “Hegel und das Problem der Metaphysik,” in *Gesamtausgabe 80.1*, ed. Günther Neumann (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2016), 313–314. This passage seems to anticipate Heidegger’s demand in the *Black Notebooks* in 1932: “The *metaphysics of Dasein* must become deeper in accord with the innermost structure of that metaphysics and expand into the *metapolitics* ‘of the historical people [*Volk*].” Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings II–VI (Black Notebooks 1931–1938)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 91.

Elfride (quoted in the epigraph), which called attention to communism's philosophical debt to Hegel, suggests that he was beginning to do the math as well.<sup>34</sup> Heidegger's later comments on Marcuse, Marx, and Hegel suggest that he was aware of the Marxist motives behind *Hegel's Ontology*. Indeed, it appears that he was worried not only about Marcuse's personal socialist convictions but also about the way *Hegel's Ontology's* seemingly abstract ontological arguments—its understanding of being—offered legitimacy to Marxism. Again, Heidegger's problem with these arguments seems to have been not only their implicit plea for a communist politics but also their even more far-reaching civilizational—in his own nascent terminology, “being-historical”—consequences.

To weigh the plausibility of this political interpretation of Marcuse's “habilitation odyssey,” let us begin with Heidegger's only public comment on Marcuse in 1969, made in the context of seminar discussions known as *Vier Seminaren* (*Four Seminars*). Their guiding theme was the question of technology. This question lay at the heart of Heidegger's narrative of “history of being,” which held that the instrumental mind-set of Western modernity was a consequence of certain ontological choices, or rather fists of fate in ancient Greek philosophy. For Heidegger, these seminars served to “keep alive a thinking that is attentive to being, knowing that this work must concern itself with laying the foundation, for a distant future, of a possibility of tradition—since obviously one cannot settle a two millennia heritage in ten or twenty years.”<sup>35</sup> Turning to Marxism, he continued:

*Which transformation of the world do we have in Marx? That of a transformation in the conditions of production. But where does production have its place? In praxis. And praxis is determined by what? By a cer-*

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34. Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger and Marx: A Productive Dialogue over the Language of Humanism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 32, 34; Heidegger to Elfride Heidegger, June 9, 1932, in Martin Heidegger, *Letters to His Wife, 1915–1970*, ed. Gertrud Heidegger, trans. R. D. V. Glasgow (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 133–134.

35. Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969, Zähringen 1973*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 51.

tain theory, which casts the concept of production as the production of the human by itself. Marx therefore has a theoretical representation of the human—a very precise representation, which includes as its foundation the Hegelian philosophy. Reversing Hegel’s idealism in his own way, Marx requires that being be given precedence over consciousness. Since there is no consciousness in *Being and Time*, one could believe that there is something Heideggerian to be read here [in Marx, M. I.]! At least Marcuse had understood *Being and Time* in this way.<sup>36</sup>

The conjecture that this passage could be the key to the Heidegger-Marcuse quarrel forty years earlier is strengthened by the fact that Heidegger then drew attention to Hegel’s concept of life: “For Marx, being is the production process. This is the representation that he receives from metaphysics, on the basis of Hegel’s interpretation of life as process.”

What did Heidegger know about Marcuse’s Marxism in the Weimar era? Marcuse later said that he never discussed with Heidegger the question of Heidegger and Marx, the explicit topic of Marcuse’s 1928 article “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism.” But Heidegger likely knew about this article because Karl Jaspers informed him about it.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, what matters is that Heidegger’s comment in 1969 seems to say that he had seen Marcuse’s early writings as a continuous reinterpretation of *Being and Time* from the perspective of the Hegelian-Marxist ontology of labor.

In the context of the same seminar in 1973, we find another illuminating remark by Heidegger on Marxism. Although Marcuse is not mentioned, Hemming proposes that Heidegger had Marcuse in mind because he took issue with Marx’s aphorism that Marcuse had held as the key to Marxism in his 1928 article: “To be radical is to grasp a matter by its roots. The root of humanity is, however, humankind itself.”<sup>38</sup> Beginning by quoting this aphorism, Heidegger continued:

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36. Ibid., 52.

37. Marcuse, “Heidegger’s Politics,” 166; Jaspers to Heidegger, July 8, 1928, in Heidegger, *Heidegger-Jaspers Correspondence*, 101.

38. Hemming, *Heidegger and Marx*, 31; Marx, “Contribution,” 182.

Marxism as a whole rests upon this thesis. . . . I would like to maintain . . . that the self-production of man raises the danger of self-destruction. What are we witnessing, in truth? What is it that reigns today, determining the reality of earth as a whole? *The imperative of progress*. This imperative of progress demands an imperative of production that is combined with an imperative of ever-new needs. . . . In this rush, every possibility of tradition is broken. What has been can no longer be present—except in the form of the *outmoded*, which as a result is entirely inconsequential. If it is granted that it is man who brings about all of this, the question arises: Could man ever break the domination of these imperatives himself?<sup>39</sup>

Heidegger was skeptical about this change. Today, human beings understand history as their own creation. Hence, “the increasingly constraining network of the socio-economic ‘imperatives’” appears to them as their own making, as something they can transform. For Heidegger, however, these imperatives result from the history of being and should be seen as “precipitates” of enframing [*Ge-stell*]. The only way to break free of them was to give up one’s self-understanding as producer. But this was an unlikely scenario, since it “would mean renouncing progress itself, committing to a general restriction of consumption and production.” Heidegger emphasized that his criticism of Marx was not political. Marxism was nihilism because of its anthropocentric ontology. To illustrate this, Heidegger noted that in Marx’s aphorism “an intermediary thought is missing, which makes it possible to go from the first thought to the second. *It is the idea that what matters [die Sache] is man.*”<sup>40</sup> On Heidegger’s account, Marxism made everything into a means for the self-assertion of one species. Acceptance of the Hegelian premises of Marxism resulted in the subordination of earth and the human being to the unlimited “imperative of progress.” Absent in Heidegger’s judgment was, then, every concern with the emancipatory dimension of Marxism as radical enlightenment that sought liberation from natural and social heteronomy.

The two passages from the turn of the 1970s were written from the perspective of Heidegger’s mature “history of being.” Yet, as this

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39. Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 73.

40. *Ibid.*, 74, 77.

narrative was already in its initial stages in 1930, we should ask if the highly critical picture of Marxism given forty years later was already held by Heidegger in the Weimar era. To be sure, it is possible that Heidegger's critique of Marcuse in *Four Seminars* was only a product of a later confrontation with his former student, who had gained world fame with *One-Dimensional Man* and as the inspiration behind the American and West German student movements.<sup>41</sup> But this conjecture is untenable. Already in the 1946 *Letter on "Humanism,"* Heidegger had claimed that Marxism was not just a political program but also a serious, if objectionable, philosophy. At the heart of this philosophy was not the easily refuted thesis that everything is matter but rather the ontological idea that "every being appears as the material of labor," an idea "anticipated in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*."<sup>42</sup> For Heidegger, the anti-communist struggle was futile if Marxism was left to determine the terms of the struggle. Moreover, this conceptual struggle was not between Marxist and non-Marxist economists but between Marxist and non-Marxist ontologists.

What about Heidegger's view of Marxism in the Weimar era? Were his objections about the political abhorrence of Bolshevism? Or did he already detect the real problem of Marxism in its ontological premises—premises pregnant not only with Lenin but also with most undesirable civilizational consequences? Speaking for anti-Bolshevism are Heidegger's already cited letter to Marcuse from 1948, Heidegger's letter to his wife from June 1932, as well as Hermann Mörchen's testimony, according to which on New Year's Eve 1932, Heidegger expressed in private his wish that Nazism would defend Germany against communism.<sup>43</sup> That Heidegger already

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41. Commenting to his wife on student rebellions in Freiburg in 1968, Heidegger conjectured that "the young people turn up to see me" because "their 'chief ideologue' Marcuse was a student of mine. I'll hear what they put forward of course. The start of the semester will certainly be a lot of 'fun.'" Heidegger to Elfriede Heidegger, Easter Sunday 1968, in Heidegger, *Letters to His Wife*, 305.

42. Martin Heidegger, *Letter on "Humanism,"* trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 259.

43. Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 226–227.



saw Marxism in ontological terms, however, is suggested by his lecture from the summer of 1931. Here, he criticized the association of *Being and Time* with Marxism: “We have to clarify for ourselves what it signifies that man has a relation to the works that he produces. It is for this reason that a certain book called *Sein und Zeit* discusses dealings with equipment; and not in order to correct Marx, nor to organize a new national economy, nor out of a primitive understanding of the world.”<sup>44</sup> The words against charges of primitivism may have been replies to critics such as Cassirer. The ones on work, production, and Marx, however, were likely aimed at Marcuse.<sup>45</sup>

To substantiate the claim that it was indeed Marxist ontology that troubled Heidegger early on, I would like to highlight the degree to which his criticism in 1973 of the “imperative of progress” resonates with Ernst Jünger’s diagnosis from the early 1930s. Jünger saw the world political situation as “total mobilization,” where every realm of life was mobilized to support a future war effort. Both Western capitalism and Russian communism advocated this nihilist will to power, and for Germany to keep pace, hard measures were required to unite all classes behind a single nationalist purpose.<sup>46</sup> After World War II, Heidegger admitted that Jünger’s diagnosis of “the history and the contemporary situation of the West” had made a strong impression on him in the late Weimar Republic.<sup>47</sup> Given this endorsement of Jünger, it is possible that Heidegger was already developing a negative view of Marxist ontology. Of course,

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44. Martin Heidegger, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics IX 1–3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 117.

45. Of course, Heidegger’s target could also have been Maximilian Beck with his claim that *Being and Time* was indebted to Georg Lukács, or Karl Löwith whom Heidegger criticized later in 1931 for the unacceptable view that everything important in the history of philosophy began with Marx. Heidegger to Rudolf Bultmann, November 14, 1931, in Rudolf Bultmann and Martin Heidegger, *Briefwechsel 1925–1975*, ed. Andreas Grossmann and Christof Landmesser (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2009), 172.

46. Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger’s Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 46–93; Wolin, *Politics of Being*, 77–82.

47. Quoted in Wolin, *Politics of Being*, 77.

the world political situations were different in 1930 and 1970. Whereas in the early 1930s Heidegger “the active nihilist” sought to fight total mobilization with militant power-political means, by 1970, Heidegger “the shepherd of being” had adopted a more passive stance. Yet, the place of Marxism in Heidegger’s scheme remained the same: Marxism advocated technological forgetfulness of being, and it did this because it was rooted in Hegel’s notion of life.

Hemming suggests that Heidegger would have been reading heavily in Marx in the last Weimar years and, moreover, that Marcuse would have been instrumental in drawing Heidegger’s attention to Marx’s *Paris Manuscripts*, published in 1932 and edited by Marcuse’s friend and another Heidegger student, Siegfried Landshut. While Hemming does not go as far as one commentator does, who (entirely unconvincingly) claimed that Heidegger would have helped in the editing of these manuscripts,<sup>48</sup> his claim about Marcuse’s mediating role should be taken with caution. As we saw above, Marcuse said that he never discussed Marx with Heidegger. Thus, Marcuse hardly actively introduced Marxist literature to Heidegger. Hemming’s suggestion elsewhere that Heidegger owed his understanding of Marxism to Jünger seems much more to the point.<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, we should consider Hemming’s proposition more closely, for even as Heidegger criticized Marxist ontology, it is still possible that he learned much about it from Marcuse’s review of the *Paris Manuscripts* and his Hegel book. Richard Wolin emphasizes the startling fact that in 1934, shortly after his rectoral period, Heidegger would seek to interpret labor as an ontological phenomenon and—in contrast to *Being and Time*—as an authentic mode of existence. Motivating Heidegger’s effort was his concern about the direction of the Nazi revolution in its first year. For the latter to reach its true potential, in a 1934 lecture course, Heidegger strove to clarify the concept of labor (along with other key concepts

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48. Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 222.

49. Hemming, *Heidegger and Marx*, 32, 156–166.

such as historicity, logic, and *Volk*) and to make it serviceable to Germany's national awakening. Remarkable here is that even though Heidegger filled his notion of labor with *völkisch* banalities of the Nazi ideology, structurally it was not so different from the expressivist notion of labor we find in the *Paris Manuscripts*.<sup>50</sup> Heidegger described authentic work as "the making present of being [des Seienden]." Since labor established this essential connection to beings, the curse of unemployment was not only a "deprivation of income" but also a "spiritual disruption."<sup>51</sup> Elsewhere, he rejected the Marxist view of the proletariat as "the class of the disinherited who are rallying for the general class struggle." Neither was labor simply "the means to earn a living." Instead, for Heidegger "*work is the title of every well-ordered action that is borne by the responsibility of the individual, the group, and the State and which is thus of service to the Volk.*"<sup>52</sup>

The expressive character that Heidegger here attached to labor echoes Marcuse's review of the *Paris Manuscripts*. For Marcuse, the latter confirmed Marx's view of capitalism as an inversion of the human essence. Underlying Marx's critique of political economy was a specific, by his own admission, ontological conception of the human being as an objectifying being who realized herself in the products of her labor. Capitalism estranged human beings from their capacity of world making by forcing their labor to serve alien goals. Non-alienated labor, Marcuse emphasized, was in contrast "all-around self-realization and self-expression." Through it the "*whole* man is at home in the *whole* objective world." For Marx, labor contained a spiritual dimension. Whereas animals produce "only under the dominion of immediate physical need," a human being "only truly produces in freedom therefrom." Beyond self-

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50. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 195–196, 201–202.

51. Martin Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, *Gesamtausgabe Bd. 38*, ed. Günter Seubold (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 1998), 154.

52. Martin Heidegger, "Political Texts, 1933–34," trans. William S. Lewis, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 59.

preservation, human beings can even produce in accordance with the laws of beauty,” as Marx, following Schiller, enthused.<sup>53</sup>

Heidegger’s later criticisms of Marxism saw as its most consequential aspect its particular ontology—an ontology that Heidegger saw as Hegelian in origin. Heidegger may well have owed these insights to Marcuse, who had highlighted the *Paris Manuscripts* as the first textual evidence of Marx’s appropriation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*—for Marx “the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy”—and cited his own Hegel book as a comprehensive analysis of Hegel’s ideas of objectification and labor.<sup>54</sup> Heidegger’s remarks on Marcuse and Marxism suggest, then, that he saw Marxism as a political threat, even as a nightmarish civilizational menace, and was reluctant to see *Being and Time* used to articulate its ontological underpinnings.

A comparison of Marcuse’s case to that of Löwith is pertinent again. In the 1950s, Heidegger furiously commented on “the most outrageous lies” that Löwith had set forth after World War II. Heidegger described Löwith’s political position in 1929 as that of “the reddest Marxist,” an observation likely based on Löwith’s interest in Marx’s early writings published in the late 1920s. If this interest, which resulted in the 1932 treatise *Max Weber und Karl Marx*—according to Löwith a “non-Marxist study of Marx”—was enough for Heidegger to cast Löwith as a communist, what would he have said about Marcuse of the same period, who in many articles had engaged in an unmistakably Marxist study of Marx?<sup>55</sup> But was it only Marcuse’s Marxism that pushed Heidegger to rethink his stance toward his student? After all, Marcuse was not only a

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53. Herbert Marcuse, “New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism,” trans. Joris de Bres, in *Heideggerian Marxism: Herbert Marcuse*, ed. Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 87–97, 109; Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 276–277.

54. Marcuse, “New Sources,” 86–87, 94, 208n38; Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, 329.

55. Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, 91; Karl Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933: A Report*, trans. Elisabeth King (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 160–161; Karl Löwith, *Max Weber and Karl Marx*, ed. Tom Bottomore and William Outhwaite, trans. Hans Fantel (London: Routledge, 1993).

Marxist but also Jewish. Indeed, “the most outrageous lies” that Löwith had allegedly put forward had been about Heidegger’s anti-Semitism.

### Racist Interpretation: Heidegger’s Anti-Semitism

In 1953, Marcuse wrote to Horkheimer: Löwith “knows that Heidegger had made a rude anti-Semitic remark about me.”<sup>56</sup> Marcuse specified neither when Heidegger had spoken these words nor when Löwith, whom Marcuse had asked to review his Hegel book in 1932, had reported them.<sup>57</sup> Based on a 1933 letter by Husserl, it is not unlikely that Heidegger had already made this comment at the time of the Hegel debate. Husserl wrote that Heidegger’s anti-Semitism “had increasingly come to the fore in recent years—also against the group of his enthusiastic Jewish students.”<sup>58</sup> Jack Jacobs asks, referring to Heidegger’s above comment on Marcuse, whether anti-Semitism turned out to be fateful for Marcuse’s academic career.<sup>59</sup> Remarkably, this conjecture is supported by Horkheimer’s recollection of Marcuse’s entry into the Institute for Social Research. Horkheimer recalled that Kurt Riezler, rector of the University of Frankfurt, had “approached me privately because, as he said, Marcuse had received his doctors’ [*sic*] degree in Freiburg under Heidegger, who would never admit a Jew as an academic teacher into a Faculty.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, as late as January 4, 1933, Heidegger wrote to Marcuse: “I hope that I’m able to meet Mr. Riezler in the next months. I would then like to thoroughly

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56. Marcuse to Horkheimer, April 15, 1953. The letter can be found on Marcuse’s official homepage: <https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/biography/1953-horkheimer-letter.html>.

57. Jansen, “Marcuses Habilitationsverfahren,” 148.

58. Husserl to Dietrich Mahnke, May 4, 1933, in Berndt Martin, ed., *Martin Heidegger und das “Dritte Reich”*: *Ein Kompendium* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 149.

59. Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 113–115.

60. Horkheimer to Sidney Lipshires, January 11, 1971, in Horkheimer, *Life in Letters*, 366.

discuss your habilitation plans with him once more.”<sup>61</sup> We do not know how sincere Heidegger was about this promise. In any case, Husserl’s testimony and Horkheimer’s recollection tell a different story—that Marcuse’s academic plans run into Heidegger’s anti-Semitism.

Before going farther, let us see what was known about Heidegger’s anti-Semitism before the 2014 publication of the first *Black Notebooks*. In the Weimar era, Heidegger was concerned about the Jewish influence on Germany’s intellectual life. Even in 1916, he wrote to his future wife about the terrible “jewification [*Verjudung*] of our culture & universities.”<sup>62</sup> In 1929, when writing a letter of recommendation for a grant candidate, he claimed that a “crucial choice” was to be made: “Either to infuse, again, our *German* spiritual life with genuine indigenous forces and educators, or to leave it at the mercy, once and for all, of the growing Jewish contamination [*Verjudung*].”<sup>63</sup> As the Nazi rector of Freiburg University in 1933–1934, Heidegger supported the new regime’s anti-Semitic measures in academe.<sup>64</sup> He also severed contact with his Jewish dissertation students and did not allow them to graduate. Heidegger is not known to have rejected before 1933 the academic theses of his Jewish dissertation or habilitation students just because they were Jewish. After 1933, he even helped some of his Jewish students, such as Helene Weiss, to habilitate abroad.<sup>65</sup> And of course, Heidegger’s mentor, Husserl, was Jewish, as was his lover, Hannah Arendt. Wolin observes that the perplexing fact that in the 1920s Heidegger’s philosophy attracted many Jewish students can be explained by their primarily German identity; Heidegger, whose anti-Semitism at

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61. Heidegger to Marcuse, January 4, 1933, the Herbert Marcuse Archive, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

62. Heidegger, *Letters to His Wife*, 28.

63. Heidegger to Victor Schworer, October 2, 1929, trans. Manfred Stassen, in Martin Heidegger, *Philosophical and Political Writings*, ed. Manfred Stassen (New York: Continuum, 2003), 1.

64. Wolin, *Politics of Being*, 2–4.

65. Berndt Martin, ed., “Ein Gespräch mit Max Müller,” in *Martin Heidegger und das ‘Dritte Reich’: Ein Kompendium* (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989), 105–106, 115n42.

the time was of a traditional anti-Judaist nature, had little problem with assimilated Jews.<sup>66</sup>

If there was little question earlier that Heidegger saw his Nazi turn as connected to his narrative of “history of being,” the *Black Notebooks* leave no doubt of it. It had been common knowledge that Heidegger saw Bolshevism and Americanism as the key manifestations of the forgetting of being. But in the notebooks, from about 1937 on—years after Heidegger’s allegedly short-lived revolutionary enthusiasm was supposed to have faded—“World Jewry” replaces the two as Germany’s greatest enemy. Peter Trawny, the editor of the notebooks, defines Heidegger’s conception as “being-historical anti-Semitism.” While Heidegger rejects Nazi racial theories, he offers philosophical legitimacy to traditional anti-Judaist prejudices: the Jewish aptitude for calculation and interest in commerce and money.<sup>67</sup> He writes that “*by their markedly calculative aptitude* the Jews have ‘lived’ the longest by the principle of race, which is why they put up their defense against its unrestricted application.” The unfortunate outcome of the spreading of this calculative thought is “a *complete deracination* of peoples” and “a self-alienation of peoples.”<sup>68</sup> Heidegger does not see calculative thought as something inherently biologically Jewish. Still, he claims that historically, it is in Jewish thought that the principle of “machination” (*Machenschaft*)—complete rationalization and technologization of the world—has made its greatest advance. Trawny notes that Heidegger’s being-historical anti-Semitism is logically an ambiguous construction. For the most part, Heidegger sees impersonal machination as the primary mover of modern history, whereas Jews, Germans, Americans, and Russians are only marionettes of the history of being. Yet, at times, he writes, echoing Hitler and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, that “international Jewry” is the actual agent of history and currently, as the war is under way, Germany’s prime enemy.<sup>69</sup> On top of everything, in 1942, Heidegger describes

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66. Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children*, 83.

67. Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 45–47, 111–117.

68. Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV*, 56.

69. Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 33–35, 38, 50–51, 86–87.

the war as Jewish “self-annihilation” (*Selbstvernichtung*), implying that in the hands of the genocidal Nazi regime, the Jews, as advocates of machination, have merely fallen victim to their own destructive principle.<sup>70</sup>

What differentiates these abhorrent anti-Semitic passages from similar remarks in Heidegger’s lectures in 1933–1934 is that we cannot dismiss them as ideological concessions aimed to satisfy Nazi snoopers. Rather, they express what Heidegger actually thought. Adding to our perplexity is the fact that Heidegger planned to publish his notebooks in his collected works. Trawny asks whether we are to see the notebooks as Heidegger’s philosophical testament. Or had the older Heidegger simply forgotten what he had written? In the former case, should we see more in Heidegger’s following lecture remarks than ideological concessions: “For a Slavic people the nature of our German space would manifest itself completely differently than for us. For a nomadic Semite it would perhaps never even become manifest.” Or: “The enemy does not have to be external, and the external enemy is not even always the more dangerous one.” One should “harbor no illusions about the enemy, to keep oneself ready for attack, to cultivate and intensify a constant readiness and to prepare the attack looking far ahead with the goal of total annihilation [*Vernichtung*].”<sup>71</sup>

On the basis of the *Black Notebooks*, Wolin suggests, not implausibly, that notwithstanding Heidegger’s rejection of biological race theories, his obsession with “World Jewry” is not so far from what Saul Friedländer calls “redemptive anti-Semitism” of Hitler and hardcore Nazis, that is, from the quasi-religious racial mysticism that saw elimination of Jews as the solution in saving Germany from the perils of modernity. Indeed, the difficulty in viewing Heidegger’s

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70. Martin Heidegger, *Anmerkungen I–V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, *Gesamtausgabe* 97, ed. Peter Trawny (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2015), 20.

71. Martin Heidegger, “Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat.” Übung aus dem Wintersemester 1933/34, in *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 4: Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente*, ed. Alfred Denker und Holger Zaborowski (Freiburg, Germany: Karl Alber, 2009), 82; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 73.



philosophically founded “being-historical anti-Semitism” as qualitatively different from racial anti-Semitism is that recent Holocaust research has highlighted malleable “race mysticism”—rather than biological race science—as the ultimate basis of the Nazi worldview.<sup>72</sup>

As disconcerting as these grotesque anti-Semitic passages are, how are they connected to Heidegger’s debate with Marcuse? Is it anachronistic to read Heidegger’s anti-Semitism from the late 1930s into the early 1930s? Doing so is not far-fetched. Heidegger’s correspondence with his brother, published in 2016, discloses his enthusiasm for Hitler as early as December 1931. Sending *Mein Kampf* to his brother as a Christmas present, Heidegger praised Hitler’s “exceptional and sure political instinct.”<sup>73</sup> What is more, on the basis of the *Black Notebooks*, Trawny suggests that Heidegger’s bitter philosophical breakup with Husserl at the turn of the 1930s had an anti-Semitic dimension. The correct understanding of phenomenology was philosophically at issue in this struggle between the key figures of the phenomenological movement. Husserl sought to defend the modern scientific worldview from within, to sharpen the sciences’ self-understanding by showing their roots in the groundbreaking rationalist openings of the Greeks. Heidegger, who in 1929 had accepted the philosophical chair in Freiburg after Husserl’s retirement, was offended by Husserl’s reluctance to appreciate *Being and Time*’s existential phenomenology, whereas Husserl publicly accused his heir of succumbing to the irrationalism against which he had fought his entire life.<sup>74</sup>

Giving the lie to Heidegger’s denial in the famous 1966 *Spiegel* interview that his quarrel with Husserl had not been colored by

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72. Wolin, *Politics of Being*, Preface to the 2016 edition, xxiv; Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews. Volume 1, The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 87–90; Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7–8.

73. Heidegger to Fritz Heidegger, December 18, 1931, in Walter Homolka and Arnulf Heidegger, eds., *Heidegger und der Antisemitismus: Positionen im Widerstreit. Mit Briefen von Martin und Fritz Heidegger* (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 2016), 21–22.

74. Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 31–39, 81–92.

anti-Semitism is a 1939 entry in the *Black Notebooks*. Repeating his view of Jewish thought as bent on empty rationality and calculation, Heidegger bemoans that (from the standpoint of his own desire to see a “second beginning” in Western thought) “the more primordial and primary the coming decisions and questions become, the more inaccessible they remain for this ‘race.’” Immediately following these lines, Heidegger continues in parentheses:

So Husserl’s step to phenomenological observation . . . is of lasting importance—and nonetheless it never reaches the domain of essential decisions, but instead takes the historical heritage of philosophy everywhere for granted. . . . My “attack” against Husserl is not directed solely on him and it is altogether unessential—the attack goes against the omission of the question of being, i.e., against the essence of metaphysics as such, on the basis of which the machination of beings is able to determine the course of history.<sup>75</sup>

For Trawny, this passage does more than disclose Heidegger’s personal anti-Judaist resentment of his teacher. In following a reference to “this race,” it also shows that the Heidegger-Husserl quarrel was colored by Heidegger’s sinister being-historical anti-Semitism. For Heidegger, Husserl’s pure phenomenology would thus be a manifestation, on a highly sophisticated level, of the Jewish emphasis on empty rationality, a form of thought that is blind to the history of being and contributes to the increasing wordlessness and rootlessness of modernity. But one could ask what these passages from the late 1930s have to do with Heidegger’s thoughts about Husserl in the early 1930s. Acknowledging this observation, Trawny notes that we have Husserl’s aforementioned letter from 1933, as well as Walter Eucken’s testimony from 1945, according to which Husserl had felt that his philosophical breakup with Heidegger was motivated by Heidegger’s anti-Semitism.<sup>76</sup> And we have Heidegger’s

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75. Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV*, 46–47; Martin Heidegger, “‘Only a God Can Save Us’: *Der Spiegel*’s Interview with Martin Heidegger,” trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 99.

76. Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 37, 89–91.

above-quoted concession in the *Black Notebooks* that he was already thinking in being-historical terms in 1930.

Following Trawny's exploration of the Heidegger-Husserl debate, can we say that in the early 1930s, Heidegger's view of Marcuse was also anti-Semitic? Moreover, do we not have here a similar situation as in the Heidegger-Husserl case, namely, that we do not know whether this anti-Semitism was about anti-Judaist resentment or about being-historical anti-Semitism? The former reading could make sense in the light of *Hegel's Ontology's* provocative suggestion that Hegel was the originator of modern discussions of historicity. Although Heidegger insisted in 1931 that his feelings had not been hurt by readings such as Marcuse's, is it not possible that he felt offended? As Wolin suggests, it was likely because of Marcuse's assimilated status as German that Heidegger had no problem accepting him as his student in 1928.<sup>77</sup> Yet, was it too much for Heidegger that after a couple years of collaboration, Marcuse, a Jew, showed his gratitude by elevating Hegel above him in originality? As to the latter being-historical reading, is it not possible that Heidegger saw *Hegel's Ontology* through the lens of the history of being? For if Heidegger in the early 1930s thought that Husserl's phenomenology was blind to the history of being, was not Marcuse's celebration of Hegel's idea of life equally incapable of seeing the increasing nihilism of modernity? Heidegger did not talk about machination in the early 1930s. But what is Jünger's theory of total mobilization if not a precursor to Heidegger's idea of machination and its later version, "enframing"? Marcuse's ontology of labor was dangerous because it blocked awareness of the essential decisions required to reverse the nihilist course of Western history.

The Hegel debate thus had clear parallels to Heidegger's debate with Husserl. But would Heidegger have blocked Marcuse's academic path because of anti-Semitism? As noted earlier, Heidegger is not known before 1933 to have rejected the academic theses of

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77. Wolin, *Heidegger's Children*, 83. See also Peter Marcuse, "Herbert Marcuse's 'Identity,'" in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, ed. John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 249–252.

his Jewish students just because they were Jewish. And his promise in January 1933 to discuss Marcuse's habilitation prospects with Riezler could suggest that, as in the case of Weiss, he offered a helping hand to find Marcuse an alternative place to habilitate. Nevertheless, Horkheimer's recollection of Riezler's account of Marcuse's "habilitation odyssey" (a source based, to be sure, on third-hand information) suggests that it was Heidegger's anti-Semitic university politics that had blocked Marcuse's path in Freiburg.

What can we conclude about our exploration of Marcuse's "habilitation odyssey"? No piece of evidence unequivocally shows that one of our three lines of interpretation—philosophical, political, or racial—is stronger than the others. But they are all entirely plausible. As to philosophy, was Heidegger sincere when in 1931 he denied that recent Heideggerian readings of Hegel were not a personal insult to him? We should remember that after the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, and even more after the Davos disputation in 1929, Heidegger was seen in the eyes of many as having surpassed both Cassirer and Husserl as Germany's new first philosopher. Given this heightened status, could it be that Heidegger was offended that Marcuse had used *Being and Time* to lift Hegel above him?

As to politics, anti-communism was clearly a crucial motive behind Heidegger's Nazism. Hence, it is not unthinkable that he was upset with Marcuse's Hegelian-Marxist twisting of *Being and Time*. But if Heidegger abhorred Marxism, why did he accept Marcuse as his student in the first place? Perhaps he only gradually became aware of his student's political background. Perhaps he had ignored Jaspers's mention in 1928 of Marcuse's first article. Or maybe it was simply not a concern for him at that point. Yet, it is reasonable to argue that Heidegger's ignorance of or indifference to Marcuse's political preferences changed in the next couple of years. Influenced by Jünger's idea of total mobilization and by Nazi ideologues such as Alfred Baeumler and Hitler himself, Heidegger underwent a change in attitude to Marxism. Reading Marcuse's Hegel book and perhaps also his Marxist articles, he recognized the connection between communism and the subtlest details of Hegel's dialectic.

Concerning anti-Semitism, when it comes to Heidegger's broader cultural predilections, Marcuse, a Marxist Jew from urban Berlin,

represented everything that Heidegger's anti-modern and anti-Judaist prejudices stood against. When Heidegger turned to Nazism in 1930, this certainly did not cure him of his prejudices; it strengthened them. Following Trawny's argument about the Heidegger-Husserl debate, we could speculate that as Heidegger sketched his "history of being," his prejudices underwent transformation from traditional anti-Judaism to being-historical anti-Semitism. With this change, Marcuse's reconstruction of Hegel as the originator of the problematic of "being and time" would appear not only as a personal insult but also, like Husserl's phenomenology, as a sophisticated conceptual contribution to the forgetting of being.

Instead of trying to single out one factor, could we not consider that the most plausible answer might be that all three overlapped? This is implied by Heidegger's 1932 letter to his wife, which contains all three factors: Hegel, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. With the narrative of history of being already in place in 1930, the increasingly crisis-conscious Heidegger would have detected in *Hegel's Ontology's* reconstruction of human subjectivity a fateful omission of the question of the meaning of being (philosophical interpretation). *Hegel's Ontology's* understanding of the problematic of "being and time" in terms of ontology of labor would have contributed to total mobilization, or what Heidegger's later remarks on Marxism called the "imperative of progress" (political interpretation). From the perspective of Heidegger's being-historical understanding of National Socialism, *Hegel's Ontology's* implicit call for universal humanity and international proletarian revolution would have contributed to the "de-racialization of peoples" and helped keep Germany from playing its role as the redeemer of the West (racist interpretation).

PART II

THE FRANKFURT DISCUSSION

*Adorno, Heidegger,  
and the Frankfurt Heideggerians*



## THE FRANKFURT DISCUSSION

### *A Sequel to the Epochal Davos Disputation*

I know full well that many, perhaps most of you are not in agreement with what I am presenting here. Not only scientific thinking but, still more, fundamental ontology contradicts my conviction as to the current tasks of philosophy. . . . Nonetheless, may I still perhaps address a word to the most current objections, not as I have constructed them, but as the representatives of fundamental ontology formulate them, and as they first led me to formulate the theory according to which, up until then, I had proceeded solely in the praxis of philosophic interpretation.

—THEODOR W. ADORNO,  
“THE ACTUALITY OF PHILOSOPHY” (1931)

For decades, Theodor W. Adorno and Martin Heidegger were considered archenemies because of their political antagonism and Adorno’s relentless, unanswered polemics against Heidegger after World War II. Recent years have, however, seen attempts to bridge this abyss between the two philosophers. In particular, the provocative



essays in the collection edited by Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek in 2008 have proposed that partisan scholarship on both sides has overlooked shared concerns between Adorno and Heidegger, such as their emphasis on the philosophical significance of art, on a non-discursive ethics, and their concern over the allegedly diminished capacity of moderns to experience the world beyond the technical domination of nature. Still, these efforts have often been more philosophical than historical in nature, and their focus has been on the post–World War II period. The same holds for the *Ur-work* of all these attempts, Hermann Mörchen’s pioneering, in its scope unsurpassable, exploration of the peculiar philosophical “refusal of communication” between Adorno and Heidegger, a refusal that allegedly betrayed unacknowledged affinities.<sup>1</sup>

Of the more recent scholarship, Samir Gandesha and Peter E. Gordon contend that Adorno’s reception of Heidegger was indeed that of immanent critique. Had Adorno’s ultimate goal been merely to crush Heidegger’s philosophy by reducing it to Fascism, his engagement in both his early and late works in a painstaking philosophical scrutiny of Heidegger’s thought would remain incomprehensible.<sup>2</sup> Yet, both Gandesha and Gordon focus on Adorno’s later works, and therefore his Weimar-era struggle with Heidegger remains an under-explored topic. My reconstruction of this struggle examines the role played by Heidegger in the emergence of Adorno’s critical theory in the period between the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927 and Heidegger’s Nazi turn in 1933. I argue that the young Adorno, while keeping his critical distance from Heidegger’s famous aura, did not simply reject his philosophy out

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1. Macdonald and Ziarek, eds., *Adorno and Heidegger*; Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*. For earlier attempts at mediation between Heidegger and Adorno, see Fred Dallmayr, *Between Freiburg and Frankfurt: Toward a Critical Ontology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991); Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker (London: Continuum, 2002).

2. Samir Gandesha, “Leaving Home: On Adorno and Heidegger,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Thomas Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 101–104; Samir Gandesha, “Writing and Judging: Adorno, Arendt and the Chiasmus of Natural History,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 30, no. 4 (2004): 445–454; Gordon, *Adorno and Existence*, 6–7.

of hand but saw it as imperative to engage in a critical contestation with it.

My main goal is to reconstruct the so-called Frankfurt discussion (*Frankfurter Gespräch*) between Adorno and his Heideggerian opponents in University of Frankfurt in 1929–1933. The Frankfurt discussion, called as such by the protagonists, was a debate over the significance of Heidegger’s revolutionary philosophy and its implicit diagnosis of the crisis of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Adorno’s opponents in this discussion were philosopher and rector of the university Kurt Riezler (1882–1955), theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965), and psychologist Max Wertheimer (1880–1943)—whom I shall designate as the “Frankfurt Heideggerians.” They embraced Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as inspiration for their own efforts to articulate neo-metaphysics, existential theology, and a holistic view of the human psyche. Given their admiration of Heidegger, it is no wonder that all three saw Adorno’s polemics against *Being and Time* as a provocation. In his 1930 habilitation thesis on Kierkegaard, supervised by Tillich, Adorno stated that Kierkegaard’s philosophy of existence—on which Heidegger, in Adorno’s view, had built his thought—did not mark a break but rather was a continuation of past idealist systems, and was to be seen as a symptom of, rather than a solution to, aporias of post-Hegelian philosophy and crisis of societal modernization. After being criticized by his colleagues, Adorno replied to them in his two posthumously published lectures: the inaugural address, “The Actuality of Philosophy” (1931) and “The Idea of Natural-History” (1932).

Besides examining the Frankfurt discussion, I will also interpret it as a sequel to the epochal 1929 Davos disputation between Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer, Weimar Germany’s most vocal champion of the legacy of the Enlightenment. While Adorno was not present in Davos, and in fact nowhere mentions the event, I would like to suggest that his quarrel with the Frankfurt Heideggerians forms a sort of a sequel to the Davos debate, both thematically and

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3. Some studies have referred to the Frankfurt discussion but only in passing: Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 34, 142; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 95; Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 53–54.

personally. The thematic parallels between the Davos debate—which revolved around Kant’s question of what does it mean to be human—and the Frankfurt discussion are striking. By criticizing Adorno’s ignorance of this question, Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer thought that Adorno had arrogantly dismissed the very question that Germany’s two top thinkers held as the key not only to the future of philosophy but of Western civilization more generally. The characterization of Heidegger’s significance for Riezler by his later colleague, Leo Strauss, goes for Tillich and Wertheimer as well; Heidegger’s philosophy was superior because of its “clarity and certainty, if not about the whole way, at least about the first and decisive steps” that philosophy should take in a situation of deep cultural crisis. In contrast, Adorno could well be described, in Strauss’s words, as an outsider who saw Heidegger’s increasing popularity as “paralysis of the critical faculties” where “philosophizing seems to have been transformed into listening with reverence to the incipient *mythoi* of Heidegger.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in outlining his nascent critical theory, Adorno presented a drastically different account of the first step that philosophy should take to gain relevancy in the modern world. And yet, he did it through an immanent critique of Heidegger’s position.

As to the personal connections between the Davos protagonists and the Frankfurt discussants, Riezler witnessed the Heidegger-Cassirer debate, “the exceptional contestation” between the “metaphysics of Dasein, in which the primordial fright confronts the hard essentials of the finite existence as such, and the philosophy of symbolic forms, in which the awe before the miracle of spirit aspires to embrace the breadth of its forms.”<sup>5</sup> Riezler also gave a lecture in Davos, which echoed Heidegger’s demand to search for the ontological structure of the human being. “The contemporary human being,” Riezler stated, “is like everything historically concrete, in his particularity a metaphor of a generality and has to be beheld and

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4. Leo Strauss, “Kurt Riezler,” in *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 246.

5. Kurt Riezler, *Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, Rede gehalten auf der Hochschultagung in Davos (Bonn, Germany: Friedrich Cohen, 1929), 27.

grasped as such.” In his estimation, all historical investigations on the current state of humanity required an outline of “the existence as such in its finitude.”<sup>6</sup> In letters from Davos to his wife and colleagues, Heidegger singled out his pleasant ski trips and time spent with Riezler as social high points in an otherwise unpleasant environment.<sup>7</sup> Again, Tillich, although not present in Davos, later commented on the Heidegger-Cassirer debate as one between two profound ethical conceptions of the human being. Given Adorno’s friendly and collegial ties to Riezler and Tillich, it is more than likely that he discussed the Davos debate with his colleagues in 1929–1933. What is more, in January 1929, three months before the Davos conference, Heidegger lectured in Frankfurt on the metaphysics of Dasein that he would defend in Davos against Cassirer. Adorno attended Heidegger’s lecture and met Heidegger afterwards, for the first and last time, at Riezler’s home.<sup>8</sup>

Part II makes an important contribution to our understanding of Adorno’s early thought. Not only does it explore Adorno’s largely overlooked Weimar-era struggle with Heidegger, it also brings historical weight to this struggle by examining historical referents, the Frankfurt Heideggerians, behind it. Furthermore, by viewing the Frankfurt discussion as a sequel to the Davos debate, it sets Adorno’s critical theory in the context of arguably the most significant philosophical event in twentieth-century continental philosophy. To be sure, the Frankfurt discussion was hardly as important a historical event as the Davos debate. Not only did the latter become a significant point of reference in the subsequent twentieth-century philosophical memory, its epochal importance was already recognized by contemporaries. In comparison, the Frankfurt discussion was an insignificant phenomenon, which, apart from certain circles of

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6. Ibid., 5.

7. Heidegger to Elfride Heidegger, March 21, 1929, in Heidegger, *Letters to His Wife*, 119–120; Heidegger to Elisabeth Blochmann, April 12, 1929, in Martin Heidegger and Elisabeth Blochmann, *Briefwechsel 1918–1969*, ed. Joachim W. Storck (Marbach am Neckar, Germany: Deutsche Literaturarchiv in Marbach, 1989), 29–30.

8. Heidegger to Mörchen, January 3, 1972, cited in Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 13.

the University of Frankfurt, remained out of the public eye. Yet, in Adorno's early reception of Heidegger's philosophy, the Frankfurt discussion formed the key historical framework. Indeed, this discussion opens a new window to Adorno's early development. What makes the Frankfurt discussion especially interesting is that unlike the majority of the Davos audience and the Frankfurt Heideggerians, Adorno implied that the "continental divide," to use Peter E. Gordon's expression, should be seen not as between divergent answers to the question of what it means to be human, but between this very question and critical materialism that proposed to dispense with the whole question without, however, thereby ignoring legitimate motifs underlying it.<sup>9</sup>

The focus of the present chapter will be on the Davos disputation and Adorno's habilitation thesis on Kierkegaard, his first contribution to the Frankfurt discussion and, according to Robert Hullot-Kentor, his "first analysis of the dialectic of enlightenment."<sup>10</sup> The chapter also clarifies the historical connections and thematic parallels between the Davos debate and the Frankfurt discussion and examines the intellectual, institutional, and personal factors between Adorno and his Heideggerian opponents. Chapter 5 will concentrate on Adorno's inaugural address "The Actuality of Philosophy," where he introduced his idea of critical theory, conceded that it had been the Heideggerian challenge that had forced him formulate his position, and called for an immanent critique of *Being and Time*. Finally, Chapter 6 turns to Adorno's lecture "The Idea of Natural-History," which put his immanent criticism of Heidegger into action by attempting an "ontological reorientation of the philosophy of history."<sup>11</sup> Remarkably, while Adorno accused Heidegger's dark notion of thrownness of ideological fixing of historical affairs into ontological ones, he also showed some understanding to this notion as a reflection of discontents of moder-

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9. Gordon, *Continental Divide*.

10. Hullot-Kentor, "Critique of the Organic," xi.

11. Theodor W. Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History," trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, in Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 260.

nity. Chapter 6 also ponders whether Heidegger is present in the Frankfurt School's most famous work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947)—a question that is not so far-fetched because in 1932, Adorno was willing, in the spirit of immanent critique, to develop his conception of natural-history out of Heidegger's ontology of history.

This raises an important question: was the young Adorno too, despite his stern opposition to Heidegger, under his *mythoi*? Robert Hullot-Kentor and Susan Buck-Morss note that in his musical writings in the late 1920s, Adorno occasionally evoked in an affirmative manner ontological vocabulary that clearly betrayed Heidegger's influence. Whether this allows one, as Hullot-Kentor maintains, to talk about Adorno as having been "directly involved in the neo-ontological movement in the mid-twenties" is contestable. It remains true, however, that Adorno would omit these Heideggerian traces from later editions of his musical writings because he was "too embarrassed" about them.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, this ontological vocabulary is visible in Adorno's contributions to the Frankfurt discussion, especially in the little-examined transcriptions of the so-called *Kränzchen* discussions. This may testify to the powerful presence of Heidegger even in Adorno's thought. But it may also be a sign of Adorno's willingness to seek translation, in the spirit of immanent critique, between Heidegger's thought and his own. It was perhaps not least because of this willingness to embrace, for the sake of critical dialogue, the position of the arch-enemy that the later Adorno—not known for using labels echoing the imprint of "culture industry"—described his discussions with his colleagues at the University of Frankfurt as a true expression of "the famous twenties."<sup>13</sup>

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12. Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 53, 210–211n228, 227n78; Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Introduction to T. W. Adorno's 'The Idea of Natural-History,'" in *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 235–238.

13. "Erinnerungen an Paul Tillich," in *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch* (Stuttgart, Germany: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967), 29.

## The Davos Disputation and Heidegger's Frankfurt Lecture

“There’s nothing going on in Frankfurt. I see nobody and am unhappy. Mr. Cassirer will speak on Wednesday. Well, the philosopher.”<sup>14</sup> It was with these unenthusiastic words that 25-year-old Adorno described his low expectations for the upcoming lecture by the eminent neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer in October 1928. Cassirer would lecture at Frankfurt’s Kant Society on philosophical anthropology, which along with other early twentieth-century currents such as phenomenology and philosophy of life desired to challenge neo-Kantianism’s overly intellectualized and optimistic picture of the human condition. In his works in the 1920s, Cassirer had made considerable modifications to his previous orthodox neo-Kantian concern with epistemology of natural sciences—attempts to make Kantian epistemology applicable to Einstein’s theories of relativity—by focusing on less scientific varieties of human expression. What Cassirer called the capacity at symbolization in his tripartite *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (*Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*) counted, besides science, also art, ethics, and myth as equal expressions of the human being’s symbolic coming to terms with the world. Cassirer’s move from the sciences to more worldly dimensions of human life had brought him into proximity with philosophical anthropologists such as Max Scheler. Yet, the most important of these, although he disliked the label, was Heidegger, whose idea of *Das Sein* paralleled Cassirer’s recent interests.<sup>15</sup>

In the spring of 1929, Heidegger and Cassirer would face each other in the second annual Davos *Hochschulkurse* in Switzerland. At the main event of this multidisciplinary and international event of high magnitude, envisioned as a “Locarno of intellectuals” between German and French scholars, Cassirer and Heidegger drew on Kant to articulate their views of what it ultimately means to be

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14. Adorno to Kracauer, October 1, 1928, in *Briefe und Briefwechsel—Bd. 7: Theodor W. Adorno—Siegfried Kracauer: Briefwechsel 1923–1966*, ed. Wolfgang Schopf (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2008), 178.

15. Edward Skidelsky, *Ernst Cassirer: The Last Philosopher of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 100–127.

human. Cassirer claimed that Kant's transcendental philosophy disclosed a richer view of the human being than orthodox neo-Kantianism had realized. Kant's idea of the human mind as lawgiver to reality meant that not just natural science but art, ethics, and myth followed the logic inherent in the human mind. While these different realms should be given attention, however, scientific reason should be held as the last authority. In contrast, Heidegger's idea of the human being as thrown Dasein implied that what defined human life was not the potential to reach universal truths but historical existence. Whether human beings inauthentically adopted historical tradition or engaged in an authentic retrieval of alternative possibilities offered by the historical heritage, they could not escape their fate of existing as a historical being. In Davos and in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), Heidegger aspired to cast Kant as a precursor of his own concerns. He claimed that Kant posed the question on the human being to highlight not the spontaneity but the receptivity of the human mind, and ultimately to advocate metaphysics over science. Heidegger argued that Kant's new conception of metaphysics, based more on persistent metaphysical need than to any answers to this need, had sought its point of departure in the human being not as a detached scientific observer but rather as a finite, worldly creature embedded in time and place in a very concrete sense. The Copernican turn, according to which the objective world had to adjust to laws posed on it by the human mind, meant for Heidegger that the human being indeed infused reality with meaning: not primarily through scientific *Verstand*-reason but through the more hermeneutic everyday signification of Dasein thrown into historical facticity.<sup>16</sup>

In his disputation with Heidegger, as well as in his writings before and after Davos, Cassirer conceded that *Being and Time*'s merit lay in its articulation of the situation-bound existence of the human being as being-in-the-world. Yet, Cassirer thought Heidegger was mistaken in stating that this existential sphere was all there was and that the human being could not rise to the realm of universality through reason. By universal truths, Cassirer meant scientific

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16. Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 6–16, 24–37, 87–94.



rationality, which he saw as progressing toward increasing functionalization (Einstein). Cassirer, one of most vocal defenders of the Weimar Republic, embraced the disenchanting process of cultural modernity because it critically undermined metaphysical claims to absolute authority, showing for example that Kant's idea of thing-in-itself, allegedly beyond the grasp of human rationality, was no such thing at all but only a limiting concept for the gradual development of science. Cassirer accused Heidegger of championing a sort of developmental arrest that, like philosophical anthropology and philosophy of life, worked against the Enlightenment promise of autonomy. For Heidegger, who claimed that what he meant by thrownness was not something that could be done away with, Cassirer's views bespoke fleeing the finite human condition into delusions of rational mastery of outside reality. Rejecting Cassirer's accusations of epistemic nostalgia, he insisted that his view of the human being was defensible without recourse to precritical metaphysics or theological dogmas. While Heidegger was considered the winner of the debate, the impression of his superiority was based not only on his arguments but equally on his charismatic person who, like Naphta in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, embodied the broader cultural crisis consciousness in a way that Cassirer's erudite but dispassionate Settembrinian outlook failed to match.<sup>17</sup>

What was Adorno's stance toward the Davos protagonists? To put Adorno's impression of Heidegger and Cassirer in perspective, a few words on his earlier development would be appropriate here. By 1928, Adorno, the only child of an assimilated Jewish father and a Catholic mother, had behind him his first successes and disappointments in two of his dearest passions: philosophy and music. Although he had earned his doctorate in philosophy in 1924 with a dissertation on Husserl, Adorno had found little to appreciate in the scientifically minded academic philosophy of the 1920s, epitomized by his neo-Kantian supervisor, Hans Cornelius. Adorno's private mentor, Siegfried Kracauer, had played a remarkable role in his philosophical upbringing since 1918. Kracauer was, among other things, a highly original left-wing sociologist of literature and

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17. Ibid., 87–90, 224–229, 237–243.

mass culture, whose unconventional approach to philosophical classics such as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* nurtured his young student's sensitivity to the complex societal inscription of the most abstract philosophical arguments. Adorno's philosophical imagination had been further fed by Kierkegaard and then increasingly by intellectual as well as personal contacts with two founding fathers of Western Marxism, Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, in whose works romantic anti-capitalism joined hands with an unorthodox Marxism with a utopian flavor. Alongside his philosophical interests, Adorno had sought a career in music, establishing himself as one of Germany's seminal music critics and an outspoken defender of expressionism. Moreover, in the mid-1920s, Adorno had studied composition in Vienna under Alban Berg, one of the insiders of Arnold Schönberg's circle. After his Vienna years, Adorno had returned to Frankfurt to continue his studies in philosophy, but here too his first attempt at habilitation in 1927 with a work on Kant and Freud had ended in failure.<sup>18</sup>

Adorno's unenthusiastic remark on Cassirer in 1928 suggests that he held a similar impression of him as much of the Davos audience. Based on Adorno's rare remarks on Cassirer, he found the latter's neo-Kantianism uninspiring, and even after they were both exiled to Oxford in the mid-1930s, Adorno did not move philosophically closer to Cassirer. In Adorno's later verdict, neo-Kantian focus on epistemology "denied what will be expected of philosophy by anyone who goes in for it unprepared" and trained people to "stop asking, as futile, the only questions for whose sake they turn to it."<sup>19</sup> Adorno was also far more sensitive to the fragility of cultural modernity than Cassirer. This can be seen in his criticism of Cassirer's 1932 *Philosophie der Aufklärung* (*Philosophy of Enlightenment*), an effort to cast Kantian rationalism as foundation not only of scientific reason but also of the enlightenment as a larger cultural-political movement. In Adorno's opinion, Cassirer, "our

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18. Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 65–114; Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 37–51, 67–109.

19. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 62.

university-Goethe,” succumbed to a dangerously superficial understanding of emancipation by viewing the political French enlightenment of the eighteenth century as a mere precursor to the far less radical neo-Kantian rationalism.<sup>20</sup>

If Adorno’s stance toward Cassirer was marked by indifference, Heidegger’s philosophy signified a considerable challenge for him. According to Adorno’s later testimony, *Being and Time* made a strong impression on him in 1927, and for a while, he even planned to pay a visit to Heidegger in Freiburg.<sup>21</sup> Although this plan was never actualized, Adorno got a chance to meet Heidegger. On Kurt Riezler’s invitation, Heidegger lectured in Frankfurt’s Kant’s Society on January 24, 1929, with the title “Philosophical Anthropology and Metaphysics of Dasein.” Unlike Cassirer’s lecture in the same Kant Society just months earlier, Heidegger’s lecture apparently left no one cold; according to some newspapers, it was “totally rejected.”<sup>22</sup> It does not take much daring to suggest that the most negative reactions came from the members of the Institute for Social Research. Hermann Mörchen has, however, proposed that Adorno’s stance toward this lecture was not entirely negative, for he opened his own lecture on “natural-history” in the same Kant Society in 1932 by saying that his aim was to “further develop the problems of the so-called Frankfurt discussion” that had been unjustly disparaged. It seems that Adorno’s defensive words were directed at his fellow critical theorists, who were not enthusiastic about his attempt to develop critical theory out of Heidegger’s

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20. Adorno to Kracauer, January 12, 1933, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 298. Adorno’s criticism was connected to his belief that neo-Kantianism overlooked the threat of irrational forces in the present societal situation. Adorno’s first attempt at habilitation, the 1927 Freud-Kant study, can be read as an effort to expand the overly rationalistic neo-Kantian paradigm toward Freudian psychoanalysis. Theodor W. Adorno, *Der Begriff des Unbewussten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre*, in *Gesammelte Schriften 1, Philosophische Frühschriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1973). On Cassirer’s book, see Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 291–300.

21. Adorno’s discussion with Mörchen on October 8, 1965, in Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 13n2, 31.

22. Mörchen’s diary entry from January 30, 1929, in Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 13n4.

thought. Mörchen suggested further that Heidegger's Frankfurt lecture may have formed a sort of a beginning point of the Frankfurt discussion.<sup>23</sup> Yet, he did not develop this suggestion any further, which is, of course, understandable given that Heidegger's lecture was only published in 2016.

Significantly, one newspaper report of Heidegger's lecture deviated from the narrative of total rejection. Echoing Adorno's more nuanced view of Heidegger, Siegfried Kracauer's review in *Frankfurter Zeitung* related nothing about the allegedly dismissive reactions by the audience:

At the invitation of Frankfurt's Kant Society, on Thursday evening the famous philosopher Prof. Martin Heidegger spoke on "Philosophical Anthropology and Metaphysics of Dasein." He had chosen the topic considering the philosophical work of Max Scheler, whose question he started from, and also as an introduction to his own work. Here it is not possible to reproduce, let alone to comment, on the lecture. It should only be noted that in the course of his reflections, constructed with utter methodical caution, Heidegger sought to bring philosophical anthropology's question of the essence of the human being back to philosophy's fundamental question of Dasein as such. The human being is more than the human being. He is Dasein. The human being certainly stands in the center of metaphysics, but not as the human being.—Such were the decisive formulations, which struggled against anthropologism (and anthropomorphism) to convey a more accurate notion of the place of the human being in the world. The essence of the human being is *eccentric*: hardly more succinctly than with this word by Scheler, quoted in the end, can one express what Heidegger meant. We end this report by saying that the personality of the speaker brought a great crowd of spectators, who were no doubt unversed in the problems of philosophy, but who put themselves at risk and entered the complex world of subtle definitions and distinctions.<sup>24</sup>

Heidegger's lecture revolved around the topic that would be crucial in the Frankfurt discussion: the relationship of his metaphysics of Dasein to the philosophical anthropology of Max Scheler, to

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23. Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 34n14, 142; Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 252.

24. Siegfried Kracauer, "Vortrag von Prof. Heidegger," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Abendblatt), January 25, 1929, 2.

whose memory Heidegger dedicated his lecture. Today mostly forgotten, at the time of his unexpected death, Scheler (1874–1928) was one of the most significant German intellectuals, corresponding with figures from Albert Einstein to Rainer Maria Rilke, introducing Henri Bergson's thought to Germany, and co-editing with Edmund Husserl the journal *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*. Appointed as the professor of philosophy in Frankfurt in 1928, Scheler was a colleague to Adorno and Horkheimer for a few months until his death. Scheler was known for his restless wondering from one philosophical and political allegiance to the next. Over the course of his life, he would embrace currents as diverse as the youth movement, Prussian militarism, pacifism, social democracy, Catholicism, and, finally, in his late works on philosophical anthropology, atheist Nietzscheanism. What remained a constant was Scheler's yearning for a community in the disenchanting West and his elitist belief in an aristocratic leadership in both thought and politics. This did not prevent Scheler from being an outspoken critic of National Socialism, which together with his Jewish heritage led to suppression of his works in the Third Reich.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas the question of the human being had implicitly been on the table since the attacks on positivism and shallowness of cultural modernity by critics such as Nietzsche, it was explicitly articulated as the most burning philosophical question by phenomenologists such as Scheler and Heidegger after World War I. Bespeaking their distance from Husserl's rationalist ethos was Scheler's observation that today, the human being "finds himself completely and utterly 'problematical,'" and "no longer knows what he is and simultaneously *knows that* he does not have the answer." Situating this predicament within a historical perspective, Scheler pondered whether the advancing rationalism and individualism of the modern West were a desirable development, or whether they rather "mark the progress and growth of a dangerous illusion."<sup>26</sup> In his

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25. Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 228–239; John Raphael Staude, *Max Scheler 1874–1928: An Intellectual Portrait* (New York: Free Press, 1967), viii–ix.

26. Max Scheler, "Man and History," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, trans. Oscar A. Haac (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 65, 68.

Frankfurt lecture, Heidegger credited Scheler for the insight, ripened especially in his last work, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (*The Human Place in Cosmos*), that the question of the human being lies at the center of all genuine philosophy. But he also differentiated his position from Scheler's by claiming that philosophical anthropology was still trapped in Cartesian subjectivism and hence incapable for serving as the path to the question of the meaning of being raised in *Being and Time*.<sup>27</sup> This criticism notwithstanding, Daniel O. Dahlstrom notes that judging from their many praising comments on each other's work, there was something like "a mutual admiration society" between the two, and that Heidegger's comments in *Being and Time* and dedication of his Kant book to Scheler suggest that the latter influenced him.<sup>28</sup>

A pressing question in German philosophy at the time revolved around the theoretical and practical implications of the "material" or "existential" twist given by Scheler and Heidegger to Husserl's original idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science. Scheler's concern with larger historical and civilizational issues perhaps explains why Adorno found his thought more appealing than the arid neo-Kantianism of Hans Cornelius, Scheler's predecessor in Frankfurt. Pondering on Scheler's appointment and the possibility of his accepting the Kant-Freud thesis that Cornelius had rejected, Adorno wrote to Alban and Helene Berg that Scheler "is certainly an exceptional man," and that with Scheler, he "could get by with fewer concessions."<sup>29</sup> Adorno, however, found Scheler's material phenomenology highly problematic because of its metaphysical and ideological baggage—a baggage that plagued even Scheler's last seemingly secular meditations on philosophical anthropology.

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27. Martin Heidegger, "Philosophische Anthropologie und Metaphysik des Daseins," in *Gesamtausgabe 80.1*, ed. Günther Neumann (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 2016), 219–229.

28. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "Scheler's Critique of Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology," in *Max Scheler's Acting Persons: New Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Schneck (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 67.

29. Adorno to Alban and Helene Berg, May 14, 1928, *Briefe und Briefwechsel—Bd. 2: Theodor W. Adorno und Alban Berg, Briefwechsel 1925–1935*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1997), 170.

Indeed, the Frankfurt discussion came down largely to the question of whether Heidegger's existential phenomenology—his understanding of the human being in terms of the temporal scheme of thrownness and projection—had succeeded in getting rid of Scheler's *weltanschaulich* baggage. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defined authenticity as “resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing, and discloses them *in terms of the heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, *takes over*.”<sup>30</sup>

The theological and idealist narratives of providence or world spirit having been judged untenable, Heidegger's teachings about the human condition had disclosed something undeniable: that every individual stood between, on the one side, the historical tradition and social environment they were born into and, on the other side, those authentic possibilities that they could actualize by shaking off their social conformism and uncritical adoration of the historical tradition. How could this formal idea of Dasein, this mere temporal skeleton that abstained from all substantial questions about the content of authenticity, be seen as carrying ideological connotations? And yet, Heidegger's phenomenological explication at times toed the line between description and prescription. Reflecting on his idea of thrownness, in the Kant book, Heidegger argued that in “man's comportment toward beings which he himself is not, he already finds the being as that from which he is supported, as that on which he has depended, as that over which, for all his culture and technology, he can never become master.” In *Being and Time*, continuing his meditations on authenticity, he declared that “once one has grasped the finitude of one's existence, it snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities which offer themselves as closest to one—those of comfortableness, shirking, and taking things lightly—and brings Dasein into the simplicity of its *fate*.”<sup>31</sup>

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30. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 74 (435).

31. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 5th ed., trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 159–160; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 74 (435).

Adorno's first analysis of Heidegger's philosophy—its peculiar fusion of concreteness and abstractness as well as its ambivalent normative status—was his habilitation thesis on the arch existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard.

### ***Kierkegaard: Adorno's First Contribution to the Frankfurt Discussion***

Written in 1929–1930 and published on February 27, 1933, the day of the Reichstag fire and the beginning of Hitler's dictatorship, *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen* (*Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*) sought to disclose the mythic conception of human existence underlying Kierkegaard's existentialism. In the terminology of Adorno's supervisor, Paul Tillich, the book saw at the heart of Kierkegaard's much-applauded philosophy a demonic conception of existence. Clarification of one's stance toward Kierkegaard was a must for almost every philosophical and theological current of the Weimar era. Like many others in the Western Marxist canon, the young Adorno had been impressed by Kierkegaard's passionate critique of contemporary bourgeois society and of the Hegelianism that saw this society as a manifestation of reason. Dissatisfied with Kierkegaard's incapacity to translate this moralistic indignation into a social criticism of capitalism, however, Adorno became critical of his solipsistic notion of existence. In contrast, during the Kierkegaard revival of the Weimar era, it was just this conception of the individual encapsulated in its self that had inspired both existentialist philosophers such as Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, as well as representatives of new theological currents such as the existential theology of Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann and the dialectical theology of Karl Barth.<sup>32</sup>

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32. Hullot-Kentor, "Critique of the Organic," xii; Marcia Morgan, "Adorno's Reception of Kierkegaard: 1929–1933," *Søren Kierkegaard Newsletter* 46 (2003): 8–12. On reception of Kierkegaard in Weimar Germany, see Peter E. Gordon, "Weimar Theology: From Historicism to Crisis," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 159, 162–166.



Adorno's study consisted of a twofold effort. First, he attacked the new radical philosophical and theological appropriations of Kierkegaard for repeating his core mistake: hypostatizing the isolated individual from the allegedly inauthentic social world. Concerning Heidegger, Adorno criticized the ontological direction in which *Being and Time* had developed Kierkegaard's psychological concepts such as anxiety and fear. In Kierkegaard's defense, Adorno claimed that while the Dane had indeed brought philosophy from the heights of idealist speculation back to the concrete historical world, he had not thereby sought to answer any ontological questions but had remained on the psychological level of empirical human beings.<sup>33</sup> Second, while being highly critical of Kierkegaard, Adorno wished to rescue the enduring significance of his thought by showing that its lasting truth—the element of hope and concern with suffering—was not located in that realm where Kierkegaard himself and his followers looked for it, that is, in the hierarchic doctrine of stages of existence culminating in the leap of faith and surrender of individual autonomy under Biblical dogmas. Rather than in this existential doctrine, Adorno saw an emancipatory dimension in the aesthetic realm, in unintentional secondary material such as images, names, and metaphors that Kierkegaard used frequently. These fragments embodied hopes of individual fulfillment and reconciliations of social antagonisms that Kierkegaard's official doctrine suppressed.<sup>34</sup>

In this peculiar interpretive effort, Adorno was following the materialist hermeneutics of his closest philosophical ally since 1928, Walter Benjamin. The core of Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*), a habilitation thesis rejected in Frankfurt in 1925 and published in 1928, was the claim that thinking—even the seemingly immutable idealist thought categories, such as Kant's spontaneous reason or Husserl's intentionality—bore the imprint of history. This did not mean the

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33. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 68–69.

34. Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 114–121; Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 125–131.

reduction of thought to individual psychology, particular *Zeitgeist*, or the economy. Instead, in his study Benjamin interpreted “mourning plays” of German Baroque as complex expressions of an antagonistic social structure. The motive for Benjamin’s study, however, was to illuminate his own time, for what applied for Baroque plays went in his eyes for modern expressionism as well. Both genres critically reflected the painful social-cultural disintegration of their respective eras (the early modern period and the liberal-bourgeois pre-1914 epoch) without seeking refuge in classical doctrines (Greek tragedy and German idealism). Both expressed their hope for a better world through fragments rather than systems. Benjamin’s openings were pivotal for Adorno, who as an expressionist musical critic was immersed in the problematic of change in the standards of musical composition. Defending Schönberg’s atonality, Adorno denied the existence of eternal standards in composition. To keep on invoking the old ideal of tonality meant a false ornamenting of current antagonistic social reality that was no longer the more harmonious one in which, say, Beethoven had lived.<sup>35</sup> In Adorno’s eyes, popular polemic against Schönberg in the name of classic standards differed little from Heidegger’s rehabilitation of the question of being. By invoking immutable standards, they presented reality as more meaningful than it actually was and ignored the very real and painful societal transformations that characterized the current historical period.

Adorno argued that despite Kierkegaard’s legitimate critique of Hegel’s idealism, he succumbed to the same idealist trap of bringing history to a standstill. Unlike in Hegel, this was caused not by a premature affirmation of bourgeois institutions reconciling the antinomy of individual and community, but by Kierkegaard’s undialectical view of the individual as forever alienated from other human beings and social institutions. Adorno thought that Heidegger had constructed his idea of *Dasein* around this Kierkegaardian experience, for which it was characteristic that, as Adorno would

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35. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985). See Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 11–17, 20–23, 77–81; Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 246–255.

formulate it in his 1931 inaugural address, the despair felt in the face of frustrating historical reality was transformed (*verzaubert*) into a “design [*Entwurf*] of being within subjectivity” that is nothing short of a “design of hell.”<sup>36</sup> What made this existentialist solution unacceptable to Adorno was its conservative function. Giving up all criteria with which to differentiate good social forms from bad ones, its emphasis on individual authenticity ended up supporting the social status quo.

Adorno invested much of himself in this interpretive effort, not only philosophically but also theologically. To his erstwhile mentor, Kracauer, he wrote that “blood is indeed being spilled in the work.” Even as Adorno clarified that despite his distance from modern-day epigones of Kierkegaard—Heidegger and dialectical theology—“I by no means deny my own theological motives. On the contrary, I cannot bury my head in the sand . . . if I myself mean it clearly and explicitly.” In its odd mixture of theology and materialist social criticism, *Kierkegaard* was not easily digestible. Horkheimer “finds it incredibly difficult, more difficult than the Baroque book. I can be of no help here; it lies in the things. I have disclosed the mythical-demonic character of Kierkegaard’s notion of existence. If this does not let itself be translated into Suebo-Marxism, there is nothing I can do about it.”<sup>37</sup> As John Abromeit has recently shown, while Horkheimer could appreciate the critical thrust of Adorno’s study, he was quite frank that Adorno’s understanding of critical theory as an interpretation of individual works of philosophy and art, and his distillation out of them a vague glimpse of theological hope, lay far from Horkheimer’s own attempt to grasp current society in its totality by fusing social philosophy and empirical sciences.<sup>38</sup> For Tillich, in contrast, Adorno’s theological side was not so crucial. And although Adorno attacked the very Kierkegaardian foundation of Tillich’s theology, the latter could still praise his student’s

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36. Theodor W. Adorno, “The actuality of Philosophy,” trans. Benjamin Snow, in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 27.

37. Adorno to Kracauer, July 25, 1930, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 235.

38. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 351–352.

unorthodox reading of Kierkegaard as a considerable interpretive achievement.<sup>39</sup>

Susan Buck-Morss notes that a sort of crystallization of Adorno's philosophical position occurred in the fall of 1929 when he and Benjamin held a meeting in the Frankfurt suburb of Königstein. In a discussion that went back to the opposition of historicism and neo-ontology, the two decided to resist all attempts at a rehabilitation of ontology, such as the phenomenologies of Scheler and Heidegger.<sup>40</sup> Although Adorno had hardly been an uncritical advocate of neo-ontological doctrines, the Königstein meeting marked a change in his philosophical outlook. As already noted, in some of his musical writings, such as "Schubert" (1928), Adorno had frequently used "ontology" vocabulary affirmatively but deleted it when these writings were reprinted in 1964.<sup>41</sup> *Kierkegaard* was thus Adorno's first attempt to put the anti-ontological Königstein program into play. This was by no means an easy task, as evinced by the marked differences between the published book and the original manuscript. "Without trying to find a common denominator for all these revisions," Robert Hullot-Kentor suggests, "what is evident is a trimming back of ontological efforts, though not to the point demanded by his later philosophy. In *Kierkegaard* Adorno is still concerned with the possibility of a rescue of ontology."<sup>42</sup> Significantly, Adorno's use of ontology vocabulary is visible in his previously unexamined debates with the Frankfurt Heideggerians. The Frankfurt discussion offers, then, an intriguing window to the young Adorno's effort to find and trust in his own philosophical voice in an environment dominated by phenomenological radicals, most notably by Heidegger.

It was at the Königstein meeting that Benjamin also presented first drafts of what would become his unfinished masterpiece, *Das*

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39. Paul Tillich, "Review of *Kierkegaard: Konstruktion des Ästhetischen*, by Theodor W. Adorno," *The Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 23 (1934): 640.

40. Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 22, 53–54, 64–65.

41. *Ibid.*, 227n78; Theodor W. Adorno, "Schubert," in *Night Music: Essays on Music 1928–1962*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Wieland Hoban (London: Seagull Books, 2009), 19–46.

42. Hullot-Kentor, "Critique of the Organic," xxi.

*Passagen-Werk* (*The Arcades Project*). The so-called Königstein draft of the book does not contain any references to Heidegger, although Adorno and Benjamin very likely discussed his philosophy.<sup>43</sup> Supporting this conjecture is the fact that just few months after the Königstein meeting, Benjamin described his own struggle with Heidegger: “It now seems a certainty that, for this book as well as for the *Trauerspiel* book, an introduction that discusses epistemology is necessary—especially for this book, a discussion of the theory of historical knowledge. This is where I will find Heidegger, and I expect sparks will fly from the shock of the confrontation between our two very different ways of looking at history.”<sup>44</sup> The Königstein meeting, taking place just six months after the Davos conference, was followed by a plan by Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht to write a crushing critique of Heidegger. Adorno was supposed to be part of this project, which, however, never materialized. At the time, Adorno also planned a lengthier critique of *Being and Time*, but this effort too came to nothing, and his longer treatments of Heidegger would have to wait until the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Pressed by his Heideggerian-minded colleagues, however, in the early 1930s, Adorno was forced to defend and sharpen the philosophical program he had outlined with Benjamin and applied for the first time in *Kierkegaard*.

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43. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 873–884.

44. Benjamin to Scholem, January 20, 1930, in Walter Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 359–360. Howard Caygill suggests that Benjamin had already been critical of Heidegger’s 1916 doctoral dissertation, and that Benjamin’s Baroque book, sketched in 1916, should be read as an implicit rejoinder to Heidegger; Howard Caygill, “Benjamin, Heidegger, and the Destruction of Tradition,” in *Walter Benjamin’s Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), 1–22.

45. Erdmut Wizisla, *Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Christine Shuttleworth (London: Libris, 2009), 66–97; Adorno to Kracauer, January 2 and May 29, 1931, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 258–259, 276.

## The Frankfurt Discussion: Philosophy, Politics, Participants

The Frankfurt discussion over Heidegger was one theme, albeit a significant one, among many others fought in Frankfurt in the late Weimar Republic. Perhaps the general intellectual front lines in these wider debates could be drawn between blossoming, left-leaning sociological imagination of the Institute for Social Research, led by Max Horkheimer, and the sociology of knowledge around Karl Mannheim's sociological seminar and elitist humanists influenced by the charismatic neo-Romantic poet Stefan George, such as the Germanist Max Kommerell and the historian Ernst Kantorowicz.<sup>46</sup> Characteristic of Frankfurt at the time was its position not only as an intellectual but also as a political battleground. The University of Frankfurt's strong Leftist and anti-Fascist student organizations fought the mounting number of brown-shirted Nazi students, who dubbed the Institute for Social Research a "temple of Marxists" or "Marxburg" and ridiculed the city as "the new Jerusalem," a reference to the *Freie jüdische Lehrhaus* led by the philosophers of religion, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber.<sup>47</sup>

The cutting-edge character of the University of Frankfurt was incarnated by its rector and honorary professor of philosophy, Kurt Riezler, who played a pivotal role in making the university an innovative intellectual center and prime expression of Weimar's modern spirit. Riezler was responsible for initiating appointments of such sharp minds as Tillich, Scheler, Horkheimer, Mannheim (with whom came his young assistant Norbert Elias), and Kantorowicz. He also tried his hand on Heidegger, which is unsurprising, given that on Leo Strauss's account, "Heidegger was the greatest contemporary power which Riezler ever encountered." While Riezler

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46. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Intellektuellendämmerung: Zur Lage der Frankfurter Intelligenz in den zwanziger Jahren* (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1985), 19–22; Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 142–143. See also Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 258–278.

47. Schivelbusch, *Intellektuellendämmerung*, 19–22, 47–48; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 112–113; Rolf Wiggershaus, *Max Horkheimer: Unternehmer in Sachen "Kritische Theorie"* (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 2013), 75–76.

appreciated Cassirer's erudition and tried to persuade him to come to Frankfurt as well, of the two Davos protagonists, "Riezler took the side of Heidegger without any hesitation." Riezler was not just an academic. In his earlier career as a diplomat, he had contributed to Germany's war effort as the chief advisor of chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg. Nationalist by sentiment, during the Weimar era, Riezler gradually became a sincerer defender of the republic. His allegiance to cultural modernity, however, was always ambiguous. In his inaugural speech in Frankfurt's *Pauluskirche* in 1928, Riezler defended the Weimar Republic and scientific modernity but also declared that "the most essential thing" lay in "being and becoming a person." Riezler's openness to modernity made him persona non grata in 1933, and despite his defense that he had tried to attract such pro-Nazi voices as Heidegger and the legal theorist Carl Schmitt to Frankfurt, he was smoked out from academia. Married to a Jewish woman, in 1938, Riezler emigrated to New York and the New School of Social Research.<sup>48</sup>

In appointing Tillich as Scheler's successor as professor of philosophy in 1929, Riezler thought he had made a good acquisition because of Tillich's appreciation of philosophical issues beyond epistemology and his concerns over larger cultural and political questions. Indeed, Tillich saw himself as continuing the work of Scheler rather than Hans Cornelius because the former's wide-ranging interests far surpassed the latter's limited focus on epistemology.<sup>49</sup> Before arriving in Frankfurt, Tillich had taught in Marburg in the mid-1920s simultaneously with Heidegger. His stance toward Heidegger was ambivalent. Although Tillich's socialism, shaped after the horrors of the world war, set him apart from Heidegger, the latter's radical existen-

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48. Strauss, "Kurt Riezler," 245–246; Karl Dietrich Erdmann, "Kurt Riezler—ein politisches Profil (1882–1955)," in *Kurt Riezler: Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, ed. Karl Dietrich Erdmann (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1972), 141–145; Wayne C. Thompson, *In the Eye of the Storm: Kurt Riezler and the Crises of Modern Germany* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), 211–216; Notker Hammerstein, *Die Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main: Von der Stiftungsuniversität zur staatlichen Hochschule. Bd. 1, 1914 bis 1950* (Neuwied, Germany: Metzner, 1989), 65–69, 79–83.

49. Wilhelm Pauck and Marion Pauck, *Paul Tillich: His Life and Thought, Vol. I: Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 113.

tial approach to philosophy left its mark on Tillich's theology. "Only after several years," Tillich recalls, "did I become fully conscious of the influence upon my own thinking of this encounter" with Heidegger. "I resisted, I tried to approve. I adopted the new methods of thought, less their results."<sup>50</sup> Due to Tillich's pro-socialist speeches, he was forced to emigrate in 1933, and he spent the rest of his life in Cambridge and New York, where he stayed in contact with Riezler at the New School and Horkheimer's circle in Columbia.

Another notable recruit by Riezler, and another soon-to-be exile in New York, was Max Wertheimer, a founder of the burgeoning avant-garde current of Gestalt psychology. Seeking to challenge the mechanical nineteenth-century psychology with an emphasis on holistic structure of human experience, Wertheimer shared Heidegger's view of the human being's pre-theoretical understanding of the world. Given Heidegger's general skepticism toward empirical sciences, it is noteworthy that he expressed uncharacteristically embracing words about Wertheimer's and other Gestalt theorists' work. Due to his Jewish origins and liberal-democratic preferences, in 1933, Wertheimer decided to emigrate to New York and continue his work at the New School.<sup>51</sup>

What grounds do we have to view Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer as those "representatives of fundamental ontology" that Adorno mentioned in his 1931 inaugural address (the epigraph)?<sup>52</sup> Shortly afterwards, Adorno reported to Kracauer, "I have ahead of me a long confrontation with Wertheimer and Riezler (from whom stem the 'fundamental-ontological' objections at the end of my lecture)." His lecture was partly an answer to "the objections by Wertheimer and Riezler against" his *Kierkegaard*.<sup>53</sup> As for Tillich, Adorno

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50. Paul Tillich, *Begegnungen: Paul Tillich über sich selbst und andere*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 12 (Stuttgart, Germany: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1971), 69.

51. D. Brett King and Michael Wertheimer, *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory* (London: Routledge, 2005), 176–209; Mitchell G. Ash, "Weimar Psychology: Holistic Visions and Trained Intuition," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 40–41.

52. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 24.

53. Adorno to Kracauer, May 29 and June 8, 1931, Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 275, 283–284.



later described his supervisor as “one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met in my life and I owe to him the most profound debt of gratitude for having approved of my Habilitation thesis in 1931, in other words, at a time when fascism with all that this meant was on the rise.” Adorno attached to Tillich’s persona “openness and open-mindedness such as I have never encountered in anyone else. I am fully aware that precisely these qualities in Tillich provoked criticism, and I myself was among those who made such criticisms early on.”<sup>54</sup> What Adorno had found problematic was Tillich’s “proximity to the then fashionable theory of origins [*Ursprungstheoreme*], which came partly from Heidegger and alternatively from the racial theory of the National Socialists.” To Adorno’s dislike, Tillich had not rejected this theory “with sufficient radicalness, but talked about primordial powers [*Ursprungsmächten*] as if such things actually existed.”<sup>55</sup>

Considering that Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer were by no means uncritical followers of Heidegger, the term “Frankfurt Heideggerian” requires some explanation. Indeed, even though the three saw Heidegger as the most powerful philosophical force of the times, they would not have accepted the characterization of themselves as Heideggerians. Not only would they, after 1933, trenchantly criticize Heidegger’s Nazism, they already thought earlier that while Heidegger had posed the right existential questions, he had failed to provide adequate answers. Indeed, they stressed a connection between this failure and Heidegger’s political misjudgment. Again, although Heidegger appreciated his friendship with Riezler, shared with Tillich an existential approach to theology, and said uncharacteristically warm things about Wertheimer’s psychology, he would not have characterized the three as Heideggerians. Adorno was aware of these differences. Nevertheless, in his programmatic lectures, he chose to call his colleagues “fundamental ontologists” or “neo-ontologists.” In doing so, Adorno was not trying to be merely polemical.

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54. Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 2–3.

55. “Erinnerungen an Paul Tillich,” 29–30.

cal. Instead, he identified his colleagues as Heidegger's followers because—even when their theories ultimately led elsewhere than Heidegger's—they had adopted *Being and Time's* philosophical starting point, the existential analytic of Dasein, as their own. Therefore, I think it is legitimate, with these qualifications in mind, to refer to Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer as “Frankfurt Heideggerians.”

Adorno later looked back nostalgically at the Weimar years at the University of Frankfurt when he and his colleagues would “go for one another like wild animals” but in an open spirit that did not cause damage to their friendships.<sup>56</sup> By this, he meant the so-called wisdom seminars, led by Riezler, and similar gatherings around Tillich known as *Kränzchen* (“circle”), which resisted academic specialization by creating an informal setting for discussion of pressing social, cultural, and political phenomena. These gatherings also formed the main forum for the Frankfurt discussion. What makes the *Kränzchen* discussions important for us is that unlike from the wisdom seminars, a couple of transcriptions have remained from discussions in June 1931, that is, about a month after Adorno's inaugural address in May. These transcriptions, which we will examine in detail in the following chapters, do not discuss political developments, such as the parliamentary crisis of Weimar Republic in 1930–1933, but rather focus on deeper societal and philosophical underpinnings of the crisis of Western modernity.

The longest and most important of these is titled “Discussion on the Task of Protestantism in the Secular Civilization.”<sup>57</sup> The original copy held in the Max Horkheimer Archive is more aptly titled “On Religious Urmotives and Cultural Shaping of the World: Protestantism and Socialism.”<sup>58</sup> What interests us in this gathering on June 27 is not its main theme, the question of Protestantism as a

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56. *Ibid.*, 29.

57. “Diskussion über die Aufgabe des Protestantismus in der säkularen Zivilisation,” in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 11: Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 345–405. Hereafter cited as the Urmotive discussion.

58. “Über religiöse Urmotive und Kulturelle Weltgestaltung. Protestantismus und Sozialismus,” the Max Horkheimer Archive IX 209, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

cultural and political force, even though Adorno's confrontation here with many established theologians can be seen as a kind of a coming to a full circle of his struggle in *Kierkegaard* with modern Protestant theology. More importantly, this discussion on "religious Urmotives" often moves from a theological to a secular register. Although Heidegger is not mentioned by name here, the influence of his secularization of certain Kierkegaardian motifs is apparent in Riezler's and Tillich's defense of certain ontological invariants of human existence. Besides this long discussion transcription, there are two shorter ones, both unpublished, which have not been examined before.

Besides being about Heidegger's philosophy, the Frankfurt discussion was also about the implicit cultural diagnosis of modernity underlying *Being and Time*. All our protagonists could underwrite the following alarming diagnosis that kicked off the *Kränzchen* discussion on "religious Urmotives." In the words of theologian Heinrich Frick, characteristic of the current era of industrial modernity was "a particular view of the human being of himself" and the machine as "his prophet." All people today, Frick lamented, were "affected by an occurrence which, almost with the power of a natural process, shapes our life with a seeming irresistibility."<sup>59</sup> Heidegger's view of thrownness as a constitutive aspect of human life seemed like a plausible explanation of this predicament. But what was this thrownness all about, and what, if anything, could be done about it? The front lines in the Frankfurt discussion were drawn, in Tillich's words, between "the intra-philosophical" side, represented by Riezler, who "draw on the Greek thought and from there seek to influence the contemporary world and the overall cultural situation," and those, like Adorno, who came to this "discussion from the joint experience of the proletarian situation and socialism and place this fact into the epicenter of their whole theoretical work." What these two secular sides shared with Tillich's theology was "the passionate question of the possibility of existence that we currently face."<sup>60</sup>

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59. Heinrich Frick's contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 350, 353.

60. Paul Tillich's contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 355–356.

## “WHAT IS THE HUMAN BEING?”

### *Thrown Dasein or Cura Posterior?*

Theodor W. Adorno delivered his inaugural address, “Die Aktualität der Philosophie” (“The Actuality of Philosophy”) on May 7, 1931, three months after the University of Frankfurt had accepted his *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* as a habilitation thesis. The guiding thread of Adorno’s address—which scrutinized the dominant philosophical trends from scientifically minded positivism of the Vienna Circle and various schools of neo-Kantianism to their phenomenological and vitalist adversaries—was critique of idealism. It was mandatory, Adorno declared, to “reject the illusion” that “the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real. No justifying reason could rediscover itself in a reality whose order and form suppresses every claim to reason.” In contrast, every philosophy that interprets reality as a meaningful whole “only veils reality and eternalizes its present condition.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 24.

Turning to the main target of his criticism, Adorno continued that “prior to every answer, such a function is already implicit in the question—that question which today is called radical and which is really the least radical of all: the question of being itself, as expressly formulated by the new ontological blueprints.” Challenging the popular opinion that Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* marked the beginning of a new concrete philosophy, Adorno declared that Heidegger too “aims at ahistorical truth.” Heidegger’s rejection of Hegelianism, neo-Kantianism, and Husserlian phenomenology and his turn toward a worldly Dasein would seem to escape the accusation that his fundamental ontology repeated past mistakes. Adorno insisted, however, that the difference notwithstanding the actual function of Heidegger’s thought too was to cast reality in a transfigurative light. Heidegger’s major mistake was to believe that old philosophical “problems could simply be removed by forgetting them and starting fresh from the beginning.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Adorno’s aim was not just to attack Heidegger. If dialectical approach was a precondition for any advancement in philosophy, “then the first dialectical point of attack is given by a philosophy which cultivates precisely those problems whose removal appears more pressingly necessary than the addition of a new answer to so many old ones.” In other words, the philosophical position Adorno was about to defend would have to engage in a careful conceptual scrutiny of *Being and Time*, for only “in the strictest dialectical communication with the most recent solution-attempts of philosophy and of philosophic terminology can a real change in philosophic consciousness prevail.” Adorno’s inaugural address was the first chance for him publicly to defend the philosophical premises of his *Kierkegaard*, written in 1929–1930. Clarifying the motivational background of his address, Adorno conceded that it was indeed the critique of his habilitation study by “the representatives of fundamental ontology” that here forced him to articulate better the philosophical theory that had guided his study.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Ibid., 24, 35.

3. Ibid., 35, 37. In making this statement about his philosophical theory, Adorno was not being entirely sincere about the authorial copyright, for he failed

By these fundamental-ontological critics, Adorno was referring to his colleagues in the University of Frankfurt who regarded *Being and Time* as a monumental watershed in Western philosophy: Kurt Riezler, Paul Tillich, and Max Wertheimer. Before going to Adorno’s Frankfurt discussion with these Frankfurt Heideggerians, the chapter takes a brief look at Adorno’s view of Heidegger’s place in the phenomenological movement. After this, it turns to Riezler’s, Tillich’s, and Wertheimer’s specific criticisms of *Kierkegaard*, and Adorno’s responses in his inaugural address and in the so-called *Kränzchen* discussions. The focus of the present chapter will be on the protagonists’ differing stances toward the question of what it means to be human, whereas Chapter 6, at the heart of which is Adorno’s lecture “The Idea of Natural-History,” concentrates on their divergent conceptions of history.

### Heidegger’s Place in the Phenomenological Movement

To understand Adorno’s debate with the Frankfurt Heideggerians, we must first gain a more historicized view of the question of Heidegger’s place in the history of philosophy, for at the time, this question was often posed more specifically as the question of Heidegger’s place in the phenomenological movement. Beginning with *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl had fought relativistic implications of surging naturalism and historicism by seeking to uncover, as a condition of possibility of all experience, a realm of timeless intentional structures of human consciousness. Dissatisfied with the taken-for-granted status of older idealist axioms, Husserl aspired to bring philosophy “back to the things themselves.” Husserl understood phenomenology as an answer to the “spiritual need of our time”—a time that lacked not only a universally valid

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to mention his debt to Walter Benjamin’s *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). After discussing the issue afterwards with Benjamin, Adorno promised to dedicate the published version of his inaugural address to him; see Benjamin to Adorno, 17 and 25 July, 1931, in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940: Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 8–14.

conception of the world but also generally shared binding norms. Phenomenology was supposed to make good on the Greek promise of philosophy as “the science that satisfies the loftiest theoretical needs and renders possible from an ethico-religious point of view a life regulated by pure rational norms.”<sup>4</sup>

Many of Husserl’s followers, however, saw this strictly rationalist project as a continuation of Cartesian subjectivism and, moreover, insensitive to perennial questions of human life. Before Heidegger’s entrance into the larger public spotlight in 1927, Max Scheler was considered the most important of these post-Husserlian phenomenologists. Of Jewish background but converted to Catholicism, Scheler saw phenomenology as a special “moral attitude” rather than a scientific method. To Husserl’s dismay, Scheler sought to expand the scope of phenomenological “intuition of essences” from logical to such worldly phenomena as state, community, and the human being. Scheler’s “material phenomenology” promised to disclose a metaphysical hierarchy of values consisting of, from the bottom, biological values related to pleasure and material well-being, spiritual values of beauty and justice, knowledge of truth in an instrumental scientific and higher metaphysical sense, and finally of holiness and God.<sup>5</sup>

In his late writings on philosophical anthropology, however, Scheler adopted a position more consistent with modern science. Rather than to transcendent God, he now anchored his thought to immutable features of the human being. Any serious understanding of the historical present, Scheler maintained, required an ontological conception of the human being. The reason for the present antagonism between different worldviews, such as Judeo-Christianity, Marxism, and *Lebensphilosophie*, was their “fundamentally different ideas of the nature, structure, and origin of man.”<sup>6</sup> On Scheler’s account, these worldviews captured only parts of human existence, not its essence. The latter was the topic of Scheler’s last work, *The Human*

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4. Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 140, 71.

5. Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 253–256.

6. Scheler, “Man and History,” 69.

*Place in Cosmos* (1928), which saw the human being as a fusion of life and spirit. Against his earlier Catholicism, Scheler conceded that human beings too were part of the all-pervasive natural “impulsion.” Yet, against irrational vitalists such as Ludwig Klages, he insisted that the human being was as much a spiritual being, whose cognitive and such emotive capacities as love, humility, and reverence animated nature. The human being held a unique metaphysical place in the world because in its existence, the two ontological principles of reality—spirit and life—complemented each other. The view of history based on this conception, however, was pessimistic. In the face of the dark impulsion, the power of spirit was weak, for it no longer had on its side providential history, only rare human individuals, “persons,” on whose exceptional deeds the future of moral forces depended. Yet, for Scheler, this situation was not as meek as it seemed. Echoing Nietzsche, he claimed that the absence of God actually enabled the responsibility of humans as the sole carriers of spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno’s two programmatic lectures show that he was well aware of these developments in phenomenology. Not only had he written his doctoral dissertation on Husserl in 1924, his knowledge likely went back to conversations with his early mentor Siegfried Kracauer, who knew Scheler personally. Kracauer acknowledged the merits of phenomenology over neo-Kantianism, the mainstream academic philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Yet, ambivalence characterized Kracauer’s stance. He felt some attraction to Scheler’s version, not because of its fanciful postulation of metaphysical essences but because of its

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7. Max Scheler, *The Human Place in Cosmos*, trans. Manfred S. Frings (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 56–66. On Scheler’s philosophical anthropology, see Manfred S. Frings, *The Mind of Max Scheler: The First Comprehensive Guide Based on the Complete Works* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), chap. IX. On philosophical anthropology in general, see Joachim Fischer, *Philosophische Anthropologie: Eine Denkrichtung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg, Germany: Alber, 2009).

8. “I have given a lot of thought on phenomenology,” Kracauer wrote in 1921, “without having earlier been able to entirely come clear with this important area.” Kracauer to Leo Löwenthal, January 14, 1921, in *In steter Freundschaft: Leo Löwenthal—Siegfried Kracauer, Briefwechsel 1921–1966*, ed. Peter-Erwin Jansen and Christian Schmidt (Springe, Germany: Klampen, 2003), 18.



underlying concern with modernity as an epoch lacking in meaning and community, a concern shared by Kracauer's own teacher, Georg Simmel, as well as the pioneers of Western Marxism, Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch.<sup>9</sup> By turning the scope of phenomenology to concrete history, Scheler's aim had been to strengthen its status as a cultural force. The flipside of this turn, however, was phenomenology's increasing proneness to make unconvincing metaphysical claims and to project ideological prejudices onto its allegedly objective doctrines. These had been major issues in Scheler's Catholic phase in the early 1920s. Yet, critics argued that the later Scheler succeeded little better in keeping his *weltanschaulich* preferences in check. His philosophical anthropology revolved around anything but evident beliefs in the immutable "ground of being" or the special place of humans in the cosmos. Again, Scheler's endorsement of exceptional "persons" was elitism that betrayed his anti-modernist bias.<sup>10</sup>

For Adorno, the crucial weakness of Scheler's philosophical anthropology was its overemphasis of the idea of natural impulsion—an idea that brought phenomenology to the proximity of irrational vitalism from which Husserl had tried to keep it as far as possi-

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9. Martin Jay, "The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 155; Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 48–49. As Adorno was beginning his academic studies, Kracauer was writing his own phenomenological-sociological reflections on modernity, the 1922 *Soziologie als Wissenschaft (Sociology as Science)*. Although Kracauer seems not to have been very interested in Husserl's phenomenology, the latter found much to applaud in Kracauer's study. Max Horkheimer, who knew Husserl personally, recalls that Kracauer's book "was regarded by the late Edmund Husserl as one of the most productive applications of his philosophy." Max Horkheimer to Else Staudinger, July 10, 1945, the Max Horkheimer Archive, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

10. Although Scheler acknowledged the structural forces as important factors in history, he emphasized the decisive role of unique individuals. "History, based on this anthropology, becomes a monumental presentation of the 'spiritual figure' of heroes and geniuses, or, to adopt Nietzsche's terms, of the 'highest examples' of the human species." Significantly for the Frankfurt context, Scheler held as the exemplary representatives of this understanding to history the glorifying studies of Caesar, Goethe, and other great men by the historians of the Stefan George circle. Scheler, "Man and History," 93.

ble.<sup>11</sup> Where Scheler had failed, however, Heidegger seemed to have succeeded much better. In *Being and Time*, there was no talk of God or objective values, and the scope of phenomenology was restricted to the temporal structure of the human being. Heidegger's idea of authentic and inauthentic historical existence seemed capable of offering precepts for concrete life without turning into a propagation of worldviews. Adorno conceded that something important had indeed changed with Heidegger. As he put it in 1932, "the most recent turn of phenomenology, if one may still call it that, has carried out a correction at this point by eliminating the pure antithesis of history and being." In *Being and Time*, "the suspicion of the transformation of the accidental into the absolute disappears."<sup>12</sup> Heidegger had avoided Scheler's implausible doctrine of essences "by ontologizing time itself, i.e., putting it forth as that which constituted the essence of man."<sup>13</sup>

Heidegger had defended his position in his 1929 Frankfurt lecture on "Philosophical Anthropology and Metaphysics of Dasein." Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer were convinced that Heidegger's attempt to move beyond philosophical idealism as well as Scheler's blind spots had been successful. Adorno summarized their position in the "Frankfurt discussion" as follows: "All radically historical thought, all thought that aims at reducing content exclusively to historical conditions, must presuppose a project of being by which history is already given as a structure of being: only within the framework of such a project is the historical organization of particular phenomena and contents in any way possible."<sup>14</sup> What the Frankfurt Heideggerians demanded, in other words, were just such existential-ontological invariants like Heidegger's scheme of thrownness and project, against which Adorno and Walter Benjamin had teamed up in their 1929 Königstein meeting. From this Heideggerian perspective, Riezler, Tillich, and Wertheimer had criticized

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11. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 27–28.

12. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 256.

13. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 28.

14. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 256.

Adorno's *Kierkegaard*. Their criticism, as summarized by Adorno, revolved around the following charges:

The central objection is that my conception, too, is based on a concept of man, a blue-print of being (*Entwurf des Daseins*); only, out of blind anxiety before the power of history, I allegedly shrank from putting these invariants forth clearly and left them clouded; instead I bestowed upon historical facticity . . . the power which actually belongs to the invariant, ontological first principles, practiced idolatry with historically produced being, destroyed in philosophy every permanent standard, sublimated it into an aesthetic picture game, and transformed the *prima philosophia* into essayism. In response, I can relate to these objections only by admitting of their content, but I defend it as philosophically legitimate. I will not decide whether a particular conception of man and being lies at the base of my theory, but I do deny the necessity of resorting to this conception.<sup>15</sup>

What the Frankfurt Heideggerians cherished as Heidegger's breakthrough, Adorno judged as a deeply problematic move. Heidegger's metaphysics of Dasein was too abstract to appreciate historical reality in its unique constellations. Like Scheler, Heidegger was also suspect of smuggling ideological baggage to his seemingly neutral account of Dasein. But if philosophy still wanted to be relevant in the emphatic sense—that is, more than neo-Kantian epistemology or Husserlian phenomenology—what form could it take once Heidegger's solution was rejected? In Adorno's estimation, philosophy had to avoid “all ontological questions in the traditional sense” but also “invariant general concepts, also perhaps the concept of man.” In tune with the maxim employed in *Kierkegaard*, Adorno claimed that “only in traces and ruins” may reason “hope that it will ever come across correct and just reality.”<sup>16</sup> These programmatic statements laid the ground for that idiosyncratic materialism that Adorno would embrace for the rest of his life. They also brought upon him, however, the anger of the Frankfurt Heideggerians. Taking Adorno to task for his disparagement of the question of what does it mean to be human, they turned the tables

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15. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 37.

16. *Ibid.*, 24, 34.

on him by suggesting that it was Adorno himself who smuggled dubious, all-too-modernist prejudices into his philosophy.

### Against Kurt Riezler’s Metaphysics of Freedom

In reconstructing Adorno’s contestation with Kurt Riezler, we have to rely on some conjecture, as Riezler’s initial, likely verbal, critique of Adorno’s *Kierkegaard* has not survived for posterity. After his inaugural address, Adorno reported to Kracauer that he had repeated Riezler’s critique verbatim in a letter to Ernst Bloch.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, this letter too is gone. To reconstruct Riezler’s criticism of Adorno, however, we can draw on, besides Adorno’s own description of the critique directed at him (quoted above), Riezler’s lecture in Davos in 1929, his contributions to the *Kränzchen* discussions in 1931, and his two books written in the Weimar era.

Riezler had opened his own contribution to the 1929 Davos Conference, “Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters” (“On the bondage and freedom of the contemporary age”), by saying that his lecture was only indirectly concerned “with the great metaphysical question that weighed in your previous session, with being [*Sein*] as such, with man in general.” Unlike in the Heidegger-Cassirer debate, Riezler’s topic was “the man of today, the spiritual state of the times.” Nevertheless, Riezler stressed that “the contemporary man is, like everything historically concrete, in his particularity a metaphor of a generality and has to be beheld and grasped as such.” As to this generality, for Riezler, “every age has its own freedom as it has its own fatality. The moments of alterable spontaneity and alterable fatality are forever entwined. But this entwinement of the alterable is itself unalterable. It stems essentially and inescapably from the ground of being. It is the invariant of history.” Concerning today’s world, Riezler lamented (echoing Max Weber) the reign of instrumental production (*poiesis*), which

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17. Adorno to Kracauer, June 8, 1931, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 283–284.

as a fatal, nature-like process diminished the possibilities for human initiative and self-sufficient action (*praxis*).<sup>18</sup>

We saw in Chapter 4 that the question of technological and secularized modernity was the point of departure in the *Kränzchen* discussion on “religious Urmotives” on June 27, 1931. In his contribution to this discussion, Riezler emphasized that “all people are confronted with the question of what stance to adopt towards secularization,” not just Christians. For him, the only viable option was to accept the inevitability of secularization. Yet, he pointed out that there were different paths open, even within this secularized option, for this cultural formation crisis was “itself a field of struggle.” As for the prospects of Protestantism in the modern world, Riezler described Protestantism as a revolt against dogmatism, against a preordained world. But he observed that, oddly, our current world seemed to be without this kind of preordained, dogmatic form against which to struggle. The modern world with its critical historical consciousness was rather a field of ruins (*Trümmerfeld*). This was a nihilistic situation. Although there were ruins that should rightly be bashed—ruins a rehabilitation of which could only lead to a shallow costume theater of historicism—there might also be ruins whose roots were still connected to “ground” (*Boden*). If Protestantism could open a view to this realm, Riezler argued—regardless of whether this took place in Christian or non-Christian form—it should be able to rehabilitate itself as an active cultural force.<sup>19</sup> Even though Riezler did not mention Heidegger here, with his last words, he already pointed toward that modern body of thought that had moved the concern with authenticity from a theological to secular register, that is, Heidegger’s existential ontology.

Even before his encounter with Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, in his study *Gestalt und Gesetz (Form and Law)*, Riezler had attempted to conceptualize a “metaphysics of freedom” that would make room for a deeper experience of life without advocating metaphysics or

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18. Riezler, *Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit*, 5–14.

19. Kurt Riezler’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 362–364.

theology of the old sort against modern science.<sup>20</sup> This motif brought Riezler’s thought into proximity with Heidegger, who equally wanted to dispense with old idealist grand narratives by focusing on the ontological features of the finite human being. Not unlike Heidegger’s attempt to differentiate backward-looking historiography from futural historical existence, Riezler was concerned with the phenomenon of history as experienced from the first-person perspective in actual engagement with the world.<sup>21</sup> Echoing this idea, Riezler had ended his Davos lecture by stressing that “it is in this battle itself,” between freedom and bondage, and “not in its imagined end, where the greatness of the human race” is to be found.<sup>22</sup> At the time of the Frankfurt discussion, Riezler was working on what would become his most original philosophical contribution, *Parmenides* (1934). Riezler’s new interpretation of Parmenides’s poem, the first written document of Western philosophy, was heavily indebted to *Being and Time* and its call for a destruction of the history of ontology. Yet, as Hans-Georg Gadamer notes, Riezler by no means simply followed Heidegger’s version of this destruction but rather sought his own path in his quest to uncover what he saw as the ancient philosophical origin of the current crisis of European modernity.<sup>23</sup>

It was from this neo-ontological standpoint that in the Frankfurt discussion, Riezler accused Adorno of ignoring the essentials of the human condition. In the discussion on “religious Ur motives,” Riezler criticized the non-theological side in the debate, that is, Adorno and other sociologists (Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, and Karl Mannheim) for their wish to obstruct attempts to

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20. Kurt Riezler, *Gestalt und Gesetz: Entwurf einer Metaphysik der Freiheit* (Munich, Germany: Musarion, 1924). Ernst Cassirer had actually requested Riezler to write this study; Christian Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich. Teil 1* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), 334.

21. Strauss, “Kurt Riezler,” 243–247.

22. Riezler, *Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit*, 28.

23. Hans-Georg Gadamer, afterword to *Parmenides: Text, Übersetzung, Einführung und Interpretation von Kurt Riezler*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt, Germany: Klostermann, 1970), 93–94. See also Strauss, “Kurt Riezler,” 247–252.

build something new on some of the old ruins and facades. To give in to this undifferentiated critique of all existing traditions, Riezler complained, meant falling into an unfounded nihilism. But this nihilist position, Riezler pointed out, was “itself in need of a foundation.”<sup>24</sup> Without an ontological idea of the human being, Riezler argued, the sociological approach to historical existence was unable to differentiate authentic from inauthentic action, genuine freedom from un-freedom. As for Adorno’s *Kierkegaard*, we can suspect that Riezler’s complaints touched more specifically upon the following issues. First, by searching for the key to Kierkegaard’s existentialism in the capitalist social antagonism, rather than in the philosophical arguments themselves, Adorno “practiced idolatry with historically produced being” and “bestowed upon historical facticity” that “power which actually belongs to the invariant, ontological first principles.” Second, by preferring social philosophy over fundamental ontology, Adorno’s thought betrayed “blind anxiety before the power of history,” that is, before the increasing hegemony of materialism and the special disciplines, which, by treating the human being as any other object, ignored the more primordial facets of the human life such as care for one’s authenticity. Third, by putting so much emphasis on Kierkegaard’s haphazard use of names and images, Riezler accused Adorno of obliterating “in philosophy every permanent standard,” turning it into “an aesthetic picture game,” and finally transforming “the *prima philosophia* into essayism.”<sup>25</sup> In sum, for Riezler, Adorno’s materialism represented untenable social reductionism.

From Adorno’s perspective, things appeared drastically different. Riezler’s “metaphysics of freedom,” a neo-metaphysical position cleansed of its outdated Christian roots, represented precisely such reliance on ontological invariants that Adorno detested. Moreover, Adorno forcefully opposed Riezler’s equation of the critical sociology practiced by Adorno in *Kierkegaard* with the sociology of knowledge of their colleague Karl Mannheim. In his much-debated 1929 *Ideologie und Utopie* (*Ideology and Utopia*), Mannheim had

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24. Kurt Riezler’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 363–364.

25. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 37.

reduced all political and philosophical doctrines, Marxism included, to their advocates' class position and thereby eliminated their possible truth content a priori. Deviating from this view, Adorno insisted in the discussion on “religious Urmotives” that the function of intellect was not to “destroy all meaningfulness in the world.” Neither, however, was it to advocate what the neo-ontologists called “the radical questioning.” Rather, the purpose of reason, Adorno emphasized, was to “resist blind subjugation to pre-given norms.”<sup>26</sup> In his inaugural address, Adorno defined his own position between Mannheim’s sociology and Heidegger’s existentialism in a brilliant passage that is worth quoting in full:

One of the most powerful academic philosophers of the present is said to have answered the question of the relationship between philosophy and sociology somewhat like this: while the philosopher is like an architect who presents and develops the blueprint [*Entwurf*] of a house, the sociologist is like the cat burglar who climbs the walls from outside and takes out what he can reach. I would be inclined to acknowledge the comparison and to interpret positively the function he gave sociology for philosophy. For the house, this big house, has long since decayed in its foundations and threatens not only to destroy all those inside it, but to cause all the things to vanish which are stored within it, much of which is irreplaceable. If the cat burglar steals these things, these singular, indeed often half-forgotten things, he does a good deed, provided that they are only rescued; he will scarcely hold onto them for long, since they are for him only of scant worth.<sup>27</sup>

Adorno understood philosophy as the construction of “keys, before which reality springs open.” Philosophical idealism, in its older and newer Heideggerian form, chose categories that were too large that “did not even come close to fitting the keyhole.” At the other end of the spectrum, positivist sociology, Mannheim the cat burglar chose categories that were too small: “the key indeed goes in, but the door doesn’t open.” Both pure philosophy and pure sociology failed to grasp the concrete roots of the current social-political

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26. Theodor W. Adorno’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 399. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1936).

27. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 35–36.



turmoil. Adorno criticized Mannheim for untenable relativism, “the correction of which philosophy possesses a sufficient means in the dialectical method.”<sup>28</sup> The liability of Heidegger’s position manifested itself in Riezler’s reduction of historical critique into a typology of human compartments around *praxis* and *poiesis*. These Aristotelian invariants could not account for the structural economic forces behind the appearance of what Riezler saw as a “field of ruins” and the triumph of instrumental reason.

The goal of Adorno’s materialist hermeneutics, in contrast, was to arrange empirical material “into changing constellations” or, as he specified, “to say it with less astrological and scientifically more current expression, into changing trial combinations, until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears.”<sup>29</sup> In *Kierkegaard*, Adorno had brought together seemingly insignificant and unrelated material, such as the images and metaphors Kierkegaard used frequently, to dismantle from within the latter’s ultimately self-sacrificial philosophy of existence.<sup>30</sup> By disclosing the social conditionedness of Kierkegaard’s metaphysical despair, Adorno aspired to channel the critical potential of his thought—which resided in the aesthetic impulses repressed by Kierkegaard—toward critique of capitalism. Elaborating on this constellative approach in his inaugural address, Adorno proposed that the concept that perhaps best illuminated the current historical epoch was Marx’s idea of “commodity fetishism.” This central category from *Capital* and Marx’s key to the law of motion of capitalism had been appropriated by Georg Lukács in his 1923 theory of reification. Lukács defined society characterized by the commodity form in terms that stressed both the unprecedented systemic structure of this society and the corresponding reified consciousness adopted by people toward the world in this society.<sup>31</sup>

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28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 32.

30. Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 117–120.

31. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 32–33. “The commodity can only be understood in its undistorted essence,” Lukács emphasized, “when it becomes the universal category of society as a whole. Only in this context does the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance both for the objective

This concern over reification, Adorno thought, certainly also received expression in Heidegger’s philosophy, most clearly in the notion of “das Man,” which Adorno’s existentialist interpretation of *Being and Time* saw as referring to the inauthenticity of urban mass society. Yet, by viewing inauthenticity as an eternal plague of social relations, and by playing the ahistorical ideal of authenticity against this supposedly fallen social world, Adorno found Heidegger’s account severely distorted. From Adorno’s Marxist perspective, Riezler’s position was equally flawed. It searched for the solution to the crisis of modernity in the ontological ruminations, while the solution could only be found in a critique of capitalism.

### Against Paul Tillich’s Existential Theology

Most of what Adorno saw as compromised in Paul Tillich’s thought came down to his suspicion of its proximity to Heidegger. It caused considerable differences of emphasis in two interest areas that Adorno shared with his supervisor: Marxism and theology. These differences would remain between the two in their American exile. Adorno could not put up with Tillich’s “rather stupid,” ultimately Heideggerian, “theories of ‘historical concept of existence.’”<sup>32</sup> Tillich, on his part, summarized his frustration with less anthropologically oriented Marxists such as Adorno by insisting that “Marx could not have constantly talked about dehumanization in the early capitalism without some sort of image of a truly human society. They all have a doctrine of man.”<sup>33</sup> Neither of Adorno’s two

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evolution of society and for the stance adopted by men towards it. Only then does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men’s consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the ‘second nature’ so created.” Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 86.

32. Adorno to Horkheimer, June 25, 1936, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Briefe und Briefwechsel*—Bd. 4: *Theodor W. Adorno—Max Horkheimer, Briefwechsel 1927–1969, Bd. I: 1927–1937*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2003), 165.

33. Theodor W. Adorno, “Theodor W. Adorno contra Paul Tillich: Eine bisher unveröffentlichte Tillich-Kritik Adornos aus dem Jahre 1944,” ed. Erdmann Sturm,

programmatic lectures mentions Tillich. Yet, we find them debating over just this issue in the *Kränzchen* discussion on “religious Urmotives” in 1931. To my knowledge, Adorno’s and Tillich’s contributions to this discussion have been compared only once before, but the focus of this previous study is on theology, and Heidegger or the Frankfurt discussion are not treated at all.<sup>34</sup>

Tillich’s main work, *Systematic Theology* (1951–1963), understood Christian theology as an answer to the age-old philosophical question of human essence—a question raised anew in the interwar period by German existentialists, most notably by Heidegger.<sup>35</sup> Tillich’s position had been in the making since his encounter with Heidegger in Marburg in the mid-1920s. While Tillich’s interest in Marxism and in social and political questions in general set him apart from Marburg’s apolitical spirit, he, like his colleagues, was impressed by Heidegger.<sup>36</sup> Tillich recalls a discussion with Heidegger over a paper that Heidegger had presented. Tillich had found the speech to be excellent and told Heidegger afterwards: “You gave a sermon last night, an atheistic sermon, but couched entirely in the phraseology of early German Pietism.” To Tillich’s delight, Heidegger “understood immediately what I meant and accepted it.”<sup>37</sup> Tillich’s existential theology (another key representative of which was Rudolf Bultmann, a friend of Heidegger’s) rejected from theology all mythological remnants but also the excessively historicizing and psychologizing effects of liberal neo-Kantian theology of the previous century. What remained for him was the Kierkegaardian yearning for ultimate meaning, “breaking-in of the unconditioned” in the phenomenon of subjective

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*Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologieggeschichte* 3, no. 3 (1996): 263.

34. Manfred Bauschulte and Volkhard Krech, “Saulus-Situationen: Zum Verhältnis von Kritischer Theorie und Religiösem Sozialismus,” in *Das Feld der Frankfurter Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften vor 1945*, ed. Richard Faber and Eva-Maria Ziege (Würzburg, Germany: Königshausen and Neumann, 2007), 49–62.

35. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

36. Gordon, “Weimar Theology,” 165–166.

37. Paul Tillich, “Heidegger and Jaspers,” in *Heidegger and Jaspers*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994), 17.

faith.<sup>38</sup> Tillich saw this theology of correlation between the human being and God as formally compatible with Heidegger’s atheist interest in the human being’s relation to being. This link was pronounced in Heidegger’s several quasi-Lutheran notions such as care, authenticity, call of conscience, and being-toward-death.<sup>39</sup>

Significantly for our concerns, in a later recollection, Tillich reports his view of the 1929 Davos disputation, which echoes the basic points of his *Systematic Theology*. Heidegger’s existentialism posed the right questions, but it could not offer answers because of its sole focus on human finitude. Tillich was adamant about Heidegger’s shortcomings in offering answers, something that he thought Kantian thinkers such as Ernst Cassirer did with their universal ethical maxims.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, as with other post-1933 recollections of Heidegger’s philosophy at the time of the Davos debate, we should also abstain from taking Tillich’s hindsight views at face value. Before 1933, Tillich was probably more taken by Heidegger’s provocative questions than by his unwillingness to offer definitive answers—an unwillingness that from the hindsight of 1933, Tillich believed had made Heidegger vulnerable to the lure of Nazism.

As for the Frankfurt discussion, Tillich’s positive stance toward Heidegger’s radical scrutiny of the human condition comes to the fore in his contributions to the discussion on “religious Urmotives.” For Tillich, being Protestant meant neither an encounter with a personal God nor the rationalized Hegelian idea but rather standing under an unconditional demand that does not have content other than “the transcendental Yes that I am at all allowed to live.” Tillich saw Protestantism’s “special task” in “radical questioning.” In the present, this task was threatened by four forces of heteronomy: communism, fascism, Catholicism, and Protestant orthodoxy.<sup>41</sup> One area where this “radical questioning” showed its indispensability

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38. Paul Tillich, “Kairos,” in *Main Works/Hauptwerke*. Vol. 4, ed. John Clayton (Berlin: De Gruyter—Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1987), 57. Translation of the quote from Gordon, “Weimar Theology,” 166.

39. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 62–63, 168–169, 189, 2: 25–26, 3: 232–233.

40. Tillich, “Heidegger and Jaspers,” 25.

41. Paul Tillich’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 392–393.

was the interpretation of Marxism—another crucial point of contention between Tillich and Adorno. Tillich expressed his concern about “the current picture of the human being that is prevalent in socialism.” This was a reference to Hendrik de Man’s recent social-psychological study, which suggested that instead of acting as the counterforce to capitalism, the working class was adopting the bourgeois values of the notorious “last man,” an unheroic character type whose ideals of happiness and pleasure Nietzsche had prophesized as the sad culmination of the Western civilization. Tillich’s motives here were not merely that of a moralist, for he worried that the overemphasis on material affluence, advocated especially by the Social Democrats, made workers liable to the lure of Fascism because this was just what the latter offered. Tillich was convinced that socialism had to be fused with Biblical wisdom. Adorno and other members of Horkheimer’s circle, he argued, had much to learn from the religious socialists, who in the Bible hold crucial resources for a genuine critique not only of capitalism but also of “contemporary socialism in theory and practice.” This critique, Tillich claimed, was well in tune with Marx’s anthropology, which pertained to *The Old Testament*.<sup>42</sup>

Adorno shared Tillich’s concern with projecting capitalist values onto a future socialist society. He attacked terms such as the “last man,” however, as bad abstractions and, moreover, as concepts that are possible only from an untenable existentialist perspective. Although Adorno did not mention Heidegger, his words suggest that *Being and Time* was on his mind as well. Adorno claimed that genuine socialism had nothing to do with the caricature ridiculed by Nietzsche as the outcome of modernization: “the image of the last man” as the allegedly “ultimate consequence of socialism” has “nothing at all to do with socialism and historical materialism.” Not only did such conservative arguments inappropriately equate capitalism and socialism, Adorno argued that they totally missed the

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42. Ibid., 402–403; Tillich, *Begegnungen*, 18–19; Hendrik de Man, *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* (Jena, Germany: E. Diederichs, 1927); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, ed. Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin, trans. Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9–11.

connection between what they criticized as the “last man” and the capitalist society. The image of the last man, Adorno stressed, “is itself obscure.” He highlighted that this “merely rational, atomized, meaningless human being seems to be integrally connected to the conditions of abstract calculus, under which the capitalist system indeed stands.” Echoing his remarks on Georg Lukács and Marx’s “commodity form” in his inaugural address, Adorno implied that even if the characteristics of something like “the last man” are observable in certain groups, this does not change the fact that we are dealing with a historical phenomenon of industrial capitalism, not with some ontological truth of the human condition. Lastly, Adorno directed his criticism at the Nietzschean-Heideggerian perspective itself, arguing that “the Nietzschean caricature of the rational man already presupposes a quite particular projection [*Entwurf*] of the essence of man in general. This projection is essentially orientated to concepts like finitude and meaningfully fulfilled existence that are thought of as constitutive of the essence of man.” It was anything but clear, however, that “these categories standing behind this projection have the last authority.” For Adorno, this elitist cultural criticism and the object of its derision, the so-called mass society, were two sides of the same coin. “One can say nothing about the form that human existence can assume in a properly organized society,” he concluded. “This is literally, not merely psychologically speaking, a *cura posterior*,” a later concern.<sup>43</sup>

When in 1936 Adorno wrote to Horkheimer about Tillich’s Heideggerian concept of existence, he was not only bemoaning this concept’s fateful consequences for Tillich’s understanding of Marxism. What also bothered Adorno was Tillich’s praising review of a book on Gestalt psychology by Kurt Goldstein, whom Tillich praised for “belonging to that group of modern thinkers to whom the question of the human being has become the focal point of all other queries.”<sup>44</sup> Adorno found it annoying that Tillich’s review appeared in the Frankfurt School’s organ, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*,

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43. Theodor W. Adorno’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 385.

44. Paul Tillich, “Review of *Der Aufbau des Organismus*, by Kurt Goldstein,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5 (1936): 111.

a forum highly critical of doctrines relying on a fixed human essence. To this group, Horkheimer's circle also included Gestalt psychology.

### Against Max Wertheimer: Gestalt Psychology and Heidegger

The question over the significance of Heidegger's *Being and Time* also sparked a controversy between Adorno and Max Wertheimer, a leading representative of Gestalt theory. Adorno's initial view of Gestalt theory had been positive. His 1924 dissertation on Husserl had criticized phenomenology from the standpoint of neo-Kantianism and Gestalt theory—two doctrines he had learnt in his undergraduate studies under Hans Cornelius and Adhemar Gelb. In the 1920s, Gestalt theory had been the mode of the day in Frankfurt's modern intellectual climate, and Adorno had met Horkheimer in a psychology class in 1923.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the decade, however, Adorno had come to see Gestalt psychology as problematic for similar reasons as Heidegger's existentialism.

Mitchell G. Ash describes Gestalt psychology and phenomenology as part of a wider anti-positivist discourse of the early twentieth century that challenged the natural scientific psychology of the previous century with a more holistic understanding of the human psyche. Gestalt theory claimed that human mental life consisted of "immediately perceived wholes (*Gestalten*) and relationships rather than punctiform, atomistic sensations." Gestalt theorists disliked mechanical psychology and its dissection of thought and experience to atomistic particles, which lost sight of the structured, meaningful nature of these phenomena for human beings. Gestalt theorists held the phenomenological movement in general as an ally. They thought that Husserl, with his idea of intentionality, sought similar insights as Gestalt theorists with their desire to disclose a priori

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45. Theodor W. Adorno, *Die Transzendenz des Dinglichen und Noematischen in Husserls Phänomenologie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 1, *Philosophische Frühschriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 1973), 7–77; Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 69–79.

forms of human experience. Telling of this commonality is the fact that before adopting the name phenomenology, Husserl had called his thought “descriptive psychology.”<sup>46</sup>

Although the concept of Gestalt was not part of Heidegger’s technical vocabulary, Bernhard Radloff suggests that Gestalt theory’s emphasis on the whole over the parts and on a priori forms of perception found an echo in Heidegger’s ideas of hermeneutic nature of understanding and being-in-the-world. Moreover, Heidegger’s view of Dasein in temporal terms as a thrown project could be understood as a kind of a temporal Gestalt. This kinship with Gestalt theory was not lost on Heidegger who on several occasions celebrated the achievements of Gestalt psychology. In 1926, he praised Wertheimer for offering “the most modern of what can be heard in this field today,” and in 1932, having earlier recommended Gelb for a professorship, stated of him that “I value him greatly and believe he will one day write the new psychology, which is growing out of the totally changed problematic of the new biology.” Despite their mutual respect, Heidegger and Gestalt theorists had their disagreements. On Heidegger’s account, Gestalt theory’s emphasis on a priori forms of perception was a step in the right direction, but he complained that the wish to lead these forms back to the organic elements in the brain remained captive to natural scientific thought. In terms of *Being and Time*, Gestalt theory approached the human being in ontic not ontological terms.<sup>47</sup>

“Our images of perceived reality may very well be *Gestalten*,” Adorno conceded in his inaugural address, yet “the world in which we live is not; it is constituted differently than out of mere images of perception.” This was Adorno’s only remark on Gestalt theory in his address. Yet, reporting to Siegfried Kracauer about the vexed reactions of his colleagues to his pronouncements, he told that “Wertheimer got a crying fit from fury and

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46. Mitchell G. Ash, *Gestalt Psychology in German Culture, 1890–1967: Holism and the Quest for Objectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 275–299; quoted lines from Ash, “Weimar Psychology,” 39.

47. Bernhard Radloff, *Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism: Disclosure and Gestalt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 13–29. Radloff quotes Heidegger’s letters to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1926 and 1932.



agitation.”<sup>48</sup> Why would Adorno’s address, which did not deny the scientific merits of Gestalt theory, cause such a negative reaction from Wertheimer? We do not have evidence of Adorno’s discussion with Wertheimer. Yet, Adorno disclosed the reason for Wertheimer’s reaction in another letter to Kracauer. Wertheimer had not liked Adorno’s defense of the essay against existential ontology as the best form for philosophy. Unlike Tillich who showed sympathy for Adorno’s essayistic approach in *Kierkegaard*, Wertheimer seems to have viewed Adorno’s approach and his simultaneous attack on Heidegger as something of a scandal.<sup>49</sup>

“I gladly put up with the reproach of essayism,” Adorno declared in his address, likening his approach to such early modern thinkers as the English empiricists and Leibniz. These thinkers, Adorno said, composed essays “because the power of freshly disclosed reality, upon which their thinking struck, continuously forced upon them the risk of experimentation.” Confronted with the major cultural transformations of their time, Bacon and others had not sought refuge in old metaphysical safe havens but rather had boldly experimented with novel tools of thought. Somewhat surprisingly, Adorno drew a link from these early modern figures to Marx’s theory of “the commodity structure” and Freud’s turn to the “refuse of the physical world.” What they all had in common was a rejection of idealist questions of meaning and intention, as well as a focus on historical concreteness. Adorno pulled back a little by admitting to Kracauer that it “goes without saying that I will not desire to reduce philosophy haphazardly to essay. I only think that in essay there is

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48. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 31; Adorno to Kracauer, May 29, 1931, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 274.

49. Adorno to Kracauer, June 8, 1931, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 283–284. Another transcription of the Kränzchen discussions, although sketchy and not very informative, shows that Adorno and Gelb discussed Heidegger: “Notizheft. [vor 1933, Datierung unklar] Scheler, Heidegger, Hegel; zu Diskussionen über Metaphysik mit Tillich, Adorno, Stoltenberg, Riezler, Gelb, Mannheim,” the Max Horkheimer Archive VIII 34, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main. While officially dated as pre-1933, this discussion must have taken place before 1931, as Gelb left Frankfurt in that year; see Hammerstein, *Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität*, 122.

a principle that could become extremely fruitful against the great philosophy.”<sup>50</sup>

The lack of social-historical concreteness made Gestalt theory inferior in Adorno’s eyes to another avant-garde current in psychology: Freudian psychoanalysis. While already in his first habilitation attempt, the 1927 Kant-Freud study, Adorno had used psychoanalysis as a critical epistemological weapon, it was only by the turn of the decade, and under the influence of Erich Fromm’s groundbreaking social-psychological studies at the Institute for Social Research, that he truly came to appreciate the significance of Freud’s ideas of the unconscious, libidinal drives, and repression for understanding the current historical situation and the increasingly anti-rational *Zeitgeist* of the times. Indeed, besides its abstractness, Adorno saw more ominous flaws in Gestalt psychology. Beginning with his Kant-Freud study, Adorno had expressed reservations about Gestalt theory because of its proximity to irrational philosophies of the unconscious. In this study, Adorno had defended Freud’s concept of the unconscious against reactionary misuses by figures such as Carl Gustav Jung and Ludwig Klages. Like the neo-Kantian reading of Kant’s idea of the thing-in-itself as a limiting concept, Adorno argued that the unconscious was not a timeless repository of some dubious *Ur*-experiences but rather something that could be gradually turned into conscious terms by scientific enlightenment.<sup>51</sup> Adorno’s quest against irrationalism extended to both post-Husserlian phenomenology and Gestalt theory. Both were prone to slide, despite the liberal-democratic preferences especially of Wertheimer, from a justified critique of positivism to anti-Enlightenment polemics and postulation of questionable “essences” beyond the grasp of critical, disenchanted reason.

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50. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 32–33, 36–38; Adorno to Kracauer, June 8, 1931, in Adorno, *Adorno-Kracauer: Briefwechsel*, 284. See also Adorno’s later piece, “The Essay as Form,” trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Fredric Will, in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 91–111.

51. Adorno, *Begriff des Unbewussten*, 316; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 336–348; Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 17–20, 179.

Having now examined Adorno's debates with the Frankfurt Heideggerians, let us conclude by looking more closely at the reasons behind his aversion to the question of the human being.

### Adorno's Rejection of the Question of the Human Being

The question of the human being, Adorno maintained, was "an idealist demand, that of an absolute beginning, as only pure thought by itself can accomplish." Despite post-Husserlian phenomenology's polemics against abstract Cartesianism, its question of human essence was itself "a Cartesian demand, which believes it necessary to raise thinking to the form of its thought presuppositions and axioms." If philosophy used its energies to uncover these axioms, however, Adorno claimed, it can "reach them only formally, and at the price of that reality in which its actual tasks are laid."<sup>52</sup> Still, leaving the problem of formalism aside, one could ask why Adorno did not answer this question with his own conception of the human being. Moreover, did not Adorno's critical theory presuppose, out of logical necessity, some sort of understanding of what it means to be human?

The discussion on "religious Ur motives" in 1931 leaves no doubt that Adorno certainly believed that human beings could break free from natural and social constraints to a far greater degree than Heidegger thought was possible. But to defend this materialist conviction, Adorno refused to follow Herbert Marcuse, who had argued against Heidegger that human beings could develop from being thrown objects of history to its active subjects through socialist revolution. Martin Jay points out that Adorno had good reasons to be cautious about the path taken by Marcuse, and Lukács before him. In setting the paradigm for Western Marxism, Lukács had drawn on Hegel to argue that the human being was not just the object but also the subject of history. Relying on a reading of Giambattista Vico's *verum factum* principle, according to which the human being knows best that which she has made, Lukács sought to raise

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52. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 37–38.

the working class to “class consciousness” of the fact that history was a human creation. Adorno saw several downsides in advancing materialist social criticism in this way. First, Lukács used the idea of class consciousness to legitimate Bolshevism, which meant surrendering the working class and critical intellectuals under authoritarian party rule. Second, Lukács’s position was in danger of falling back to idealism because it held its insight into history as a new answer to the age-old question of the thing-in-itself. Third, Adorno was afraid that the legitimate emphasis on historical practice as the means to undo alienation could turn into a celebration of material labor as human essence. By refusing to articulate a socialist conception of the human being, Adorno saw himself defending Marx’s dream of the realm of freedom from turning into a realm of production for production’s sake.<sup>53</sup>

Martin Jay and Susan Buck-Morss underscore that a crucial element in Adorno’s thought was his concern with the “first nature.” This did not refer to any irrational primal forces, advocated by *Lebensphilosophie*, but to the world of suffering bodily creatures desiring fulfillment and happiness. Marxism was supposed to be the prime guardian of these concerns. Yet, orthodox Marxism’s overemphasis on an increase in the forces of production as an end in itself made it susceptible of turning the hardness shown by nature toward human beings into its opposite, where human beings projected this domination back to nature and, as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would later stress, ultimately to their inner natures as well.<sup>54</sup> Suppression of the natural, bodily dimension of human life was a major problem with Heidegger’s existential ontology too. To be sure, in *Being and Time*, this suppression did not happen through the instrumental domination of outer nature but rather, as in Kierkegaard’s disparagement of the aesthetic realm, through the

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53. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 108–109, 257–261; Martin Jay, “The Frankfurt School’s Critique of Marxist Humanism,” in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1985), 20–22.

54. Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 261–262; Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 54–57.

sacrifice of individual desire for fulfillment under a particularly oppressive, anxiety-ridden ideal of authenticity.

As to our guiding question concerning the Frankfurt discussion, that is, whether Adorno thought Heidegger's existential phenomenology was free of the ideological baggage of Max Scheler's "material phenomenology," the answer is negative. With Heidegger's concept of thrownness, "which is set forth as the ultimate condition of man's being," Adorno declared, "life by itself becomes as blind and meaningless as only it was in *Lebensphilosophie*." Rather than avoiding the pitfalls of Scheler's philosophical anthropology, in *Being and Time*, "phenomenology seals a development which Scheler already inaugurated with the theory of impulse." By postulating the dark powerful impulsion and pervasive thrownness as insurmountable conditions of human life—conditions that exceptional individuals could temporarily challenge but no structural social transformation could undo—Scheler and Heidegger used phenomenology to undermine the Enlightenment goal of human autonomy. The distance between these doctrines and Husserl's original conception of phenomenology, animated by an unshaken trust in the power of reason, could not have been much wider. "It cannot be concealed," Adorno lamented, "that phenomenology is on the verge of ending in precisely that vitalism against which it originally declared battle."<sup>55</sup>

When we look at Adorno's judgments of the *weltanschaulich* dimension of *Being and Time*, we find a considerable accord in his views and some of his most notable contemporaries. No matter how lukewarm Adorno found Ernst Cassirer's neo-Kantian rationalism, he would have found much to applaud in the latter's polemics against Heidegger. Adorno would also have preferred Cassirer's maxim: "Cast off yourself the anxiety of earthly things!" over Heidegger's preference for anxiety. As much as Adorno distanced himself from the optimist mood of neo-Kantianism, as well as from positive theological dogmas, he could still maintain that, as he later underscored, it was just this "anxiety which philosophy and the great

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55. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 28.

religions formerly undertook to dispel.”<sup>56</sup> Adorno’s criticism also echoed that of Scheler, for whom there was hardly a more repulsive element in Heidegger’s thought than its disproportionate emphasis on anxiety. By casting thrownness and self-centered care rather than love and solidarity as the ultimate determinants of human life, *Being and Time* was for Scheler (in the words of Daniel O. Dahlstrom) something like a “Calvinist prep school,” exuding that inner-worldly asceticism Max Weber defined as the trademark of the early modern Puritanism.<sup>57</sup> Finally, Adorno’s criticisms echoed Edmund Husserl’s disillusioned lecture at Frankfurt’s Kant Society in June, 1931, a month after Adorno’s inaugural address. While Husserl did not mention Heidegger by name, it was evident who the main target of his criticism of recent anthropological turn in phenomenology was. Husserl was forced to admit that, as he put it in private, philosophically he had “nothing to do with this Heideggerian profundity, with this brilliant unscientific genius” whose existential phenomenology represented a philosophy “I have always considered it my life’s work to make forever impossible.”<sup>58</sup>

What about the question, then, of Adorno’s own reliance on a notion of human essence? Did not Adorno’s defense of first nature and his references to bodily suffering and desire show that he too had, if not an explicit conception, at least a vague image of what it means to be human? Did not Adorno’s critical theory rely, like the philosophies of Heidegger and Cassirer, on what Peter E. Gordon calls a “normative image of humanity”? Was there not out of logical

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56. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ontology and Dialectics (1960/61)*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 178.

57. Dahlstrom, “Scheler’s Critique of Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology,” 81–85; Max Scheler, “Zusätze aus dem nachgelassenen Manuskripten,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 9, Späte Schriften*, ed. Manfred S. Frings (Bern, Switzerland: Francke, 1976), 294, 297.

58. Edmund Husserl, “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, *Collected Works, Volume VI*, trans. and ed. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 1997), 485–500; Husserl to Alexander Pfänder, January 6, 1931, trans. Burt C. Hopkins, in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 482.

necessity, as Paul Tillich claimed, also a notion of human essence behind Adorno's work, a notion that made his criticism of the current society possible? I believe that Adorno would have admitted that his critique was premised on certain facts concerning human nature. But he would have stressed, following Max Horkheimer and Erich Fromm, that these facts were disclosed not by Heidegger's existential ontology, or any other quasi-theological or -metaphysical doctrine such as philosophical anthropology, but rather by Freud's early drive theory. The latter was a theory of the natural constitution of human beings that abstained from all metaphysical speculation about so-called human essence.<sup>59</sup>

We look in vain for a more positive account of authenticity or human flourishing in Adorno's Weimar-era writings. Notwithstanding his occasional use of ontology vocabulary, he seems to have remained faithful to his and Walter Benjamin's anti-ontological Königstein program. In some of his later writings, however, Adorno would lower his guard somewhat. "Lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky," Adorno dreamed in *Minima Moralia*, "might take the place of process, act, satisfaction, and so truly keep the promise of dialectical logic . . . None of the abstract concepts comes closer to fulfilled utopia than that of eternal peace." These lines were preceded by Adorno's polemics against orthodox Marxism's idealization of "unfettered activity," "uninterrupted procreation," and "chubby insatiability." It was because of Marxism's producerist understanding of "freedom as frantic bustle"—not because of its radically egalitarian goals—that "the positive blueprints of socialism, resisted by Marx, were rooted in barbarism."<sup>60</sup>

Assessing Adorno's occasional "speculation about the state of reconciliation," Ute Guzzoni suggests that these reflections on the less instrumental relationship between human beings and nature do not stand that far from the later Heidegger's wish to let beings be, or "releasement" (*Gelassenheit*). What the two shared, besides a non-systematic mode of philosophical expression, was a plea for a theoretical and practical attitude that opposed the constricting

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59. Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 5–6; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 342–348.

60. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 156–157.

categorizations of Cartesianism and instrumental rationality bent on domination. But whereas Heidegger did not hesitate to make authoritative metaphysical claims about the undifferentiated state of being, Adorno expressed his own cautious sentiments on the “non-identical” by respecting the unforced communication of subject and object in their legitimate differentiation.<sup>61</sup>

In the next chapter, we will turn to Adorno’s 1932 lecture on natural-history where he put his immanent critique of Heidegger into action. We will further develop the argument that besides Cartesian formalism, Adorno saw Heidegger’s conception of thrown Dasein as an ideological mythology of surrender. Yet, rather than just dismissing Heidegger’s conception as nothing more than Fascism (as he once proposed), we will see that Adorno appreciated Heidegger’s sense of alienation and crisis and sought through immanent criticism to lead Heidegger’s distorted conception toward a more fruitful one offered by his nascent critical theory.

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61. Ute Guzzoni, “‘Were speculation about the state of reconciliation permissible . . .’: Reflections on the Relation Between Human Beings and Things in Adorno and Heidegger,” in *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, ed. Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 124–137.



## DEMYTHOLOGIZING HEIDEGGER'S THROWNNES

### *Toward* Dialectic of Enlightenment

On July 15, 1932, three years after Martin Heidegger's presentation in Frankfurt's Kant Society, Theodor W. Adorno opened his lecture on "Die Idee der Naturegeschichte" ("The Idea of Natural-History") in the same venue by saying that his was "no more than an attempt to take up and further develop the problems of the so-called Frankfurt discussion." Adorno acknowledged that "many uncomplimentary things have been said about this discussion." Yet, he firmly believed "that it approaches the problem correctly and that it would be wrong always to begin again at the beginning."<sup>1</sup> Adorno's lecture put into play the immanent critique of *Being and Time* that he had called for in his inaugural address the previous year. This criticism would revolve around Heidegger's notion of historicity, at the core of which lay an understanding of the human

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1. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 252.

being after the temporal scheme of thrownness and projection. Despite Adorno's criticism of Heidegger's blind spots, he admitted that Heidegger's notion was preferable over both idealist narratives of historical progress, such as Hegel's history of spirit, and irrational reductions of history to blind nature, such as the popular doomsday prophecies of the Weimar era, Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918/1922) and Ludwig Klages's *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul* (1929–1932). Heidegger's insight lay in his realization that both moments, history and nature, were essential in understanding human life, which, as Adorno put it, “presents itself in the first place as one between the mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been, and that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new.”<sup>2</sup>

The chapter begins by examining the central elements of Adorno's lecture. To illuminate its status as immanent critique, it connects the lecture to a little-examined doctoral thesis on Heidegger by another student of Paul Tillich, Dolf Sternberger, who, like Adorno, was after an immanent critique of *Being and Time*. Like Adorno's inaugural address, however, his lecture on natural-history was also a contribution to the Frankfurt discussion. Thus, the next sections analyze Adorno's struggles with the Frankfurt Heideggerians and their neo-ontological notions of history that Adorno saw as essentially Heideggerian: Kurt Riezler's notion of “fatality” and Paul Tillich's notion of “demonic.” After this, the chapter shows how Adorno's alternative to these conceptions, “natural-history,” drew on Freud and Marx to account for the fateful elements in human history in a progressive fashion. The chapter concludes by showing that, contrary to Adorno's later polemical dismissal of *Being and Time* as Fascist *tout court*, the book stimulated Adorno's early thought and, by extension, the Frankfurt School's most famous argument about myth and reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

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2. Ibid., 266.

### “The Idea of Natural-History”: Adorno’s Immanent Critique in Action

Heidegger’s notion of the historical character of human life, of historicity, saw human beings as helplessly thrown into circumstances beyond their control. Stressing the unbiased, ontological nature of this idea, Heidegger insisted that it did “not refer to the possibly negative occurrences in human life, the cultural importance of which can be estimated, but to a characteristic of the innermost transcendental finitude of Dasein which is unified with the thrown projection.”<sup>3</sup> *Being and Time* had similarly stressed the pervasiveness of thrownness: “Dasein’s facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the ‘they’s’ inauthenticity.” In the section “Falling and Thrownness,” Heidegger emphasized that contrary to the Judeo-Christian tradition, we must not “take the fallenness of Dasein as a ‘fall’ from a purer and higher ‘primal status.’” Yet, equally mistaken was the view that took this falling as something that “more advanced stages of human culture might be able to rid themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

Explicating his idea on natural-history, Adorno said that what he meant by “nature” was about just this ontological problematic. By nature, he thus did not have in mind the object of the mathematical natural sciences or the prescientific history of nature. Rather, the concept of nature, “if I translated it into standard philosophical terminology, would come closest to the concept of myth.” Myth or nature denoted that “what has always been, what as fatefully arranged predetermined being underlies history and appears in history; it is substance in history.” Although Adorno was not explicit about it, I believe that of all Heidegger’s terms, he saw the concept of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) as the one in which this mythic dimension of history received its clearest expression. Adorno continued that the question was of “the relationship of this nature to what we understand by history.” History in this context referred to “that

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3. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 165.

4. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 38 (220, 223).

mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new." History was a "movement that does not play itself out in mere identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs; it is a movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new." In Heidegger, this dimension was expressed in the concept of projection (*Entwurf*).<sup>5</sup>

As already noted, Heidegger's scheme of thrownness and projection is ambiguous. On the one hand, it presents itself as value-free phenomenological descriptions of human life. On the other hand, it seems to contain—even when stripped of all the substantial features still visible in Max Scheler's philosophical anthropology—implicit conservative prejudices about human beings' incapacity to control their fate and societal development in a rational manner. In 1931, Adorno had not minced his words when attacking what he saw as the irrational ethos or resigned worldview behind Heidegger's scheme and the related concepts of death, anxiety, and authenticity. In 1932, however, Adorno's emphasis was on the conviction that a fruitful confrontation with Heidegger's philosophy had to take off from just this anxiety-ridden experience of having no control over one's fate in order then to give this sensitive but distorted and self-defeating experience a healthier un-Heideggerian articulation. To understand the idea of natural-history, Adorno noted, his audience would "have to experience something of the *thaumazein* (shock) that this question portends. Natural-history is not a synthesis of natural and historical methods, but a change of perspective."<sup>6</sup> This remark on the shock effect was a reference to Georg Lukács's and Walter Benjamin's works, which Adorno discussed later in his lecture. Yet, I contend that this passage also referred to Heidegger and was indeed in the spirit of immanent critique. I believe Adorno wished to safeguard Heidegger's sensitivity to the discontents of

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5. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 253. Interestingly, Hermann Mörchen notes that in 1925, Heidegger had articulated his philosophy as an attempt to overcome the dichotomy of nature and history. Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 34n14.

6. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 261.

modern life by giving his experience of shock an alternative formulation in critical theory of capitalism, which would keep this experience from resulting in a resigned fixing of thrownness as an insurmountable fate.

We can gain a better view of Adorno's intentions by looking at his embracing review of Dolf Sternberger's concurrent study on Heidegger, *Der verstandene Tod: Eine Untersuchung zu Martin Heideggers Existenzialontologie* (Death Figured Out: An Investigation on Martin Heidegger's Existential Ontology).<sup>7</sup> Adorno praised Sternberger for the rare achievement among Marxist critics of Heidegger, namely that in this study, Heidegger's philosophy "is not merely criticized, but radically 'experienced.'"<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Sternberger's study was an exercise in self-criticism. He had studied with Heidegger and Karl Jaspers in the late 1920s, when he, by his own admission, had fallen under Heidegger's *mythoi*. Sternberger, however, had chosen to write his dissertation for Paul Tillich in Frankfurt, where he was also introduced to the social-critical themes of Max Horkheimer's circle; after submitting his study in 1931, Sternberger earned his *Privatdozent* status in the beginning of 1932.<sup>9</sup> "It is thereby to be recognized as an exceptional merit of the work," Adorno wrote in his review, that "instead of setting against the ontological claims of new metaphysics of finitude the standpoint of *dialectics* abstractly, it for the first time explicates, or at least everywhere prepares, a course of immanent analysis itself." Adorno embraced Sternberger's effort as a brilliant example of a truly immanent critique of philosophy that did not judge its object by alien standards. Rather, Sternberger worked "in the Husserlian-Heideggerian sense 'toward the things themselves'" with the aim being to avoid

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7. Dolf Sternberger, *Der verstandene Tod: Eine Untersuchung zu Martin Heideggers Existenzial-Ontologie* (1932/1934), in *Über den Tod* (Frankfurt, Germany: Insel, 1977), 69–264.

8. Theodor W. Adorno, "Gutachten über die Dissertation von Sternberger," in *Briefe und Briefwechsel—Band 4: Theodor W. Adorno—Max Horkheimer, Briefwechsel 1927–1969, Band I: 1927–1937*, ed. Christoph Götde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2003), 551.

9. William J. Dodd, *Jedes Wort wandelt die Welt: Dolf Sternbergers politische Sprachkritik* (Göttingen, Germany: Wallstein, 2007), 73–75, 82–84, 90–106; Dolf Sternberger, *Über den Tod* (Frankfurt, Germany: Insel, 1977), 265.

making “premature, extrinsic attacks, which do not grasp the problems in their true depth.”<sup>10</sup>

Adorno described Sternberger's aim as an “authentic and productive critique” that “advances the problems by dissolving the fixation they have in Heidegger.” What was this fixation, and what did Adorno mean by his remark that Sternberger's study had not just criticized but also “experienced” Heidegger's philosophy? Adorno hailed as Sternberger's achievement his demonstration of a connection between Heidegger's notion of death and Nietzsche's irrational *amor fati* or love of fate—a reference to the latter's idea of “the eternal recurrence of the same.” By exposing this link, Sternberger had opened a path to that “aspect of Heidegger's philosophical overall posture, under whose ontological forms there already lies an irrational conception of life, which can be restrained only by heroic resignation.” Like Adorno in his inaugural address, Sternberger argued that *Being and Time* marked a continuation, rather than a break, with German idealism. Sternberger had perceptively untied Heidegger's philosophy “from its self-imposed and self-postulated isolation” and interpreted “it as an extreme and already aporetic consequence of the crisis of the idealist spirit.” But in contrast to the past idealist hopes of reconciliation, Heidegger's metaphysics of Dasein called for resignation and celebrated the edifying effect of accepting one's powerlessness. It “shows itself as ‘surrogate’ for the decomposed and lost idealist ‘metaphysics of transfiguration’, in that it elevates the mere this-worldly existence to the ontology of itself and turns the meaninglessness (‘nothingness’) of this existence into meaning.” In so doing, it “stands in opposition not just to every speculative-idealist metaphysics, but also to every genuine theology.”<sup>11</sup>

In singling out Sternberger's study of other Marxist critiques of Heidegger, Adorno likely had Herbert Marcuse in mind. Sternberger referred to Marcuse's 1928 article, “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism,” as a “very earnest and powerful attempt” to fuse Heidegger and Marx.<sup>12</sup> As seen in Part I, Marcuse

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10. Adorno, “Gutachten,” 551.

11. *Ibid.*, 549–551.

12. Sternberger, *Der verstandene Tod*, 243–244n8.

held Heidegger's heroic individualism as a justified if insufficient form of cultural protest that failed to understand the structural dimension of capitalist dehumanization and the need for its socialist overthrow. Sternberger agreed with Marcuse when he wrote that it "seems to us entirely appropriate when Marcuse, in discussing Heidegger's concept of historicity, arrives to a point where he has to say: 'Here the examination must confront the question of the material constitution of historicity and in so doing achieves a breakthrough that Heidegger fails to achieve or even gesture toward.'" Sternberger, however, criticized Marcuse for overlooking the real reason behind Heidegger's reluctance to move from individual non-conformism to critical Marxism. Heidegger's "shortcoming does not begin only there," Sternberger stressed, "where—to use Marcuse's words—Heidegger seeks to 'refer the decisive resoluteness back to *the isolated Dasein*.'" Contrary to Marcuse's reading, the major mistake of Heidegger's existential analytic did not occur "only in the middle of the analytic, but already 'on the threshold.'"<sup>13</sup>

On Sternberger's account, it was not Heidegger's unwillingness to draw the practical conclusions from his philosophical premises that prevented him from expanding his existentialism toward critical social theory. Instead, the reason lay in those very premises. As Adorno put it, Heidegger's "existential determinations of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity' establish themselves reciprocally in such a way, that the possibility of opting for the authentic is entirely omitted, so that the desperate (in metaphysical language: demonic) character of the projection of existence itself becomes discernible."<sup>14</sup> Although Adorno did not say it in so many words, he thought that Heidegger's scheme of thrownness and projection overemphasized thrownness (nature) and downplayed projection (history). For Heidegger, human beings were mere objects of historical forces, and their capacity to become the subjects of societal development was a priori precluded. Hence, freedom or authenticity was reduced to the vague cultural dissent of rare individuals.

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13. Ibid., 243–244n8; Marcuse, "Contributions," 16.

14. Adorno, "Gutachten," 550.

To Marcuse's credit, we must say that he indeed did recognize that Heidegger's failure already happened "on the threshold" when Heidegger fixed the social-historical world into the straitjacket of the permanently inauthentic "das Man." Where Marcuse differed from Adorno and Sternberger was in his hope, albeit a thin one, that one might persuade Heidegger to reconsider the fundamentals of his philosophy and to replace the resigned ontology of individual mortality with the Hegelian-Marxist ontology of intersubjective labor. For Adorno and Sternberger, Marcuse's attempt was certainly not without its merits. But they thought it was not an immanent critique for the simple reason that it did not begin from the root of Heidegger's existential ontology. To challenge Heidegger's increasing influence in the post-Davos period—when he was seen by many as having surpassed both Ernst Cassirer and Edmund Husserl as Germany's new top philosopher—Adorno was convinced that what was required was a dismantling of the overly pessimistic worldview underlying *Being and Time*—a worldview that registered the deep discontent of the times but mystified it at the same time. We can make sense of Adorno's reasoning by turning to his struggle with Heidegger's influence at his home university, that is, to his Frankfurt discussion with Kurt Riezler and Paul Tillich.

### Against Kurt Riezler's Idea of Fatality

"Every age has its own freedom as it has its own fatality," Kurt Riezler claimed in his lecture in Davos in 1929, "On the Bondage and Freedom of the Contemporary Age." "The moments of alterable spontaneity and alterable fatality are forever entwined. But this entwinement of the alterable is itself unalterable. It stems essentially and inescapably from the ground of being. It is the invariant of history."<sup>15</sup> In his lecture on natural-history, Adorno referred to Riezler's neo-ontological conception, and stated approvingly that "I believe, indeed, that the neo-ontologists have performed something very fruitful in their conception of this structure." Yet, Adorno did

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15. Riezler, *Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit*, 5.



not want to offer another ontological scheme that would fix the core dimensions of human life—nature and history—into unified structure. To go further than the ontological approach allowed, he stated that in his usage of the concepts of nature and history, “no ultimate definitions are meant, rather I am pursuing the intention of pushing these concepts to a point where they are mediated in their apparent difference.”<sup>16</sup>

We can gain a better understanding of Adorno’s criticism of Riezler by examining the latter’s 1924 study *Form and Law* and the 1926 article “Über den Begriff der historischen Entwicklung” (“On the Concept of Historical Development”). In these works, Riezler differentiated his conception of genuinely historical existence from both Hegel’s idealism and the modern *Lebensphilosophie*’s reduction of human life to blind nature.

Hegel viewed history as a progressive unfolding of world spirit, in which human beings struggling against natural and social shackles gradually freed themselves from bondage to heteronomous forces. Riezler’s conception of history was far more pessimistic. While the advancements of human thought were indisputable, he insisted that human beings could never completely shake away the fateful dimension of history. Despite his view, Riezler took care to separate his position from *Lebensphilosophie*. In historical development, he emphasized, one always finds as indissolubly intermingled the spontaneous and the elementary, the willed and the blind, the meaningful and the meaningless, the fatal and the creative. Riezler’s problem with vitalism, for instance with Henri Bergson’s idea of immediate *élan vital*, was that historical existence was reduced to abstract *duree*. In a similar vein, Riezler stated that “the dark and ambiguous word ‘life’ with which irrationalism begins and ends its theory of history, marks only a resignation of knowledge. Bergson’s *élan vital*, defined by the blind creation of ever new, refers to mere change but not to development, to the restless but not to the meaningful.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas Hegel and modern irrationalism hyposta-

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16. Adorno, “Idea of Natural-History,” 252–253, 266.

17. Kurt Riezler, “Über den Begriff der historischen Entwicklung,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 4 (1926): 208.

tized one of the dimensions at the expense of the other, Riezler maintained that a truly historical existence combined the two dimensions. "Only a theory insensitive to history and which approaches this bewildered movement from outside," Riezler underscored, "can falsely discover in all this a unified meaning or a blind necessity."<sup>18</sup>

From the perspective of this ontological scheme, what did Riezler make of the current historical situation? As seen in his comments in the discussion on "religious Urmotives" in June 1931, Riezler saw the modern secular world as a "field of ruins" where the old traditions and ideals had lost their binding force, in part due to their own implausibility, in part due to modern sociology's nihilist criticism of everything old. In his Davos speech, Riezler had bemoaned how the current "image of humanity is empty and powerless if it is not grounded anew." This criticism went not only against irrational vitalism but "equally for the belief in progress as long as" the latter had no "direction in judging" or "mass in measuring" other than "the new virtue of efficiency . . . whose measure is the dollar." Bespeaking Riezler's pessimism was his observation that "the great expositor of all hollowed-out values, Friedrich Nietzsche, is for today's youth a time-conditioned phenomenon from an already distant past." This lack of genuine ideals reflected the increasing power of impersonal automation and instrumental, purposive rationality. Yet, Riezler's antidote to this development was not the rejection of modernity *tout court*. He had harsh words for vulgar Nietzschean charlatans such as Ludwig Klages, whose notorious *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul* called for surrender of reason to primal cosmic forces.<sup>19</sup> A real antidote to the hegemony of instrumental reason, as Riezler had emphasized in his own

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Heidegger had made a similar charge against Bergson, arguing that despite the differences, *élan vital* as directionless duration operated within the same Aristotelian notion of time that Bergson wanted to criticize; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 82 (500–501nxxx).

18. Riezler, "Über den Begriff der historischen Entwicklung," 195; Riezler, *Gestalt und Gesetz*, 311–333.

19. Riezler, *Über Gebundenheit und Freiheit*, 6, 11–15. On Klages, see Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 78–84.

inaugural address in 1928, lay rather in “being and becoming a person.”<sup>20</sup>

This was the stance from which Riezler had criticized Adorno’s habilitation study, *Kierkegaard*. In Riezler’s eyes, Adorno’s deliberate rejection of the question of the human being blurred the crucial demarcation line between authentic and inauthentic existence and threatened to turn philosophy into shallow essayism devoid of any permanent standards. In his meditations on history, Riezler bemoaned that mere concern with historical facts—an example of which, for Riezler, was Adorno’s focus on inessential historical fragments in *Kierkegaard*—signified a truncated historical imagination, betraying the unfortunate influence of positivist methodology in the human sciences. For Riezler, radical historical consciousness meant searching for the universal in history. By this, he did not have in mind Hegel’s idealism: “The belief in the absolute that unfolds itself in the unity of the world-historical process is a religious need, not a scientific insight.” In words reminiscent of *Being and Time*, Riezler continued that historical thinking “can look for the universal only in the particular. This universal is not the abstract-universal, but the concrete-universal, not the law, but the metaphor,” in which genuine historical consciousness “beholds, in the alteration of what is always the other that which is always the same.”<sup>21</sup> In Riezler’s estimation, his scheme of history as an interplay of fatality and freedom had captured this historical universal. Like Heidegger’s scheme of thrownness and projection, it was a neutral ontological blueprint that did not hypostatize contingent historical value judgments into eternal truths. It did not prescribe a specific conception of the good life, but only disclosed the a priori conditions of authentic historical existence.

As with Heidegger’s scheme of thrownness and projection, Adorno was unsatisfied with Riezler’s scheme of fatality and freedom. These neo-ontological conceptions were abstract and could not capture what was relevant in real history. “The problem of historical contingency,” Adorno pointed out, “cannot be mastered by

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20. Erdmann, “Kurt Riezler,” 142; Thompson, *In the Eye of the Storm*, 212.

21. Riezler, “Über den Begriff der historischen Entwicklung,” 218–219.

the category of historicity,” for “if one tries to interpret a particular phenomenon, for example, the French Revolution,” it is “impossible to relate the facticity of the French Revolution in its most extreme factual being to such categories.” “In the full breadth of the material,” he underscored, “one will find a sphere of ‘facticity’ that cannot be explained” by any ontological categories.<sup>22</sup> In clarifying Adorno’s argument, Robert Hullot-Kentor writes that Adorno “might have argued that while existential historiography could, for example, follow through the authenticity of Danton’s decisions, it would necessarily remain obtuse to what these decisions were actually about; existential interpretation would remain indifferent to political and economic mediations falling outside the immediate context of Danton’s understanding.”<sup>23</sup> In Adorno’s assessment, the neo-ontological approach to history signified that “the attempt to master the empirical has misfired.” He traced this profound flaw in neo-ontology back to its unacknowledged debt to Kant’s subjective idealism and “the predominance of the sphere of possibility.” In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “the antithesis of possibility and reality is none other than that of the categorical subjective structure and empirical multiplicity.”<sup>24</sup>

The post-Husserlian phenomenology maintained that its disclosure of the unfree elements of human existence—Scheler’s dark natural impulsion and Heidegger’s inescapable thrownness—set it apart from German idealism’s celebration of reason. “I know that the contents of the new ontology are quite different from what I have just asserted,” Adorno conceded. “The most recent turn in phenomenology, it would be said, is precisely not rationalistic, but rather an attempt to adduce the irrational element in a totally new way.”<sup>25</sup> Adorno, however, continued that although newer phenomenology emphasized the irrational, mythic, or natural element in history, it continued idealism by its fixed a priori categories. Riezler’s rigid scheme of fatality and freedom was an example of

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22. Adorno, “Idea of Natural-History,” 256–257.

23. Hullot-Kentor, “Introduction to T. W. Adorno’s ‘The Idea of Natural-History,’” 243.

24. Adorno, “Idea of Natural-History,” 257–259.

25. *Ibid.*, 258.

neo-ontology's failure to interpret individual historical events, in which structural, non-intentional factors played a pivotal role. Furthermore, this ahistorical rigidity also undermined neo-ontological efforts to understand the current historical era. Hence, instead of detecting the crisis of modernity in its unique, capitalist specifics, Riezler saw this crisis as a yet another manifestation of the unceasing battle of instrumental production (*poiesis*) and self-sufficient action (*praxis*). Adorno, in contrast, called for a critical historical consciousness that could disclose more deep-seated structural unfreedom in the modern capitalist world than Riezler's intra-philosophical approach was able to do. Again, Adorno's critical theory of capitalism could point beyond Riezler's ideal of authenticity to a qualitatively different kind of freedom enabled by a socialist society.

### Against Paul Tillich's Idea of Demonic

The term "demonic," more commonly found in theology than in philosophy, was a term Adorno used quite often in the early 1930s. Much in the current world, he said in his inaugural address, "may be delivered up to blind demons," a likely reference, as Stefan Müller-Doohm suggests, to the Nazis' first major electoral victory in September 1930, which Adorno elsewhere described by lamenting that the Germans "had succumbed to demonic stupidity."<sup>26</sup> Even though Adorno did not explicitly mention Tillich in his lecture on natural-history, the latter's conception of history as struggle of demonic forces and efforts at de-demonization formed a notable challenge for him. Once again, the *Kränzchen* discussions from 1931 are the key source in our examination of Adorno's debate with Tillich over history. At stake in this debate for both thinkers was a crucial issue that would remain important during their American exile. This can be seen in the fact that when Adorno and Horkheimer were working on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in

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26. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 31; Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 176; Adorno to Alban Berg, January 16, 1931, in *Adorno-Berg, Briefwechsel*, 253.

the 1940s, Adorno told Tillich that “in the language of one of our last works we would say that your concept of history has reverted to mythology.”<sup>27</sup>

The idea of the demonic, which Tillich introduced in the 1926 article “Das Dämonische: Ein Beitrag zur Sinndeutung der Geschichte” (“The Demonic: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the Meaning of History”), referred to power in both individual and communal life that was creative and destructive at the same time and that, despite its finite nature, represented itself as the infinite. In contemporary society, Tillich saw two demonic powers: capitalism and nationalism. The latter was a reaction to the former, which, “with the help of tools made available by technology, was the most prosperous form of acquisition of commodities that has ever existed.” But capitalism’s productive dimension came at a high price, and descriptions of spiritual and physical devastation created by it were “numerous and irrefutable.” For Tillich, the root of capitalism did not lie in the desire for money, and therefore a moralizing critique of capitalism as the world of sin missed the point. Essential to capitalism was rather the fact that the good and the bad, “the meaningful and the absurd are indissolubly connected.”<sup>28</sup>

Elaborating elsewhere on his conception of history, Tillich emphasized its “historical-dynamic” character. Yet, it differed from the irrational philosophy of life in that “it does not seek to understand life out of its mere appearance,” as the latter would, “but out of the ground that carries and convulses reality.”<sup>29</sup> Looking back later at the beginnings of his existential understanding of theology, Tillich stressed that the principle of the demonic was “one preparation for my understanding of present day existentialist thinking.” What united Tillich with philosophical existentialism was the view that the human “predicament and situation, and the situation of his

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27. Adorno, “Adorno contra Tillich,” 290.

28. Paul Tillich, “Das Dämonische: Ein Beitrag zur Sinndeutung der Geschichte,” in *Main Works/Hauptwerke*. Vol. 5, ed. Robert P. Sharlemann (Berlin: De Gruyter—Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1988), 121–23.

29. Paul Tillich, “Kairos und Logos: Eine Untersuchung zur Metaphysik der Erkenntnis,” in *Main Works/Hauptwerke*. Vol. 1, ed. Gunther Wenz (Berlin: De Gruyter—Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1989), 266.

world, is ambiguous.” “In every life process,” Tillich maintained, there are both good and bad dimensions, and “we never can say that something is unquestionably ‘good’ and unquestionably ‘bad.’”<sup>30</sup>

Adorno commented on Tillich’s conception of history in the discussion on “religious Urmotives.” Replying to Kurt Riezler’s observation about the ambivalent meaning of secularization, Adorno said that I “will attempt to formulate the theme of profanity” and added that “I make use of Tillich’s terminology here.” Adorno noted that Tillich’s radical Protestantism demanded that “for theology to prove itself genuine at all, it must unrestrainedly and fully enter into the profanity.” In other words, the plausibility of religious motifs today required that they accept the scientific and cultural modernization, and this is just what Tillich’s existential theology had done by rejecting old Biblical mythologies. Adorno remarked approvingly that the central motive in Tillich’s conception was “de-demonization [*Entdämonisierung*], which I call demythologization [*Entmythologisierung*].” Adorno, however, criticized Tillich’s view that the profane world, “because of its anarchist, chaotic character,” was “a field of ruins” and in need of religion. He stressed that it was urgent instead to inquire whether the critical thrust of Protestantism “has actually been historically both fulfilled and exhausted” in its centuries-old critique of mythological remnants of Christianity. Against Tillich’s ongoing use of religious vocabulary, Adorno warned that “the theological categories themselves, as far as that they still remain, are nothing but shucks, empty shucks from past historical stage of this demythologization process, that are being used for purposes that I cannot label good without exception.”<sup>31</sup>

Adorno was aware of Tillich’s distance from orthodox Protestantism, and he conceded that Tillich had grasped something of the

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30. Paul Tillich, “Philosophical Background of my Theology,” in *Main Works/Hauptwerke*. Vol. 1, ed. Gunther Wenz (Berlin: De Gruyter—Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1989), 415.

31. Theodor W. Adorno’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 366–367. The editor Gunzelin Schmid Noerr notes that “demythologization” was a term coined by Hans Jonas in 1930 (*Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*) and made into a programmatic concept by Rudolf Bultmann in 1941. Urmotive discussion, 367.

ambiguous nature of modern history. Indeed, Adorno could underwrite the central aspect of Tillich's position: "I know well that in Tillich's theory the relationship" between religious and profane "is not so simple, i.e., that the demythologization process is not straightforward but dialectical. The mythical cannot simply be utterly destroyed, but must be confronted again and again, and that the actual productive forces [*Produktivkräfte*] of history indeed ensue from these mythical sources. I would grant this." Remarkably, with this concession, Adorno seemed to give in to Tillich and Heidegger that historical development went back to something like an immutable, ontological ground. Was Adorno here, then, succumbing to the same fashionable, partly Heideggerian theory of origins that he in his later recollections accused Tillich of doing? I don't think this is the case, for Adorno also argued emphatically that by sticking to Tillich's conception, we do "not unsheathe with the demand of profanity as radically as would be necessary." A further step was required to truly appreciate "the idea of profanity as the location of truth."<sup>32</sup>

What Adorno's reference to "profanity as the location of truth" meant can be seen in his account of mythic elements in socialism in need of demythologization. Referring to phenomena such as the Lenin cult in the Soviet Union, he stated that such religious remnants should be "absolutely eliminated." But significantly, Adorno added that demythologization should not stop here in its criticism of real existing socialism. Anticipating his and Horkheimer's later worry about the mythic character of instrumental reason, he stressed that "this goes equally for the fetishization and the cult of the machine, which are absolutely incompatible with the basic idea of socialism, with the ontological design of socialism."<sup>33</sup> Adorno implied, then, that the religious—in the negative sense of mythical or natural—returns not only in obvious regressions such as personality cults but also, and more importantly, in the most modern phenomena such as the orthodox Marxist emphasis on the increase of the forces of production as an end in itself. Moreover, here we have one occasion where Adorno, two years after his and Walter

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32. Theodor W. Adorno's contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 366–367.

33. *Ibid.*, 368.



Benjamin's anti-ontological Königstein program, uses ontological vocabulary in a positive tone to describe the fundamentals of his own position.

It appears that this discussion on "religious Urmotives" continued another *Kränzchen* discussion held about a week earlier on June 19.<sup>34</sup> The unpublished and previously unexamined transcription of this discussion on the stance of philosophy and science toward the phenomenon of dread (*Schrecken*) is interesting because it contains an exchange between Adorno, Tillich, and Horkheimer over the ontological dimension of history. The background theme of this discussion was the same as in the Urmotive discussion, that is, the question of whether empirical sciences such as sociology and psychology could offer sufficiently "deep" accounts of the discontents of modernity or whether theology and philosophy were required and, if so, in what form. In his own inaugural address in January 1931, Horkheimer had forcefully defended empirical sciences as integral parts of his multidisciplinary vision of critical theory.<sup>35</sup> Although the interpretation of the sketchy transcription of this discussion requires some conjecture, I would argue that we find here Horkheimer accusing not only Tillich but also Adorno for proximity to Heidegger. In addition, I think that certain parts of Adorno's 1932 lecture on natural-history, still to be discussed, refer back to this discussion.

The discussion opened with Tillich's meditations on the ontological ground of being: "the 'powerfulness of being' [*Seinsmächtigkeit*], the 'powerfulness of life' [*Lebensmächtigkeit*] is a concept through which the analytical research of history runs into a limit." Tillich inquired whether the others were aware of what he called

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34. "Diskussion zwischen M. H., Tillich, Adorno, Mennicke, Mannheim, u.a. über das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Wissenschaft gegenüber dem Schrecken. Mitschrift von Friedrich Pollock [?] 19.6.1931," the Max Horkheimer Archive VIII 12.9, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main. Hereafter cited as the Dread discussion.

35. Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 1–14.

the “demonic center of being.” As seen earlier, for Tillich, this demonic center of being was incarnated in today’s world by capitalism’s destructive effects on the proletariat and by nationalism that had resulted in the horrors of World War I. Tillich believed that Heidegger’s existential philosophy, with its concepts of anxiety and thrownness, gave adequate expression to this puzzling and disconcerting character of reality. Existential theology and religious socialism, on their part, offered theoretical and practical answers to this unsettling experience by bringing, as Tillich continued, “the shock moments together in such a way that an answer to our being can be given.”<sup>36</sup>

Adorno argued against Tillich that a “general concept of the demonic means nothing if it does not spring from a concrete demonic.” But Adorno also accused Horkheimer’s version of critical theory of evading the crucial “difference between philosophy and scientific research.” To know the empirical conditions of a phenomenon, Adorno insisted, was not sufficient. Navigating a middle way between Tillich’s existential theology and what he saw as Horkheimer’s naïve trust in science, Adorno continued that “if the phenomena are actually meant to signify something, that is perhaps only to the dear God alone to decide.” Yet, “it seems as if there was something to be deciphered.”<sup>37</sup> I take this deciphering to mean what Adorno in his inaugural address had meant by his interpretive, essayistic critical theory, which sought the right “keys” to solve the “riddles” posed by the disconcerting historical present. At the time, Adorno contended that Horkheimer’s version of critical materialism gave too much room for empirical sciences and, in so doing, approximated positivism.

As we saw in Chapter 4, Horkheimer, on his part, had been sympathetic to the critical spirit of Adorno’s *Kierkegaard*. Yet, he had been unable to endorse Adorno’s quasi-theological conception of critical theory any more than Benjamin’s earlier study on the Baroque poets. Replying to Tillich and Adorno in the discussion on dread, Horkheimer lamented that he did not understand what they

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36. Paul Tillich’s contribution to the Dread discussion.

37. Theodor W. Adorno’s contribution to the Dread discussion.

could possibly mean by their talk of “the question-character of phenomenon.” He complained that Tillich and Adorno were not satisfied with merely scientific explanations but wanted more. “The consequence of your [Eurer] question,” Horkheimer concluded in frustration, “is Heidegger’s thesis: Why is there something rather than nothing?”<sup>38</sup> To question the cognitive hegemony of the empirical sciences, Heidegger had posed this old metaphysical question in his 1929 inaugural address *What Is Metaphysics?* with the intent of showing that the experience of the “nothing,” encountered in anxiety, was something for which the sciences could not account.<sup>39</sup> Tillich replied to Horkheimer’s critique that “I have actually experienced this question and the shock connected to it.” Tillich was likely referring to his war experience in Verdun in 1916—an experience that pushed him, like thousands of others, to question the intellectual and spiritual premises of a civilization that, under the banners of Christianity and progress, had produced horrors such as endless trench warfare.<sup>40</sup>

What are we to make of this discussion? Adorno seemed to show considerable sympathy with Tillich’s wish to dig deep into the ontological fundamentals of existence to find answers to his unsettling experience of war and other discontents of the modern world. Adorno appeared to argue that his own critical theory was a not entirely different attempt to find the right words that would not only scientifically explain the empirically identifiable causes of the disconcerting experiences but also in a more empathetic sense heal the psychological scars caused by these experiences. Was this not about what Adorno much later proposed as the task of philosophy: to express “by way of concepts precisely what it is that cannot be said, to say the unsayable.” Or that “one could almost say that the aim of philosophy is to translate pain into the

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38. Max Horkheimer’s contribution to the Dread discussion.

39. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” trans. David Farrell Krell, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 82–96.

40. Paul Tillich’s contribution to the Dread discussion; Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 40–56.

concept.”<sup>41</sup> While Adorno's critical materialism differed from Tillich's existential theology, this psychological sensitivity and the experience of shock was something he shared with his supervisor. For Adorno, Horkheimer's more optimistic position did not reflect the disconcerting side of modernity as profoundly as Adorno saw happening with Tillich, as well as with Benjamin and Lukács. I would argue that this also applied to Heidegger, in whose thought, as Adorno would later observe, “a diminished theological resonance can be heard,” albeit in an utterly self-defeating form.<sup>42</sup> John Abromeit notes that Adorno would adopt a warmer stance toward Horkheimer's critical theory only in the mid-1930s, when he read the latter's highly personal book, *Dämmerung: Notizen in Deutschland 1926–1931*. These reflections on the capitalist civilization from the first-person perspective of suffering individuals showed that far more blood had been spilled into Horkheimer's thought than Adorno had imagined. *Dämmerung* would inspire Adorno two decades later to reflect on “damaged life” in *Minima Moralia*.<sup>43</sup>

If the discussion on dread disclosed Adorno's sympathy to Tillich's neo-ontological conception of history, his lecture on natural-history a year later brought to the fore his major reservations. Replying to an unnamed criticism—likely from Horkheimer—that accused Adorno of re-enchantment of the world, Adorno said that “one might object that I am proposing a sort of bewitchment [*Verzauberung*] of history and passing off the historical, in all its contingency, as the natural and then original-historical. That is, however, not what I mean.” To shed the charges of his proximity to Heideggerian belief in the ontological invariants of history, Adorno added that certainly the natural, mythic dimension of history was unnerving. Yet, if philosophy aspired to be “nothing more than the shock that the historical presents itself at the same time as nature,

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41. Theodor W. Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften: Philosophische Terminologie 1 und 2*, ed. Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2016), 105, 107. Translation from Hullot-Kentor, “Critique of the Organic,” xx.

42. Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, 2.

43. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 351–352, 378–379. See also Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 136–139; Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 50–57, 96–110.

then such a philosophy would be subject to Hegel's criticism of Schelling's philosophy as the night of indifferentiation in which all cows are black." Despite concessions to Heidegger and the Frankfurt Heideggerians, Adorno did not wish to follow them to this murky, undifferentiated existentialist night. "How does one avoid this night? That is something that I would like to clarify."<sup>44</sup>

### Natural-History: A Progressive Freudo-Marxian Rereinterpretation of Thrownness

Adorno admitted that his conception of natural-history "did not fall from heaven." Lukács had used the concept of "second nature" in *Theory of the Novel* (1916) to describe a meaningless, "alienated world of commodities." Adorno praised Lukács for showing that modern capitalism had created a quasi-autonomous economic system that operated like a force of nature, and that the inhabitants of this "world of convention" had lost awareness of the fact that this world was ultimately a human creation. Touching on the problematic of "the question-character of phenomenon" from the earlier discussion on dread, Adorno remarked that "this world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers, is the starting point of the question with which I am concerned here." The problem of natural-history is "how is it possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world." Adorno, however, criticized Lukács for setting against the modern reified world a nostalgic and anachronistic view of ancient Greece. If Adorno had learned from Lukács that even the most modern history contained mythical elements, Walter Benjamin's achievement was the transformation of the very meaning of the concept of nature. For Benjamin, nature was longer a static substance but was itself a transient phenomenon. Adorno quoted two key passages from Benjamin's Baroque book to strike home this point. The Baroque poets saw in nature "eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision

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44. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 265–266. The sentence has been modified.

of these generations recognize history." In their works, "'history' is writ across the countenance of nature in the sign language of transience." Yet, even Benjamin was not free of a motif of re-enchanting the world, and Adorno criticized his belief in "certain fundamental original-historical phenomena."<sup>45</sup> In contrast to Lukács and Benjamin, Adorno wished to keep the conception of natural-history free from such transfigurative motifs.

As the epigraph to the Introduction shows, Adorno appreciated Heidegger's ontological attempt to overcome the separation of nature and history. The aim of Adorno's own conception of natural-history was to reorient this attempt from ontology to real history. This was to happen by a two-dimensional effort, the description of which, significantly, anticipates the language of entwinement of myth and reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. On one hand, Adorno said, we should "*comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being.*" On the other hand, we should "*comprehend nature as a historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature*" (italics in the original). Although this description resembled neo-ontological formulations such as Heidegger's scheme of thrownness and projection, Adorno's did not wish to fix history's natural dimension into an ontological invariant along the lines of *Being and Time*'s notion of historicity. Rather, he wanted to "retransform the structure of inner-historical events into a structure of natural events," the latter in the sense of Lukács's second nature. Only by thus directing the scope of philosophy at the empirical material itself did neo-ontology have "a chance of winning ontological dignity, of achieving an actual interpretation of being."<sup>46</sup>

Natural-history, Adorno emphasized, was "of an essentially different logical form" than Heidegger's search for timeless conditions of human existence. Instead, as moments of a "constellation," nature and history were supposed to "gather around a concrete

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45. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 260–264; Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971); Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 177, 179.

46. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 259–260.

historical facticity,” which in this way would “reveal itself in its uniqueness.”<sup>47</sup> In his inaugural address, Adorno had defined this constellative sociology, or “interpretive philosophy,” as riddle solving. The riddles it sought to solve were not those of idealist philosophy, whether in the form of Kant’s question of the thing-in-itself or Heidegger’s question of the meaning of being, let alone those of positive theology, but ones posed by the disconcerting and confusing historical present. Again, the answer would not be a new account of the ontological ground of being, not even in the form of Heidegger’s empty skeleton of temporality, but a set of empirical coordinates with which to make sense of the workings of the current oppressive society.

To back this idea of natural-history, Adorno drew attention to the fact that this peculiar phenomenon of “intertwining of the originally existing and the newly becoming” was at the heart of two towering modern thinkers: Freud and Marx. Already in 1931, he had claimed that Freud’s turn to the “refuse of the physical world” carried not only psychological but philosophical significance. Returning to this claim in 1932, Adorno noted that psychoanalysis presents the opposition of nature and history “in the distinction between archaic symbols, to which no associations may attach themselves, and intersubjective, dynamic, inner-historical symbols, which can all be eliminated and transformed into psychical actuality and present knowledge.”<sup>48</sup> By archaic images, Adorno had in mind those images that irrational vitalists such as Ludwig Klages wish “to preserve as categories of our knowledge,” whereas historical images referred to just those emancipatory “constellations” constructed by critical theory.<sup>49</sup> Against figures such as Klages who wanted to return from modern rational and historical consciousness to an allegedly pristine past of ancient myths, Adorno argued, again anticipating *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that “all great myths” and “the mythical images that our consciousness still carries” contain critical, dialectical elements.<sup>50</sup>

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47. Ibid., 263–264.

48. Ibid., 266.

49. Adorno, “Actuality of Philosophy,” 36.

50. Adorno, “Idea of Natural-History,” 267.

If Freud gave Adorno philosophical tools to undermine the reactionary vitalist discourse of the Weimar era, Marx's idea of the commodity fetishism gave him another key to unlock the riddle of modernization. For Adorno, Marx's turn to economic theory and the changing of the world did not result merely from the empirical superiority of economics or political considerations but also from "the immanent requirements of philosophic interpretation itself."<sup>51</sup> Adorno concluded his 1932 lecture by saying that his elaboration on the idea of natural-history was "only an interpretation of certain fundamental elements of the materialist dialectic."<sup>52</sup> What he meant by this can be read in his later masterpiece, *Negative Dialectics* (1966), where he cited his 1932 lecture and quoted Marx to show that talk of history's natural side could serve progressive ends. The young Marx had "expressed the unending entwinement of the two elements with an extremist vigor bound to irritate dogmatic materialists," while in *Capital*, the mature Marx had described economic history "as a process of natural history."<sup>53</sup>

### *Being and Time: Thoroughly Fascist or Inspiration to Dialectic of Enlightenment?*

In his most polemical comment on Heidegger, in 1963, Adorno claimed that *Being and Time* was "fascist right down to its innermost components." In his other postwar comments as well, he did not hesitate to draw continuities between *Being and Time* and Heidegger's Nazi turn.<sup>54</sup> That already at the time of the Frankfurt discussion Adorno perceived ideological elements in Heidegger's magnum opus invites the question of whether he saw in it explicitly

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51. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 32.

52. Adorno, "Idea of Natural-History," 269.

53. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 354, 358; Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 28; Karl Marx, *Collected Works*, Vol. 35, *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996), 10.

54. Adorno to *Diskus* (University of Frankfurt student newspaper), January 3, 1963; Adorno, *Jargon of Authenticity*, xviii, xx.



*political* implications. Richard Wolin relates his conversation in the 1980s with Adorno's colleague Leo Lowenthal, who "recounted that for the Critical Theorists (as well as for many others familiar with Heidegger's philosophy at the time), Heidegger's turn toward National Socialism in the early 1930s came as little surprise."<sup>55</sup> Yet, nowhere in his pre-1933 writings or lectures did Adorno mention Heidegger as a potential Nazi. No doubt, Adorno was from the beginning alert to ideological elements of *Being and Time*. But before 1933, he understood by these elitist Kierkegaardian individualism rather than Nazism. As Adorno remarked in his inaugural address, Heidegger's existentialism was, at least in his published writings, solely concerned with the being of the individual.<sup>56</sup>

Hence, if by the above comment Lowenthal implied that in the Weimar era the Frankfurt School already suspected a connection between Heidegger's philosophy and Fascism, then this seems an ex post projection. As we saw in Part I, Herbert Marcuse did not observe this connection during his time as Heidegger's student in Freiburg. And as we will see in Part III, in his own inaugural address in 1931, Max Horkheimer praised Heidegger's "melancholy individualism" for its resistance to the lure of reactionary social philosophies. The Frankfurt School's perception of the political ramifications of Heidegger's fundamental ontology fits, then, well into un-political interpretations of Heidegger's Davos disputation with Ernst Cassirer in 1929.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, it is entirely possible that in 1931, Adorno learned from Horkheimer that, as Kurt Riezler had reported to the latter, Marcuse's academic path in Freiburg had been blocked by Heidegger's anti-Semitic university politics. Whether Adorno privately drew political conclusions from *Being and Time*, we cannot tell. If he did, it does not take much effort to see that it was Heidegger's reduction of human life to such categories as thrownness, anxiety, and death that in Adorno's estimation bridged Heidegger's

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55. Richard Wolin's discussion with Leo Lowenthal, cited in Wolin, *Politics of Being*, liv.

56. Adorno, "Actuality of Philosophy," 27.

57. Gordon, *Continental Divide*, 325–338.

metaphysic of Dasein with Nazi nihilism. Nevertheless, even if Adorno already suspected this connection before 1933, this does not in any way mean that he would have considered *Being and Time* as nothing but Fascism. Considering Adorno's painstaking philosophical engagement, both in his programmatic early lectures and later in *Negative Dialectics*, with Heidegger's thought, this claim is simply untrue. In contrast to such a hyperbolic exaggeration—which anticipates Emmanuel Faye's recent claims<sup>58</sup>—Adorno always saw *Being and Time* as a philosophical work that deserved to be treated as such, not merely as an ideology.

Indeed, in Adorno's unpublished notes to Heidegger from 1951, we find a more nuanced position. Adorno emphasized *Being and Time*'s proximity to National Socialism. Heidegger's attempt to reach, in the footsteps of Descartes and Husserl, the absolute ground has “an especially reactionary accent,” Adorno argued, because this absolute is constructed on “an anthropology, for which authenticity, genuineness, vicinity to origin, and similar categories are decisive.” Besides other elements, such as Heidegger's radical pathos without any critical social content, it was just this fascination with the idea of origin in the abstract—one that could easily find content from the Nazi racial theory—that in Adorno's view resembled “genuinely National Socialist way of thinking.” Adorno took Heidegger's supporters to task for untruthfully belittling the connection between Heidegger's thought and politics as an external one and treating him as a mere “fellow traveler.” Unlike in his polemical equation of *Being and Time* and Nazism in 1963, however, here Adorno refrained from equating the two without a remainder. His position in these unpublished notes is thus better in tune with his lifelong interest in an immanent philosophical critique of *Being and Time*.<sup>59</sup>

Instead of giving too much weight to Adorno's least convincing judgment about *Being and Time* as mere meta-politics of Nazism,

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58. Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

59. Theodor W. Adorno, “Notizen zu Heidegger,” July 14, 1951, the Theodor W. Adorno Archive Ts 51941–51948, Institute for Social Research, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

we should rather consider the question of whether this book stimulated the Frankfurt School's most famous argument. For if, as Robert Hullot-Kentor proposes, Adorno's lecture on natural-history anticipated his and Horkheimer's later argument about the entwinement of myth and reason, and if, as we have shown, in 1932, Adorno developed his idea of natural-history as an immanent criticism of *Being and Time*, then the obvious question is in what sense is Heidegger's philosophy present in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*?

Written in the early 1940s during the darkest days of European history, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* claimed that the Enlightenment effort to liberate human beings from natural heteronomy and their "self-incurred immaturity" had fallen back to domination and mythic fear. In the realm of thought, this development appeared in the replacement of socially and historically sensitive reason with "the myth of that which is the case"—a fallacy evident no less in modern positivism's worship of the facts than in irrationalism's cynical celebration of naked power and fate. In politics, it showed itself in the Nazis' paranoid obsession with the purified *Volksgemeinschaft*, but also in Communism's hypostatization of forces of production and in the mind-numbing culture industry of the capitalist West. What made *Dialectic of Enlightenment* so provocative was its claim that all these phenomena were, rather than aberrations of Enlightenment, expressions of its inherent tendency to turn from liberation to domination. Going far beyond the historical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, by interpreting Odysseys as the first bourgeois, Horkheimer and Adorno detected the origin of the Janus-faced Western rationality to Homeric antiquity.<sup>60</sup>

Now, it would seem far-fetched to stress Heidegger's impact on the diagnosis offered by Horkheimer and Adorno. Heidegger is not once mentioned in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Again, we have seen that the idea of natural-history already existed before *Being and Time* in the works of Benjamin and Lukács. Thus, Adorno's struggle with Heidegger and his admirers in Frankfurt did not push him

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60. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

to create this idea but rather to defend and articulate it better. Nonetheless, Adorno's lecture on natural-history, his review of Dolf Sternberger's study of Heidegger, and the transcriptions from the *Kränzchen* discussions support the view that he saw *Being and Time*'s notion of thrownness as having captured something of the dark side of European modernity. In the *Kränzchen* discussions, Adorno had presented his own critique of the naïve belief in progress by arguing that what many saw as the most progressive phenomena, the frenzied industrialization of both the Taylorist West and Soviet Russia, together with their philosophical handmaiden, positivism, signified Enlightenment's blind side. The imperative of production in both Western capitalism and Soviet communism had led to cults of labor that repressed the human being's inner nature by turning her into a *homo faber*. With these reflections, Adorno anticipated his demand in 1932 to "comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being"—or as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* would put it, "enlightenment reverts to mythology."<sup>61</sup> In Adorno's estimation, Heidegger's *Being and Time* had registered something of this fateful dialectic. But instead of disclosing the economic, social, and psychological mechanisms behind it, Heidegger's gloomy existentialism turned its sensitivity to discontents of modernity into a repressive, self-defeating mythology of surrender. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, rather than forsaking reason, insisted on enlightening it as the only way out—or rather through—the urge to domination inherent in reason.

For Adorno, Heidegger's *Being and Time* stood out from other interwar German attacks on reason. During the formative years of his critical theory at the turn of the 1930s, Adorno was preoccupied in defending the Enlightenment against assaults by both Nazi ideologues, such as Alfred Rosenberg, author of *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*) from 1930, and preachers of rottenness of Western civilization from Oswald Spengler to Ludwig Klages. These thinkers sought to undermine "the ideas of 1789" by castigating reason as a powerless epiphenomenon of

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61. Ibid., xviii.

mystic natural forces. By revering archaic *Ursprungsmächte*, they failed to understand that in the ancient myths or cosmic forces they celebrated, progression toward rational consciousness was already at work. In Adorno's early idiom, they failed to "comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature"—or in the words of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that "myth is already enlightenment."<sup>62</sup> I believe that what made *Being and Time* a more difficult target for criticism was the fact that although Heidegger too undermined the Enlightenment, his existential analytic could not be reduced to a willful advocacy of mythical archaism. What made the early Heidegger so challenging an opponent was *Being and Time's* deceptive expression of the conservative prejudice of the human being's powerlessness in the seemingly neutral idea of thrown Dasein, an idea acquired through respectable phenomenological observation. Yet, Adorno argued that Heidegger, like Max Scheler from whom he was supposed to differ, succumbed to myth by fixing the scheme of thrownness and project in favor of the former, thereby closing the door on a qualitatively different society beyond domination.

Yet, among the works of conservative *Zivilisationskritik*, *Being and Time* held a unique place for Adorno not only because of its deceptively ideological notion of thrownness. What made Heidegger's early magnum opus a worthwhile object of immanent rather than total criticism was its connection, albeit a thin one, to the Enlightenment ideal of individual self-determination. This is evident when we contrast Adorno's view of *Being and Time* to his polemics against openly reactionary figures such as Klages and Rosenberg but also against Heidegger's later thought. For Adorno, *Being and Time's* critique of reification still operated in a human register, branded as its key concepts, such as inauthenticity and forgetting of being, were by Heidegger "as part of a theory of the decay of European civilization." In contrast, Heidegger's later narrative of history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*)—where the fateful sending of being was separated from real history and every and all human initiative—was a species of "demonology" not far from Klages's

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62. Ibid.

doctrines. With this narrative, the later Heidegger like the Nazis “reaches for myth; like theirs, his myth remains that of the twentieth century.”<sup>63</sup>

We have seen that Horkheimer also participated in the Frankfurt discussion over Heidegger. As for Adorno, for Horkheimer as well the question of Heidegger’s relationship to Scheler and the phenomenological movement at large formed the major point of departure. While Adorno recognized Scheler as a major stimulator of the German *Zeitgeist* in the 1920s, Horkheimer accorded Scheler an even more crucial role. As Horkheimer declared in his eulogy for his ex-colleague in 1928, today the great majority of the advocates of the anti-positivist and anti-Enlightenment protest “make their spiritual living knowingly or unknowingly out of Max Scheler’s unparalleled capacity at synthesis and philosophical imagination.”<sup>64</sup> It is to this impact that we will turn to in Part III as we examine Horkheimer’s nascent critical theory in a struggle with Scheler, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt Heideggerians.

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63. Adorno, *Ontology and Dialectics*, 224–225, 230. For a similar critique of Spengler’s fatalism, see Theodor W. Adorno, “Spengler after the Decline,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 51–72.

64. Max Horkheimer, “Max Scheler (1874–1928),” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 11: Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 151.



PART III

THE YOUNG HORKHEIMER  
ON HEIDEGGER

*From Guarded Enthusiasm  
to Determined Opposition*





*BEING AND TIME**The Primacy of Practical Reason  
Misunderstood*

At first glance, it is not evident that the two have something to do with one another. One is a metaphysician, for the other the point is to change the world. However, it makes one wonder that a good expert of both (Lucien Goldmann) has reproached the French Marxists for their failure to see the kinship. The latter consists in the acrimony towards idealism, which both radically reject, and further in the conviction and demonstration that nothing is given objectively but only in how we structure it. The world is nothing in itself but something that is created at every moment.

—MAX HORKHEIMER, “HEIDEGGER AND MARX” (1957)

Born in Stuttgart as the only child of a wealthy German Jewish industrialist, from an early age, Max Horkheimer was meant to inherit his father’s business. Yet, already in his youthful artistic writings, he expressed uneasiness with the role he was expected to play. Participating in Munich’s bohemian circles during the

1918–1919 revolutionary upheaval, Horkheimer witnessed the rise and fall of the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic. While in Munich, he also heard Max Weber’s famous lectures, which painted a dim picture of socialism as a repetition of the worst features of capitalism and cautioned students to dispense with social utopias. Horkheimer would never adopt the quasi-religious, redemptive conception of socialism of Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, and he himself concluded in the final days of the Soviet Republic that the time was not ripe for a revolution. Yet, Horkheimer was stupefied by Weber’s lack of interest in changing an unjust world, which made him forever suspicious of what he saw as the misplaced value freedom of conservative academia. In 1919, Horkheimer entered University of Frankfurt where through studies in psychology, philosophy, and economics he hoped to understand the roots of the current social-political turmoil. After a year of study, Horkheimer, a psychology major, was urged by the philosopher Hans Cornelius to visit Freiburg and learn philosophy from the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. In Freiburg, Horkheimer also came into contact with Husserl’s eccentric assistant, Martin Heidegger.<sup>1</sup>

Downplaying the importance of this encounter with Heidegger, Horkheimer later stated that “I did go to Heidegger’s lectures for a year, but I was more impressed by Husserl.”<sup>2</sup> In 1921, however, he had written—while reporting to Rose Riekher, his girlfriend and future wife, about his impressions of Heidegger—that the “more philosophy captivates me, the more I distance myself from what is understood as philosophy at this university [Frankfurt]. We must search for substantive expressions about our life and its significance rather than formal epistemological laws, which are basically terribly unimportant. I know now that Heidegger was one of the most significant personalities to have spoken to me.” On whether he agreed with Heidegger: “How could I, since I actually

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1. Helmut Gummior und Rolf Ringguth, *Max Horkheimer in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg, Germany: Rowohlt, 1973), 7–27; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 41–47; Wiggershaus, *Max Horkheimer*, 9–44.

2. Max Horkheimer, “Zur Zukunft der Kritischen Theorie,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 7: Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985), 429.

only know one thing about him for sure: that for him the impulse to philosophy does not stem from intellectual ambition and a preconceived theory but springs anew each day from his own experience.”<sup>3</sup>

What impact did Heidegger’s lectures in the early 1920s and his magnum opus, *Being and Time* (1927), have on Horkheimer’s development? At first glance, not much. After his return from Freiburg, in the early 1920s, Horkheimer earned his *Privatdozent* status with two conventional theses on Kant; written in the spirit of his supervisor, Cornelius, they did not betray traces of Heidegger’s influence. Neither are Heideggerian themes observable in Horkheimer’s activities outside of the academia in the early Weimar years, when he was among the founders of the Institute for Social Research, which through independent development of Marxist theory sought to prevent the Bolshevization of Germany’s communist party. Again, in the late 1920s when, as a private lecturer at the University of Frankfurt, Horkheimer developed his idea of critical theory in confrontation with abstract “consciousness philosophy” from Cartesianism to present-day phenomenology, he paid fairly little attention to *Being and Time*.<sup>4</sup> It is little wonder, then, that in contrast to the scholarship on Herbert Marcuse and Theodor W. Adorno, there is only one article-length study that focuses solely on Heidegger and Horkheimer: Lambert Zuidervaart’s comparison of their notions of truth in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

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3. Horkheimer to Rose Riekher, November 30, 1921, in Horkheimer, *Life in Letters*, 22. Translation modified.

4. Horkheimer’s Weimar-era lectures and writings contain only about fifteen, for the most part negative, remarks on Heidegger and focus more on other critics of the Enlightenment tradition and modern positivist philosophy. Of course, there may have been more remarks on Heidegger in Horkheimer’s correspondence. However, almost all of Horkheimer’s letters from the period before 1933 were either destroyed by Horkheimer and his Institute colleagues shortly before the Gestapo searched the Institute on March 13, 1933, or were lost later. See Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, “Nachwort des Herausgebers zu den Bänden 15–18: *Eine Geschichte der ‘Frankfurter Schule’ in Briefen*,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 18: *Briefwechsel 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1996), 824, 826–832.

5. Lambert Zuidervaart, “Truth Matters: Heidegger and Horkheimer in Dialectical Disclosure,” *Telos* 145 (Winter 2008): 131–160.

John Abromeit and Olaf Asbach contend that although Horkheimer praised Heidegger's anti-academic pathos in his 1921 letter to Rose Rieker, his encounter with Heidegger did not have a major impact on his development. And concerning Horkheimer's reactions to *Being and Time*, both argue that its impact on Horkheimer's nascent critical theory was marginal at best.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Helmut Gumnior and Rolf Ringguth had previously emphasized the stimulating impact of Horkheimer's early encounter with Heidegger. Drawing on Horkheimer's 1921 letter, they suggested that the "semester in Freiburg disclosed to Horkheimer the deficiencies of Frankfurt's neo-Kantian university philosophy" and that in "the middle of Horkheimer's critique of the Frankfurt philosophers was undoubtedly the strong impression that Martin Heidegger had made on him." Likewise, John McCole, Seyla Benhabib, and Wolfgang Bonss maintain that the "encounter with Heidegger provided an early impetus to the process by which Horkheimer gradually began distancing himself from the sort of neo-Kantianism represented by Cornelius." Most recently, Ian Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek have pointed out that Horkheimer's letter indicates that he did not categorically reject Heidegger's thought in the early days.<sup>7</sup>

I too believe that the young Horkheimer was fascinated, if only briefly, by Heidegger's postwar lectures. Yet, I agree with Abromeit and Asbach that by the latter part of the 1920s, Horkheimer's stance toward Heidegger had become very critical. But what was it that prevented Horkheimer from becoming a Heideggerian in the 1920s? Abromeit suggests that "Horkheimer was too concerned about the irrationalistic implications of the putatively more concrete versions

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6. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 58–59; Olaf Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie der Gesellschaft: Eine Untersuchung zur Vor- und Entstehungsgeschichte der Kritischen Theorie Max Horkheimers (1920–1927)* (Opladen, Germany: Leske + Budrich, 1997), 134–136.

7. Gumnior and Ringuth, *Horkheimer in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, 22–24; John McCole, Seyla Benhabib, and Wolfgang Bonss, "Introduction, Max Horkheimer: Between Philosophy and Social Science," in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 4; Macdonald and Ziarek, Introduction to *Adorno and Heidegger*, 1–2, 183n3.

of phenomenology, which were becoming increasingly popular in the 1920s, to fall under Heidegger's sway." I would readily agree. But I find it simplistic when Abromeit writes that what made Horkheimer "less susceptible to Heidegger's charismatic teachings than some commentators have realized" was his resistance to what Peter Gay called the widespread "hunger for wholeness" of the Weimar years, which "Heidegger's philosophy seemed to satisfy so well."<sup>8</sup> Horkheimer certainly resisted this hunger. Yet, I believe that this characterization fails to capture his impression of Heidegger. In fact, it applies better to his impression of the other major post-Husserlian phenomenologist, Max Scheler.

The chapter begins with an analysis of Horkheimer's reactions to *Being and Time* in the late 1920s. Although critical of Heidegger, Horkheimer was not indifferent toward him but saw *Being and Time* working against the critical social consciousness that his critical theory wished to generate. The second section moves to the early Weimar years to assess the impact of Heidegger's lectures on the student Horkheimer. The key to Horkheimer's initially more positive reaction to Heidegger, I contend, was his earlier encounter with Weber, against whose disheartening teachings Heidegger's emphasis on "factual life experience" came as a breath of fresh air.

### **Horkheimer's Reactions to *Being and Time***

Before becoming the director of the Institute for Social Research in 1930, Horkheimer worked for five years as a private lecturer at the University of Frankfurt. During this time, he was preoccupied with fighting a spiritual trend that greatly troubled him: the neo-metaphysical renaissance of the Weimar era. Horkheimer scrutinized this phenomenon especially in the 1926 lecture course "Einführung in die Philosophie der Gegenwart" ("Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy") and in the 1928 manuscript "Zur Emanzipation der Philosophie von der Wissenschaft" ("On Emancipation of

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8. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 58–59; Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 70–101.

Philosophy from Science”). At the time, Horkheimer was sketching a materialist interpretation of the history of European philosophy, which examined the societal function of philosophy in different phases of capitalism and in different national contexts. In general, he was unsatisfied with the present state of philosophy. Despite their differences, both scientifically minded positivism and neo-Kantianism and their rivals, phenomenology and philosophy of life, lacked an emancipatory social imagination. This lack set them apart from the eighteenth-century French *philosophés* as well as Kant and Hegel, whose insights Horkheimer attempted to incorporate into his own emerging position. While he did not publicly endorse Marxism in his lectures, in his private writings—most notably in his aphorism collection, *Dämmerung: Notizen in Deutschland* (*Dawn and Decline*), written in 1926–1931 and published under the pseudonym Heinrich Regius in 1934—Horkheimer fused his materialist reading of philosophy with a Marxist critique of capitalism and integrated Freudian psychoanalysis into this account.<sup>9</sup>

Many scholars emphasize that despite Horkheimer’s criticism of neo-metaphysics, to an extent, he considered its critique of scientific philosophy as justified. Horkheimer distinguished between what he judged as serious critics of positivism and vulgar popularizers. Whereas Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Nietzsche had taken the question of the relation of “life and intellect” seriously, popular charlatans such as Oswald Spengler attacked science when it suited them but elsewhere relied on it without further ado.<sup>10</sup> Horkheimer counted the phenomenological movement among the serious critics of modernity. Yet, he also stressed its contribution to the neo-metaphysical revival. Although Husserl had inaugurated the phenomenological search for new absolutes in place of fallible sciences, the decisive figure in phenomenology’s anti-scientific campaign was Max Scheler, the most influential of Husserl’s followers before the publication of *Being and Time* and Horkheimer’s col-

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9. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 85–140, 156–211; Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 169–281, 303–310.

10. Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany 1831–1933*, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 139–140, 144; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 48–49; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 133–138, 171.

league in Frankfurt before his death in 1928. As in the case of Adorno, in that of Horkheimer's as well understanding of Scheler's role is imperative in making sense of Horkheimer's reactions to Heidegger. As we have discussed Scheler at length in previous chapters, a brief recapitulation of the core themes of his thought suffices here.

"The profound difference between the philosophical theories that I accept and the thoughts of Scheler," Horkheimer acknowledged in the obituary for his colleague, "do not thwart us from standing in due awe of this tremendous intellectual strenuousness." He recalled that the few discussions between him and Scheler led to "admiration before the opulence of his world of thought, as well as to gratitude for the personal stimulation." Horkheimer did not hesitate to say that Scheler's last efforts toward a major work in philosophical anthropology "would at all events have been the epitome of the present-day views about the human being and the world." Yet, he stressed the metaphysical character even of Scheler's later, post-Catholic interest in the human condition. It looks like Scheler, "as earlier on the concept of God and religion, now wants to base the solution of all problems on the doctrine of man." For Horkheimer, this contained two untenable presuppositions: that humans do not change in history and that it was possible to attain a certain knowledge of the human being. "The satisfaction of the ultimate, final knowledge, metaphysics in the fashion conceived by Scheler," Horkheimer concluded, "is in our opinion unrealizable even if, according to Kant's words, 'there has always been some metaphysics or other to be met with in the world, and there will always continue to be one.'"<sup>11</sup>

Amid a critical discussion of the metaphysical twist Scheler had given to Husserl's rationalist program, in "On Emancipation of Philosophy from Science," Horkheimer referred twice, in footnotes, to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He acknowledged that Heidegger had moved phenomenology's focus from Husserl's logical realm to the

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11. Horkheimer, "Max Scheler," 146–148, 157; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.



world of historical human life without, however, avoiding a fall into all-too-typical phenomenological abstractions:

In Heidegger's philosophy, the opposition of universal and particular in the sense of the old phenomenology is sublated, just as is that of essence and reality. According to him, the philosopher has to do not with the merely possible, but with the true reality. But also according to him the task of philosophy is in no way the assessment of facts and their connections or the investigation of the laws governing natural reality. According to him, nature is rather something secondary and derivative. True being is for him identical with Dasein. From the fullness of the real, however, he excavates as Dasein a very small part, namely the isolated and austere interiority of a merely thought of human individual. What he in this way states about Dasein qua being, is then supposed to count as ontology, that is, to be applicable for all and every being independent from time, which itself is rather conceived in a monadological way. As a genuine phenomenologist, he thereby invokes the "idea of grasping and explicating phenomena in a way which is 'original' and 'intuitive.'"<sup>12</sup>

Although *Being and Time* was not after Husserl's logical essences but historical *existentials*, Horkheimer claimed that nothing essential had changed with regards to Husserl's ahistorical approach. In Heidegger's existential phenomenology, the essential realm was approached through the human being's concrete existence, in the different ways the human being relates to and is embedded in the world. Yet, Horkheimer complained that this phenomenological and rather solipsistic approach to the historical world offered very little insight into the present historical situation:

In Heidegger, the true reality is indeed reduced to the single idea of Dasein. But the same goes for his teachings as for phenomenology as a whole. The "existentials," that is, the definitive features, the "ways of being" of Dasein, are stated independently from each historical situation. In this ontology there is a lot of talk about history, but in truth only to demonstrate that Dasein does not "stand in history," but that all historicity comes from "Dasein" itself. Here as well the philosophical attempt

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12. Max Horkheimer, "Zur Emanzipation der Philosophie von der Wissenschaft," in *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 10: Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1990), 391; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 7 (61).

is made to articulate once and for all the structure of genuine being. Even though this genuine being is understood as “temporal,” its description presents itself as supra-temporal, as genuine ontology. Quite consistent with this is that the activity of human beings in their social formations is not the real action; instead, the true existence consists of philosophizing itself.<sup>13</sup>

John Abromeit aptly notes that Horkheimer’s comments on *Being and Time* only a year after its publication “testify to a solid understanding of the text.”<sup>14</sup> Horkheimer found Heidegger’s concepts of Dasein and historicity unsatisfying. We could hardly find a better demonstration of the difference between the two thinkers than the words from Heidegger’s own hand. Anticipating upcoming criticism, he had written that “it will be said that these deliberations have been rather petty. No one denies that at bottom human Dasein is the primary ‘subject’ of history; and the ordinary conception of history . . . says so plainly enough.” But he had stressed that “with the thesis that ‘Dasein is historical’, one has in view not just the ontical fact that in man we are presented with a more or less important ‘atom’ in the workings of world history, and that he remains the plaything of circumstances and events.” Instead, this “thesis raises the problem: *to what extent and on the basis of what ontological conditions, does historicity belong, as an essential constitutive state, to the subjectivity of the ‘historical’ subject?*” (italics in original).<sup>15</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Horkheimer—to whom the recent triumph of monopoly capitalism and the related decline of the individual made all the difference—was little impressed by Heidegger’s notion of historicity.<sup>16</sup> It paled in particular with the

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13. Horkheimer, “Emanzipation der Philosophie,” 396–397. A part of the translation from Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 132n170.

14. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 132n170.

15. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 73 (433–434).

16. Horkheimer’s compressed remarks on *Being and Time* resemble lengthier criticisms by Heidegger’s two left-wing students. For Herbert Marcuse, the same “fake concreteness” that characterized the book’s key concepts pervaded even the most concrete of them, the concept of historicity, as none of the social, political, and cultural “conditions which make history have any place in *Being and Time*.” Günther Anders observed that despite Heidegger’s replacement of Husserl’s notion of intentionality with more concrete existential categories of care and being-in-the-

idea of “the life process of society,” introduced by Marx in *The German Ideology*, published in 1927 and of great interest for Horkheimer at the time. By this term, Marx denoted society’s historically alterable interaction with nature and a particular form of social relations resulting from the former. Everything that Heidegger would relegate to the ontic realm—“the true individuals, their action and their material conditions”—was thus essential for the materialist understanding of history.<sup>17</sup>

In an article draft from 1928, “Über das Recht soziologischer Interpretation” (“On the Legitimacy of Sociological Interpretation”), Horkheimer again took *Being and Time* to task for succumbing to bad abstractions. “The demand of devoutness to the illustrated ‘things,’” he claimed, “and further the certainty, that the knowledge of the real historical situation remains irrelevant for the decision concerning metaphysical content, appears to us to build a presupposition even there, where the assertion of eternal truths is acknowledged as ‘a fanciful contention which does not gain in legitimacy from having philosophers commonly “believe” it.’” Through Heidegger’s phenomenology, we “are supposed to ‘get hold’ of nothing less than ‘the being of entities, its meaning, its modifications and derivations’, so that we subsequently decide upon following the indicated perspective.” Horkheimer had harsh words for “this taken-for-grantedness with which the new talk of metaphysical essences comes forward.” On his account, neo-metaphysics in its phenomenological form was as implausible as all previous metaphysics. “The Platonic conception of the freely gazing philosopher seems to us untenable since Bacon’s *Neuem Organon*.”<sup>18</sup>

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world, he downplayed those very factors that actually comprise our finitude and historicity, i.e., our dependence on the world: want, need, hunger, sex—“*starving for the world*” in general. Marcuse, “Heidegger’s Politics, 167–169; Günther Anders, “On the Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger’s Philosophy,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 8, no. 3 (1948): 346–348.

17. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, 31; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 250–251.

18. Max Horkheimer, “Über das Recht soziologischer Interpretation,” in *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 11: Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 162; Heidegger, *Being and Time* § 44 (270), § 7 (60).

As a work of theoretical philosophy, then, Horkheimer saw *Being and Time* as suffering from the same abstractness as all phenomenology. But what about its implications for practical reason, an area increasingly crucial to Horkheimer? John Abromeit and Olaf Asbach emphasize that in 1925–1930, Horkheimer’s overarching goal was to challenge the contemplative thrust of the Cartesian subject philosophy, still very much alive in both scientific and anti-scientific philosophies of the 1920s, as well as to defend the primacy of practical reason as the core of his nascent critical theory. Horkheimer’s academic theses in the early 1920s had been rather orthodox epistemological treatises in the neo-Kantian tradition.<sup>19</sup> The year 1925, however, marked a crucial shift in his philosophical outlook. A part of this self-transformation was Horkheimer’s critique of neo-Kantianism with the help of Kant himself. Stressing Kant’s emphasis on practical reason, Horkheimer touched the nerve of contemporary discussions, in which the decades-old neo-Kantian stress on natural science was judged as one-dimensional next to Kant’s multiple concerns with ethical, aesthetic, and metaphysical matters. Horkheimer interpreted *Critique of Pure Reason* as an anticipation of materialist ethics; the creaturely nature of human beings as residents of the phenomenal world nurtured the materialist virtues of critical self-reflexivity, the recognition of the open-ended nature of knowledge, and a concern with practice rather than contemplation.<sup>20</sup> This materialist appropriation of Kant also went against Scheler’s metaphysical Kant interpretation, mentioned above, as well as Heidegger’s 1929 *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Horkheimer underscored further that Hegel had improved Kant’s openings with his idea of historical

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19. Max Horkheimer, *Zur Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilskraft*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Philosophische Frühschriften 1922–1932*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 13–72; Max Horkheimer, *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 2: *Philosophische Frühschriften 1922–1932*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 73–146.

20. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 118–120; Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 203–228.

societies as institutionalized forms of freedom or un-freedom. While he rejected Hegel's belief in the innate rationality of history, he praised the latter's high regard for empirical sciences and the way he overcame the historicist collecting of facts by perceiving economic, cultural, and psychological phenomena as interrelated.<sup>21</sup>

As in the question of theoretical reason, to understand Horkheimer's evaluation of *Being and Time* as a work of practical reason, it is instructive first to look at his account of phenomenology in general. In Horkheimer estimation, the phenomenological distrust in the blessings of science was understandable only against the background of European modernization gone awry at the turn of the century. Scientific progress and industrialization had not overcome social contradictions and economic crises, which on the domestic level had led to the rise of the working class and in the international relations to chauvinistic power politics culminating in the world war. Husserl misunderstood the current crisis as a crisis of thought, viewing phenomenology as an answer to the "spiritual need of our time."<sup>22</sup> Yet, the ethical renewal that Husserl called for was intended to take place safely within the framework of cultural modernity. With Scheler, however, things were very different. Horkheimer cited Scheler's description of phenomenology as "the first step into a flowering garden of a man who had stayed for years in a dark prison." By this, Scheler meant European modernity and its inhabitants' overly rationalized mindset.<sup>23</sup> For him, the phenomenologist stood above the scientist who relied on shallow Enlightenment reason and was blind to the metaphysical realm of essences. Only the spiritual elites, freed from the

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21. Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 182–193; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 87–90, 120–124.

22. Max Horkheimer, "Einführung in die Philosophie der Gegenwart," in *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 10: Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1990), 299–302; Husserl, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," 140, 71.

23. Horkheimer, "Philosophie der Gegenwart," 324; Max Scheler, "Versuche einer Philosophie des Lebens," in *Gesammelte Werke, Bd. 3, Vom Umsturz der Werte: Abhandlungen und Aufsätze*, ed. Maria Scheler (Bern, Switzerland: Francke, 1955), 339. Translation of the quote from Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 240.

intellectual constraints of religions and the hardships of material labor, were capable of intuiting this realm. These views were connected to Scheler's longing for the simpler times of antiquity and the Middle Ages—a longing that betrayed phenomenology's proximity to the wider neo-Romantic critique of modernity.<sup>24</sup>

Situating Scheler's phenomenology on the map of contemporary thought, Horkheimer claimed that it “indeed designates the exact opposite not only to Max Weber's view of knowledge, but also to Husserl's original conviction, that philosophy has to be teachable and learnable as ‘rigorous science.’”<sup>25</sup> In his 1917 lecture, “*Wissenschaft als Beruf*” (“Science as a Vocation”), Weber had argued that the cognitive disenchantment of the world (*Entzauberung der Welt*), begun in the Renaissance, had undermined the capacity of old religious and metaphysical gods to guide whole cultural communities concertedly. Weber called for abstention in science from value judgments concerning absolute ends, as pluralism of worldviews was an undisputed fact of modernity, recognition of which was the “plain duty of intellectual honesty.”<sup>26</sup> Scheler acknowledged Weber's demand for value-free science. But he criticized the extension of this ban to philosophy; in his view, phenomenology was capable of grounding objectively true worldviews.<sup>27</sup> Scheler's anti-democratic ethos was attested to by the observation that Weber's ideal of science was “bound up with *modern democracy*” in its incapacity to drive “history forwards by setting up *positive* goals (these always having their origin amongst *élites* and minorities).”<sup>28</sup>

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24. Horkheimer, “Philosophie der Gegenwart,” 327–331; Horkheimer, “Emanzipation der Philosophie,” 398–399.

25. Horkheimer, “Emanzipation der Philosophie,” 399.

26. Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building. Selected Papers*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 294–309.

27. Max Scheler, “Sociology and the Study and Formulation of *Weltanschauung*,” trans. R. C. Speirs, in *Max Weber's “Science as a Vocation,”* ed. Peter Lassman and Irving Velody with Herminio Martins (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 87–91. See also Staude, *Max Scheler*, 149, 156.

28. Max Scheler, “Max Weber's Exclusion of Philosophy (On the Psychology and Sociology of Nominalist Thought),” trans. R. C. Speirs, in *Max Weber's “Science as a Vocation,”* ed. Peter Lassman and Irving Velody with Herminio Martins (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 92–93.

Notwithstanding their differences, both Husserl's phenomenology and Weber's social science followed a democratic logic. They were in principle open to all participants, whereas Scheler's eternal values disclosed themselves only to a chosen few.

What about the practical implications of *Being and Time*? Apart from critically commenting on "the isolated and austere interiority of a merely thought of human individual" as the wretched image conveyed by Heidegger's existentialism, and observing that Heidegger surrendered "the activity of human beings in their social formations" to pure philosophizing, Horkheimer's two remarks in the 1928 "On Emancipation of Philosophy from Science" do not discuss this side of Heidegger's book. Horkheimer's posthumously published notes to his *Dämmerung*, however, contain the following entry, titled "Philosophia perennis":

The philosophia perennis, the eternal philosophy, makes a virtue of the fact that in it, unlike in science, there is no regular progress. This eternity of philosophy comes therefrom, that it always concerns itself with problems that are either insolvable in principle or have not yet been answered by science. With reference to such questions professor Heidegger can naturally engage in a dialogue with Aristotle above the ignorant masses as if nothing had happened in the last two thousand years. Moreover, for the ruling classes it is always pleasant, that such problems exist. They hold the monopoly over higher education and thus keep from the eyes of the ruled also the key to the dark maternal kingdom. This knowledge about the infinite, like the sovereign power over the finite, appears to be in their hands.<sup>29</sup>

Horkheimer interprets Heidegger's rehabilitation of ontology through the lens of capitalist class relations. The reference to the "dark maternal kingdom" (*der dunkle Reich der Mütter*), an allusion to Goethe's *Faust*, is clearly aimed at Heidegger's dialogue with Aristotle's ontology—a dialogue that Horkheimer sees as ideological mystification, direction of attention away from present social antagonisms. Interestingly, the vocabulary of this entry resembles

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29. Max Horkheimer, "Notizen zu *Dämmerung*," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 11: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1914–1931*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 263.

those pages of Horkheimer's 1928 manuscript where, in the context of his discussion of Scheler, he commented on Heidegger. Following his critique of Heidegger's hypostatization of philosophy, Horkheimer continued in the manuscript, without naming anyone, that the "idea of philosophia perennis was always cherished in phenomenology. The great philosophers can therefore maintain a dialogue between them for centuries about the true reality, since the true reality, the world of ideas, remains entirely unaffected by history." Horkheimer lamented that there was "no sharper antithesis to all the theories in which knowledge is essentially related to the worldly practice, than this new Platonism." In the latter, the loss of belief in science, "which actually meant a belief in un-dialectical social ascent, is radically consummated." Horkheimer concluded bitterly that this "new philosophical self-consciousness of phenomenology is consistent with social pessimism, indeed, with contempt for a life that aims merely at changes in the historical world." Since newer phenomenology thinks it holds an answer to the "question of the meaning of being—or at least takes the preoccupation with this question of the meaning of being to be not only philosophically but in general the essential human activity—it consciously or unconsciously justifies the turning away from the active participation in the practical transformation of the world." In so doing, philosophy has turned from "being a handmaiden of the sciences" into "the queen of all human undertakings."<sup>30</sup>

Given the reference to "the question of the meaning of being," as well as the similar vocabulary of this passage and the above entry on Heidegger, it seems that Horkheimer especially had Heidegger in mind here. If Horkheimer saw Scheler's elitism and longing for a premodern wholeness running counter to the democratic and rational ideal of knowledge of Husserl and Weber—an ideal Horkheimer shared, despite his uneasiness with other aspects of their positions—how did Horkheimer situate *Being and Time* in terms of these ideals? With his critique of the sciences and his ontological approach to phenomenology, Heidegger shared Scheler's Platonist elitism. Apart from the remark on Heidegger and the "dark maternal

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30. Horkheimer, "Emanzipation der Philosophie," 397.



kingdom,” however, Horkheimer did not associate Heidegger with Scheler’s anti-Weberian wish to re-enchant the modern world. For Horkheimer, *Being and Time* was guilty not of feeding the neo-metaphysical hunger for wholeness, but of pulling attention away from structural social issues. Horkheimer’s view parallels Günther Anders’s later analysis. Heidegger’s book, Anders noted in the 1940s, lacked all “interest in moral or political participation.” This was not surprising, given that the “political optimism of the rising bourgeoisie one hundred and fifty years ago, which had hoped to build up a world of their own, was wholly unknown to the petit-bourgeoisie around 1920.” Despite Heidegger’s emphasis on the worldly character of human life, he only seemed to know the “lonely and stubborn self-made man.”<sup>31</sup>

Horkheimer saw Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, like the entire neo-metaphysical revival, as an expression of the declining German bourgeoisie in the phase of monopoly capitalism. The replacement of progressive universal ideals of classical German philosophy with pessimistic ruminations on life, fate, and decline reflected the situation in which the active initiative of the individual entrepreneur no longer resulted in increased control of one’s fate in the workings of capitalism. Horkheimer’s version of “social history of ideas” differed from orthodox Marxism in that it did not reduce philosophy to economy a priori. As much as Horkheimer saw contemporary neo-metaphysics unconsciously reflecting monopoly capitalism, the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment and German idealism demonstrated the exact opposite with their wish to steer social-political development actively.<sup>32</sup>

Besides the pseudo-concrete notion of historicity, a notion in *Being and Time* that for Horkheimer most clearly betrayed Heidegger’s failure to restore practical reason to its place was the notion of care. On Horkheimer’s account, Heidegger had rightly moved the scope of philosophy from the ethereal realm of ideas to the everyday world of mundane human undertakings. Indeed, the notion of care might well have aroused Horkheimer’s interest, for

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31. Anders, “Pseudo-Concreteness of Heidegger’s Philosophy,” 350.

32. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 90–92, 115–116.

he always felt an affinity with thinkers sensitive to human misery, such as Ernst Bloch and Arthur Schopenhauer, his lifelong interlocutor.<sup>33</sup> Horkheimer's aversion to Heidegger's notion is, however, evident in *Dämmerung*. In an entry (not included in the English translation) titled "Die Sorge in der Philosophie" ("The Care in Philosophy"), Horkheimer writes:

Care (Faust II, 5. Act): "Have you never been concerned?" German philosopher in 1929: "For a glance of the eye! Yes. The unity of the transcendental structure of the innermost neediness of the Dasein in human beings has been given the designation 'care.'"<sup>34</sup>

For Horkheimer, the glaring defect of Heidegger's notion was its pseudo-concreteness. It did not translate into compassion for real suffering and a plea for its political overcoming. Alfred Schmidt aptly remarks that Horkheimer "must have found it a sheer mockery of the anonymous, very empirically caused suffering of the lower classes when in 1929, the first year of the world economic crisis, he came upon [this] definition, which fancies itself radical, in Heidegger's *Being and Time*."<sup>35</sup> I would, however, argue that this entry does not refer to *Being and Time*—which does not contain the quoted definition of care (i.e., the last sentence)—but to Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, in which it can be found word for word.<sup>36</sup>

While Horkheimer eschewed from endorsing socialism in his lectures, *Dämmerung* gave untamed expression to his most authentic thoughts. It examined the themes central to the Marxist critique of

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33. Ibid., 173, 231n14; Alfred Schmidt, "Max Horkheimer's Intellectual Physiognomy," trans. John McCole, in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 28–30.

34. Max Horkheimer, "Dämmerung. Notizen in Deutschland," in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 2: Philosophische Frühschriften 1922–1932*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 415; Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, trans. Michael Shaw (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

35. Schmidt, "Max Horkheimer's Intellectual Physiognomy," 43n33.

36. Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 165.

capitalism from the first-person standpoint. But instead of talking about the human being in abstract, Horkheimer's micrological analyses of life in contemporary capitalism recognized the fractured nature of modern society and its different life worlds set apart by class relations. As Gunzelin Schmid Noerr observes, in its focus on the psyche of the "concrete individual" as the site of reproduction of current social institutions, *Dämmerung* was something like a phenomenological Marxism.<sup>37</sup> *Dämmerung* could, then, be taken as Horkheimer's attempt to appropriate the phenomenological-existentialist discourse of the "things themselves" and "concreteness" for pro-Enlightenment ends.

Horkheimer's sarcastic words on Heidegger in the above entry could also be read as a reaction to Heidegger's lecture in Frankfurt in 1929 on "Philosophical Anthropology and Metaphysics of Dasein," which he attended. Notker Hammerstein relates that after World War II, Horkheimer and Adorno would tell many times that during his visit to Frankfurt, Heidegger repeatedly addressed Horkheimer as "Horschheimer" to "show his sublime disinterest."<sup>38</sup> Why did Heidegger behave in such an impolite manner? Perhaps he felt offended by audience reactions to his lecture, which, according to some newspapers, was "totally rejected."<sup>39</sup> Horkheimer's criticism of *Being and Time*, however, was not his first encounter with Heidegger, and the explanation for Heidegger's arrogant behavior is likely to be found in their first, troublesome encounter in the first years of the Weimar Republic. But what this early encounter also shows is that unlike in the late 1920s, the young Horkheimer's initial stance toward Heidegger was characterized by guarded enthusiasm rather than determined opposition.

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37. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, "Nachwort des Herausgebers: *Die philosophische Frühschriften: Grundzüge der Entwicklung des Horkheimerschen Denkens von der Dissertation bis zur 'Dämmerung'*," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 2, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1987), 467; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 156–180.

38. Hammerstein, *Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität*, 65n19.

39. Mörchen's diary entry from January 30, 1929, in Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 13n4.

## After the Failed Revolution: Encounter with “the Hidden King”

During the fateful days of Munich’s soviet republic in 1919, Horkheimer and his friends witnessed Weber’s pessimist reflections on the October revolution and the Spartacist movement in Germany. Horkheimer later recalled that Weber’s disparaging attitude toward these world-historical efforts to put an end to class society left him nothing but cold: “it was all so precise, so strictly scientific, so value-free, that we all went home full of gloom.”<sup>40</sup> Pondering on the question of socialism, Weber had predicted that socialism would only expand the worst features of capitalist bureaucratization. The young Horkheimer’s impression of all this was that “Max Weber was ultra-conservative.”<sup>41</sup>

Weber’s account of capitalism was certainly a far cry from being apologetic. As he famously put it, “of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart.’” Amid the bureaucratization of all areas of life in the “iron cage” of modern capitalism, Weber saw the prospects of individual initiative dim.<sup>42</sup> As a way out, he denounced the consolation of old metaphysical worldviews and new social utopias and defined the critical intellectual as a representative of an “ethics of responsibility,” poser of critical questions to all worldviews leaning on an “ethics of ultimate ends.” The latter were to be kept separate from science, and in private life and politics, they were a matter of subjective faith, a condition that Weber did not

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40. Max Horkheimer, “Wertfreiheit und Objektivität—Max Weber,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd 8: Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985, 258–259. Translation of the passage by Rodney Livingstone, in Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno*, 67.

41. Max Weber, “Parliament and Government in Germany under a New Political Order,” quoted in Dana Villa, “The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory,” in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter E. Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 76; Horkheimer, “Wertfreiheit und Objektivität,” 260.

42. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), 182.

see as tragic but rather as giving dignity to human in a thoroughly administered society.<sup>43</sup>

If the upcoming generation of leftist intellectuals felt alienated from Weber's teachings, others, such as Karl Löwith, found his cautions to be breaths of fresh air amid countless revolutionary speeches on both the right and the left. Many appreciated Weber as a philosopher in the sense that his interests, in both scope and intensity, surpassed the goals of special disciplines and were concerned with "matters of human destiny" and "the fate of German politics and society."<sup>44</sup> For Heidegger's friend and fellow existentialist, Karl Jaspers, Weber embodied existentialism, for although Weber rejected metaphysics and religion, underneath his fragmentary sociological efforts lay a concern with absolute questions. Weber's defense of value freedom did not imply a positivist rejection of perennial questions of life, but rather highlighted these questions as personal decisions no objective reason or positive religion could solve.<sup>45</sup>

Horkheimer could accept Weber's bleak diagnosis of capitalism as well as his demand that a solution to the crisis of modernity was not to be looked for in metaphysical narratives of history, whether *völkisch* or socialist. What Horkheimer could not share was Weber's view that Marxist critique of political economy was also to be eschewed as metaphysical daydreaming. Weber's maxim of value freedom held that such grand theories as Marxism overstepped the line between facts and values by criticizing capitalist alienation with unrealistic yardsticks such as non-alienated life. While Horkheimer never shared the redemptive visions of Ernst Bloch, or the Lenin-

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43. Weber, "Science as a Vocation," 294–309; Dirk Käsler, *Max Weber: An Introduction to his Life and Work*, trans. Philippa Hurd (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 184–196.

44. Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*, 16–19, 160–161; Peter Lassman and Irving Velody, eds., Introduction to *Max Weber's "Science as a Vocation,"* xiv–xv.

45. Karl Jaspers, "Max Weber: A Commemorative Address (1920)," in *On Max Weber*, trans. Robert J. Whelan, ed. John Dreijmanis (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 9–16.

ism of Georg Lukács, he found Weber's conception highly problematic.<sup>46</sup> His issue was not primarily with Weber's idea of a "charismatic leader," introduced in the 1919 lecture, "Politik als Beruf" ("Politics as a Vocation"), as an antidote to bureaucratic party politics. Horkheimer naturally rejected this idea. The real problem lay in Weber's claim that value judgments were subjective decisions beyond rational legitimation, which made it impossible to surrender these to rational scrutiny beyond technical means-ends calculations.

With the immediate prospects of socialism looking bleak—and terrified of being mistaken by the Munich police as Ernst Toller, a leader of Munich's Soviet Republic—in the fall of 1919, Horkheimer entered the University of Frankfurt. After a year of study, Horkheimer's philosophy professor, Hans Cornelius, urged him to move to Freiburg and study with Husserl. Horkheimer moved to Freiburg in the fall of 1920. When asked for further advice from his new mentee, Husserl suggested that he should attend the lectures of his assistant, Heidegger, as well.<sup>47</sup> Frank Hartmann suggests that

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46. Although Horkheimer was critical of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) for its pro-war stance and violent suppression of the Spartacists, he never joined Germany's communist party (KPD). Nonetheless, while heavily inclined toward the democratic socialism of the Spartacists, Horkheimer was also excited about the October revolution and entertained hopes that the Russian experiment would lead to an un-authoritarian direction. Somewhat disturbingly, in his private writings, Horkheimer expressed some sympathy toward the Soviet Union as late as 1930, i.e., at a time when the Stalinist program of forced industrialization and appropriation of peasant land was already on its way. Of course, Horkheimer was not aware of all the actual events in Russia. Still, his sympathetic position was representative of many socialist intellectuals in the Weimar years, when, as William David Jones has shown, far-reaching intra-communist critique of Soviet Union was rare. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 72–73; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 41–46, 180–184; William David Jones, *The Lost Debate: German Socialist Intellectuals and Totalitarianism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 40–41.

47. In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl had attacked Cornelius's mix of neo-Kantian epistemology and Gestalt psychology. Yet, they were on cordial terms, and Cornelius was able to recommend Horkheimer to Husserl. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 51, 57–58; Gummior and Ringguth, *Horkheimer in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, 22–27.

Horkheimer would have encountered in Heidegger a prime example of Weber's "professorial prophets."<sup>48</sup> To be sure, as many student testimonies tell us, Heidegger stood out from other professors with his auratic presence and suggestive language. But to lump him without further ado in the camp of reactionary, neo-Romantic ideologues is misleading. As we will see, Heidegger's lectures contained elements, such as his criticism of traditional metaphysics and popular irrationalism, that were not so far from Weber's position.

Horkheimer attended Heidegger's lectures for a year: from the fall 1920 to the fall 1921. It is uncertain which lectures he witnessed. Yet, we know for certain that he attended Heidegger's winter semester 1920–1921 lecture course "Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion" ("Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion").<sup>49</sup> Besides Horkheimer, other future members of the Frankfurt School attended this course. Horkheimer's closest friend, Friedrich Pollock, was present. And Herbert Marcuse was likely there too, for in 1929, he marveled the difference between "the successor of Husserl who lectures in an overflowing auditorium with at least six hundred listeners" and "the shy and obstinate lecturer who eight years ago spoke from the window of a small lecture hall."<sup>50</sup> Marcuse's recollection of Heidegger's obstinacy fits with the picture provided by Theodore Kisiel, who notes that in his first lecture courses, Heidegger was so concerned about developing his phenomenological methodology that these theoretical concerns often "drowned out" the actual subject matters of his lectures. In the re-

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48. Frank Hartmann, *Max Horkheimers materialistischer Skeptizismus: Frühe Motive der Kritischen Theorie* (Frankfurt, Germany: Campus Verlag, 1990), 247n55.

49. Horkheimer to Hermann Mörchen, February 21, 1972, in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 18: Briefwechsel 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1996), 794. On the question of exact length of Horkheimer's Freiburg stay, see Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 104n135; Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 45.

50. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 59; Marcuse to Beck, May 9, 1929, the Herbert Marcuse Archive. Translation from Kellner, *Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism*, 34.

ligion course, Heidegger's overemphasis on methodology even led "some of his less methodologically inclined students" to complain to the dean, which caused Heidegger to alter the course plan.<sup>51</sup>

Remarkably, among the impatient students were Horkheimer and Pollock. According to Horkheimer's unpublished biographical interview, they felt frustrated with Heidegger's seemingly endless introductory remarks that lasted for several weeks. To express their unease, Horkheimer and Pollock left degrading notes on Heidegger's lectern.<sup>52</sup> This criticism notwithstanding, however, I believe Horkheimer also found things to appreciate in Heidegger's reflections on phenomenological methodology. In the same introductory part, Heidegger discussed topics such as the "factual life experience," the phenomenological meaning of history, and philosophizing as different from science—topics echoed by Horkheimer's letter to Rose Riekher in 1921. Indeed, this lecture course is highly instructive in making sense of Horkheimer's ambivalent impression of Heidegger. Let us, therefore, examine its first month until the unexpected break caused by the student resistance.

As if anticipating the coming unrest, Heidegger opened the course by defending his meditations on the essence of philosophy. In his view, philosophizing differed from science in that its subject matter was not a clearly demarcated field of objects. Yet, despite this anti-scientific character, philosophy was not about propagating world-views either. Heidegger stressed that "philosophy can be reproached for turning perpetually upon preliminary questions only if one borrows the measure of its evaluation from the idea of the sciences, and if one expects from philosophy the solution of concrete problems and demands of it the construction of a world-view." Indeed, Heidegger underscored that "I wish to increase and keep awake philosophy's need to be ever turning upon the preliminary questions, so much so that it will indeed become a virtue. About what is proper to philosophy itself, I have nothing to say to you. I will deliver nothing that is materially interesting or that moves the heart. Our task

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51. Kisiel, *Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, 149–152.

52. Cited in Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 59.



is much more limited.”<sup>53</sup> These cautious lines do not support Frank Hartmann’s claim that Heidegger was simply an anti-Weberian seducer. In contrast to someone like Max Scheler, Heidegger explicitly rejected the idea that philosophy should provide a substantial worldview or work for re-enchantment. As Rüdiger Safranski notes, in his very first lecture courses, Heidegger joined the discussion around Weber’s theses, and in tune with him demanded rejection of personal opinions from the lectern. Olaf Asbach makes a similar observation concerning Heidegger’s lectures from the time before Horkheimer’s arrival in Freiburg.<sup>54</sup>

In a critical allusion to Husserl, Heidegger continued that philosophy’s rigorousness had nothing to do with that of science. Thus, the relevance of phenomenology lay not in invigorating the positivist self-understanding of sciences but in more existential concerns. What was that realm into which Heidegger wished to open a path? Here, Heidegger called it the “factual life experience.” He emphasized that rather than from abstract epistemology this realm “can be made intelligible only from the concept of the ‘historical.’” He argued that to understand life as it is lived—not as it is comprehended *ex post facto* in historiography or fixed in neo-Kantian *a priori*—one needs sensitivity to a nonscientific sense of time. Furthermore, given the rapid development of empirical sciences in the last decades, it was imperative to realize how the factual life experience “is a danger zone for independent philosophy since the ambitions of the sciences already validate themselves in this zone.” This was so because no empirical treatment of human beings, whether biological, psychological, or anthropological, could do justice to this root phenomenon of factual life. If only we could see the difference between philosophy and science, Heidegger complained, then we would see that “factual life experience must be not only the point of departure for philoso-

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53. Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferenci (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 4.

54. Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 93–94; Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 136n25.

phizing but precisely that which essentially hinders philosophizing itself.”<sup>55</sup>

From Plato to Husserl, the motive for philosophy had been the dignified nature of the human being as participant in the immutable realm of ideas. Rejecting this idealism, Heidegger stressed that it was “crucial to find motives in factual life experience for the self-understanding of philosophizing,” for our own historical life “demands not only a *meaning at all*, but also a *concrete* meaning: namely, a meaning *other* than past cultures had, a *new* meaning that exceeds the one of earlier life.” Touching on the hotly debated issue of historical relativism, Heidegger noted that “historical thinking indeed determines our culture.” It does this, first, “in that it provokes, excites, stimulates.” From this historical consciousness “stems today’s fury to understand cultural forms, the fury of classifying life-forms and cultural epochs—a typologization that goes all the way to the belief that it has reached the last frontier.” But in addition to this tolerance of diverse historical expressions of life, historical consciousness was also a burden in obstructing cultural renewal. Echoing Nietzsche, Heidegger claimed that the “opposed, hindering direction lies in that the historical withdraws the view from the present, and that it ruins and paralyzes the naiveté of creating.”<sup>56</sup>

Assessing different solutions in the struggle against historicism, Heidegger concluded that all these attempts suffered from an objectifying approach, which lost sight of the original problem: “That which is disturbed, the reality of life, the human existence in its concern about its own security, is not taken in itself; rather it is regarded as object and as object it is placed within the historical objective reality. The worry is not answered, but rather is immediately objectified.” Even the most radical of the historical thinkers, Oswald Spengler, called for “participation in the declining occidental culture.” A radical transformation of philosophical perspective was required, and Heidegger declared that “through the explication of factual Dasein, the entire traditional system of categories will be

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55. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 7, 11.

56. *Ibid.*, 23–24, 35.

blown up—so radically new will the *categories of factual Dasein* be.” What was missing in other attempts to come to terms with the historical was the dimension of future—not of just any future but one’s own. In ambiguous words, Heidegger said that “the present wants to build itself further into the future, in a new creation of the own Dasein and in an own, new culture. Through this tendency, factual Dasein experiences a particular elevation; all efforts point to it.”<sup>57</sup> Concerning Hartmann’s suggestion about Heidegger’s anti-Weberian thrust, I would admit that here Heidegger’s tone indeed starts to resemble more that of a prophet than of a scholar. But as later with *Being and Time*, it was not evident whether this factual Dasein was to be understood in individual or collective terms.

After a month, the course was broken off. Kisiel writes that according to one transcription, the break was caused by “the objections by non-majors.” Per an anecdote circulating among students such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, the break was caused by students who were disappointed by the excessively philosophical content of a lecture supposedly on religion and who thus complained to the dean of the philosophy faculty. Kisiel concludes that one can only guess how the interruption actually occurred, whether there were shouts or loud remarks.<sup>58</sup> But if we believe Horkheimer’s testimony, not consulted by Kisiel, nothing of the sort happened. Impatient students, Horkheimer among them, simply left critical notes on Heidegger’s lectern. Offended by the negative feedback, in the next class, Heidegger expressed his perspective on the episode:

Philosophy, as I understand it, is in a difficulty. The listener in other lectures is assured, from the beginning on: in art history lectures he can see pictures; in others he gets his money’s worth for his exams. In philosophy, it is otherwise, and I cannot change that, for I did not invent philosophy. I would, however, like to save myself from this calamity and thus break off these so abstract considerations, and lecture to you, beginning in the next session, on history; and indeed I will, without further consideration for the starting-point and method, take a particular

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57. Ibid., 31, 34, 36.

58. Kisiel, *Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 170–173.

concrete phenomenon [the Pauline letters] as the point of departure, however for me under the presupposition that you will misunderstand the entire study from beginning to end.<sup>59</sup>

What can we say about Horkheimer's impression of the religion course? After his return to Frankfurt, Horkheimer would criticize the neo-Kantian preoccupation with "formal epistemological laws" and contrast these "terribly unimportant" efforts with Heidegger's interest in "substantial expressions about our life and its significance." While connecting these words to Heidegger's course on religion takes some conjecture, it is entirely plausible that Horkheimer found Heidegger's discussion of "factual life experience" very intriguing in comparison to neo-Kantian epistemology and Husserl's phenomenology. Horkheimer may well have appreciated Heidegger's talk about disturbance and the human being as the locus of philosophy as a protest against the impersonality and passivity of past and present philosophical idealism.

Furthermore, in a remarkable note from 1957, "Heidegger und Marx" (the epigraph), Horkheimer gives us reason to propose that during his early encounter with Heidegger, he might have entertained the idea that maybe Heidegger's critique of idealism would not stop at existentialism but would move forward toward social criticism.<sup>60</sup> What this note implies is that while nowhere as intense as Marcuse's later enthusiasm over *Being and Time*, for a brief moment, Horkheimer may have wondered whether Heidegger's focus on factual life would lead toward critical Marxism, in which the Left-Hegelian idea of creation of the historical world by human beings themselves was central. For Horkheimer, Heidegger's focus on factual life seemed like a promise of concreteness in historical diagnosis of the present—a concreteness that Weber had failed to deliver. While this claim might seem as outright nonsense, given Weber's rich reflections on history and the present political situation and Heidegger's absolute focus on philosophical questions,

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59. Heidegger, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 45.

60. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 14: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1949–1972: Notizen*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1988), 272.

a socialist attendant of Heidegger's early lectures could read into his reflections on factual life and concrete meaning a materialist *geschichtphilosophisch* view that the historical world was a human product to be changed, not a ready-made object to be contemplated by value-free science, which at least in Weber's person appeared indifferent to human misery and all too willing to surrender to the capitalist way of the world.

There is no denying that Horkheimer would very quickly draw the conclusion that Heidegger's promise would remain just that and that his ruminations on historical existence would not proceed toward real history. Moreover, as Horkheimer wrote in his 1921 letter, his enthusiasm over Heidegger was already guarded early on, as he did not know how to judge Heidegger's intentions. Besides Heidegger's own assumption that he would likely be misunderstood, it may have been the ambiguousness of his talk of disturbance and a new culture, as well as his polemic against science and Husserl—whom Horkheimer always seemed to like on a personal level—that made Horkheimer hesitant from the beginning. Yet, nothing suggests that Horkheimer would have seen the reason for Heidegger's pseudo-concreteness and for his critique of Husserl in his proximity to reactionary social doctrines. Instead, Horkheimer perceived Heidegger as a radical individualist—a reading he would repeat ten years later in his inaugural address as the director of the Institute for Social Research.

### Conclusion: Heidegger's Impact?

As noted earlier, the first interpreters of Horkheimer's student years highlighted Heidegger's impact on his early intellectual development. Olaf Asbach and John Abromeit have, however, contested this view. Abromeit claims that the encounter with Heidegger "left no traces in Horkheimer's own philosophical writings at this time."<sup>61</sup> True, the themes that Horkheimer encountered in Heidegger's lectures did not find their way to the academic theses he wrote in

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61. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 59.

Frankfurt for Hans Cornelius. Indeed, somewhat surprisingly both Abromeit and Asbach argue that of Horkheimer's academic influences, it was neither Heidegger nor Husserl but Cornelius who turned out to be the most important. They emphasize the fact that despite Horkheimer's critique of Cornelius (1863–1947), after his Freiburg year, he chose to continue his studies in Frankfurt. In 1922, Horkheimer had almost finished his dissertation in psychology when he learned that a study on the same topic with similar results had just been published. At this point, Cornelius came to Horkheimer's help by welcoming him to write his doctoral dissertation in philosophy. In 1923, Horkheimer earned his doctorate and also became Cornelius's assistant. His habilitation thesis followed in 1925. Horkheimer's theses argued against Kant that our experience of the world was shaped not only by the categories of understanding but already by the holistic sense qualities disclosed by Gestalt psychology that Cornelius had made a definitive feature of his philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

Asbach and Abromeit further stress that Horkheimer had already been critical of the neo-Kantian academia and Cornelius *before* his encounter with Heidegger. Heidegger would not, then, have ignited Horkheimer's critical spark but at best only strengthened it. They also point out that Horkheimer's view of Cornelius became more positive after his return from Freiburg. Asbach explains Horkheimer's preference for Cornelius by their shared theoretical embrace of the sciences and the Enlightenment—preferences alien to Heidegger. He concludes that given Horkheimer's collaboration with Cornelius and the fact that Horkheimer first commented on Heidegger only in 1928, he was not really interested in Heidegger.<sup>63</sup> Qualifying Asbach's interpretation, Abromeit stresses personal factors over theoretical ones, suggesting that despite their defense of the Enlightenment, in subtler philosophical terms, Horkheimer stood well away from Cornelius's epistemological postulates. Hence,

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62. *Ibid.*, 65–79; Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 17–18, 46–52.

63. Asbach, *Von der Erkenntniskritik zur Kritischen Theorie*, 46–49, 104–106, 134–138.

the Cornelian thrust of Horkheimer's academic theses should be seen as a tactical truce on Horkheimer's part. Emphasizing their personal rapprochement, Abromeit suggests that after his return to Frankfurt, Horkheimer gradually realized that Cornelius was not an embodiment of everything that was wrong with the neo-Kantian academia. Intellectually, Cornelius was a Renaissance man with lively interests in science and the arts. Politically, he held an anti-Mandarin attitude, had been against the world war, and opposed Nazism early on; Cornelius and his family emigrated to Sweden in 1929. On top of his friendliness and guidance in academic circles, Cornelius's invitation in 1922 to write a dissertation in philosophy gave Horkheimer a second chance in academia, which allowed him to escape the undesired fate of being the heir to his father's business.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, although Cornelius's role has been underappreciated, I would still side with the earlier scholars that Heidegger did indeed contribute to Horkheimer's development. Horkheimer's 1921 letter suggests that he saw Heidegger as being better than Cornelius. Immediately before the quoted, laudatory passage on Heidegger, Horkheimer had harshly criticized Cornelius: "I have little desire to continue concealing my own opinion in order not to attract the insults of some learned gentlemen. It doesn't suit me to write things whose narrow boundaries are fixed a priori by the mentality of those who will judge them." Horkheimer felt as if he was "in a cage whose bars are my good intentions. I often break out, reluctantly, and then return of my own volition. Yesterday, I delivered a speech to a young philosopher about the tasks of philosophy. He was very enthused. Unfortunately, I learned only today that C. [Cornelius] was in the next room and must have heard my explications, which were directed entirely against him."<sup>65</sup> Hence, Horkheimer's letter explicitly favored Heidegger over Cornelius! As Abromeit himself suggests, that Horkheimer wrote his academic theses for Cornelius should not be taken as indicating

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64. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 65–69, 86n3.

65. Horkheimer to Riekher, November 30, 1921, in Horkheimer, *Life in Letters*, 22.

Horkheimer's affirmation of Cornelius's philosophy. And even if Horkheimer's critique of this philosophy and the neo-Kantian academia predated his encounter with Heidegger, it is still plausible, even likely, that the year in Freiburg intensified them.

Yet, I find very convincing Abromeit's suggestion that when Horkheimer was sitting in Heidegger's lectures, he was already finding a home for his critical impulses not in either Heidegger's *Existenzphilosophie* or Cornelius's epistemology but in critical Marxism. Drawing on Horkheimer's unpublished notebooks from the spring of 1921, Abromeit proposes that while he had already been exposed to Marxist ideas in revolutionary Munich, during his Freiburg year, Horkheimer (on top of joining a socialist student organization) was also seriously studying Marxist theory for the first time.<sup>66</sup> Again, Abromeit notes that whereas Horkheimer began to show greater interest in Hegel only after 1925, unpublished notes on a Hegel seminar that Horkheimer taught in 1923–1924 imply that he was interested in Hegel earlier.<sup>67</sup>

Significantly, Hans Jonas's recollection suggests that Horkheimer even defended Hegel's thought against phenomenology in Freiburg. Jonas relates that during his time in Freiburg as a student of Husserl and Heidegger, he got to know "Max Horkheimer, who participated in Husserl's seminar for a semester and to my astonishment brought there Hegelian philosophy where it did not belong at all."<sup>68</sup> This raises the question of whether the expectations that Horkheimer had of Heidegger's lectures were Hegelian-Marxist,

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66. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 59–60; Max Horkheimer, "Extracta I, 1921. Exzerpte über: Landauer, Gustav; Cohn, Arthur Wolfgang; Vorländer, Karl; Engels, Friedrich; Kautsky, Karl; Boudin, L. B.; Marx, Karl; Schopenhauer, Arthur," the Max Horkheimer Archive VII 2, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

67. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 88n10; Max Horkheimer, "Übungen zu Kant und Hegel," (WS 1923–1924), the Max Horkheimer Archive VII 6.2, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

68. Hans Jonas, *Erinnerungen: Nach Gesprächen mit Rachel Salamander*, ed. Christian Wiese (Frankfurt, Germany: Insel, 2003), 108. Jonas is very likely mistaken in recalling that he would have met Horkheimer in Freiburg as late as in the winter of 1923–1924, i.e., during Jonas's second stay in Freiburg. As seen earlier, by then, Horkheimer had certainly returned to Frankfurt. Jonas must already have met Horkheimer in 1921 during his first Freiburg visit. Rüdiger Safranski too



not in the sense that he would have been applying or rather anticipating the ideas of Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) but rather in the sense that he was gradually approaching that insight about the dialectical nature of historical reality, summed up in his 1957 note on Heidegger and Marx.<sup>69</sup>

As for Horkheimer's reflections on *Being and Time* later in the 1920s, his few comments on Heidegger's magnum opus suggest that, as Asbach and Abromeit maintain, Heidegger did not influence him in the same positive way as the French Enlightenment, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Freud. Had Horkheimer considered Heidegger the most challenging intellectual force of the times, he would have scrutinized *Being and Time* in his writings as extensively as he scrutinized the works of Husserl and Scheler. Nevertheless, Horkheimer was not indifferent toward Heidegger either but saw him as a major opponent in the arena of the rehabilitation of practical reason. The reason for this, however, was not that Heidegger's book would have satiated the neo-Romantic "hunger for wholeness" so well, as Abromeit claims. This charge applies far better to Scheler than Heidegger. Certainly, Horkheimer was not blind to the similarities between the two; they shared elitism and social pessimism, scorned the hegemonic union of positivism and empirical sciences, and felt

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falsely claims that Horkheimer attended Heidegger's lectures as late as 1923; Saf-ranski, *Martin Heidegger*, 121.

69. It should be noted that Horkheimer's early critical theory differed decisively from Lukács's version of Hegelian-Marxism in that Horkheimer demanded Marxism to accommodate not only the philosophical insights of German idealism but also the newest scientific knowledge. This trust in the emancipatory potentiality of science set Horkheimer at a distance from Lukács but also from Heidegger. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer would famously forsake this belief. Already in the late 1930s, Horkheimer, troubled by the increasing one-dimensionality of positivism, would qualify his defense of the sciences and defend metaphysical and idealist traditions as sources of more comprehensive reason; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 81–82, 232n18; Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, chap. 6; Michiel Korthals, "Die kritische Gesellschaftstheorie des frühen Horkheimer: Missverständnisse über das Verhältnis von Horkheimer, Lukács und dem Positivismus," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 14, no. 4 (1985): 315–329; Richard Wolin, "Critical Theory and the Dialectic of Rationalism," in *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 23–44.

uneasy with Weber's teachings about the limits of cognition. Yet, Horkheimer did not reduce Heidegger to Scheler, let alone to more vulgar irrationalists. Scheler's antagonism to Weber was more striking than Heidegger's, who denied the existence of Scheler's objective values and, like Weber, emphasized individual decision. Horkheimer, then, saw *Being and Time* working against his nascent critical theory, not as reactionary social philosophy but as solipsistic existentialism.

## CRITICAL THEORY AS A REPLY TO HEIDEGGER, SCHELER, AND THE FRANKFURT HEIDEGGERIANS

With the help of Erich Fromm, in 1929, Max Horkheimer directed a social-psychological survey study of the German middle- and working-class mentalities to find out how these groups would act in a case of a National Socialist coup. To their dismay, authoritarian character traits, even among leftist voters, turned out to be alarmingly high, implying that the opposition against Hitler was not as solid as the relatively strong electoral numbers of the left indicated. Their fears materialized in September 1930 with the Nazis' landslide victory in Reichstag elections. In the same fall, Horkheimer followed Carl Grünberg as the director of the Institute for Social Research, simultaneously becoming the holder of the new chair in social philosophy in the University of Frankfurt. As Horkheimer was solidifying his presence on Frankfurt's intellectual scene, the surging Nazism forced him to start preparing for emigration.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. Benjamin Gregg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 11–15; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, 24–25.

Horkheimer's worries about Germany's political future echoed his concerns about its philosophical future. In the summer of 1931, he was offered a firsthand glimpse of the schism inside the phenomenological movement. As the chairperson of the local subsection of the Kant Society, Horkheimer invited Edmund Husserl to lecture in Frankfurt. Husserl's lecture on philosophy and anthropology on June 1 echoed the themes of Martin Heidegger's lecture at the same venue in 1929, with one dramatic difference. Whereas Heidegger had praised Max Scheler's philosophical anthropology for paving the way for his own metaphysics of Dasein, Husserl judged the doctrines of his two followers in highly negative terms. The view that "the true foundation of philosophy lies in human being alone, and more specifically in a doctrine of the essence of human being's concrete worldly Dasein," Husserl bemoaned, means "a complete reversal of phenomenology's fundamental standpoint."<sup>2</sup>

Horkheimer shared many of Husserl's misgivings about Heidegger. It was, however, surely an overstatement to say, as did Husserl's student Ludwig Landgrebe (who in May reported to Husserl about his negotiation with Horkheimer about his possibilities of habilitating in Frankfurt), that Horkheimer "cares deeply about the phenomenological grounding of the social sciences, which he thinks," Landgrebe emphasized, "is only possible by holding fast to the rigorous scientific character of phenomenology and by rejecting its *weltanschaulich* attachments." Horkheimer certainly acknowledged fruitful appropriations of Husserl's phenomenology in various sciences.<sup>3</sup> Yet, he did not see his own critical theory in need of a phenomenological grounding of any sort, whether Husserlian or Heideggerian.

This is evidenced by Horkheimer's two programmatic lectures from 1931, which introduced the idea of critical materialism he had been developing the past years: the inaugural address: "Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung" ("The Present Situation of Social

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2. Husserl, "Phenomenology and Anthropology," 485.

3. Landgrebe to Husserl, May 7, 1931, in Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 260; Horkheimer, "Philosophie der Gegenwart," 175.

Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research”) in January and “Geschichte und Psychologie” (“History and Psychology”) in July. Significantly, here, Horkheimer presented his position as an alternative to the doctrines of Heidegger and Scheler. Moreover, in his subsequent essays in the Institute’s new journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Horkheimer went to great lengths to outline a materialist conception of the human condition, which he set against the phenomenologists’ static, neo-metaphysical conceptions. This was less, he stressed, due to the inner requirements of his critical theory than to “the needs of the critique which metaphysics and its social function provoke.”<sup>4</sup>

The chapter begins with Horkheimer’s examination of Heidegger and Scheler in his two programmatic lectures in 1931. It then turns to a more immediate, but overlooked, context for Horkheimer’s struggle with Heidegger: the debates in the Frankfurt discussion with his Heideggerian-minded colleagues, Kurt Riezler and Paul Tillich. Finally, the chapter reconstructs Horkheimer’s subsequent essays—prime instances of the Frankfurt School critical theory in its “classic” phase—as more elaborated responses to post-Husserlian phenomenology and to the criticisms by the Frankfurt Heideggerians.

### **Horkheimer’s Two Manifestos: Against the Hegemony of Heidegger and Scheler**

Horkheimer’s inaugural address on January 24, 1931, revolved around the topic of social philosophy, the effort to understand “the vicissitudes of human fate” not from the standpoint of the isolated individual but from that of social life in all its material and intellectual expressions. Horkheimer detected the roots of this insightful approach to Hegel. Yet, turning to the present, he lamented that today, only Hegel’s major defect, the motif of transfiguration, remained. What united current social philosophers from cautious neo-

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4. Max Horkheimer, “Materialism and Metaphysics,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell and others (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 32.

Kantians to latest phenomenologists was the attempt to “provide insight into a supraindividual sphere which is more essential, more meaningful, and more substantial than their own existence.” This unfortunate situation, Horkheimer argued, was due to widespread discontent with rapidly changing industrial modernity, which created a demand for new absolutes that would make all the hardships more tolerable. As a lone exception to this trend, Horkheimer singled out Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, “the only modern philosophical work that radically rejects any aspiration to being a social philosophy, and which discovers true Being exclusively within the individual’s inner self.” Heidegger’s existential phenomenology was not “transfigurative in Hegel’s sense.” In contrast, for Heidegger, human life “is only being unto death, mere finitude; it is a melancholy philosophy.”<sup>5</sup>

This was just two years before Heidegger’s jump onto the Nazi bandwagon. Yet, Horkheimer’s view was well in tune with the general observation at the time, which did not see collective aspirations in Heidegger’s philosophy before 1933. Rumors of Heidegger’s anti-Semitism, as seen in Chapter 3, certainly already circulated earlier, and Horkheimer’s recollection of Kurt Riezler informing him in 1931 about Heidegger’s anti-Semitic university politics suggests that he too was aware of these rumors. Still, Horkheimer’s comment crystallizes his pre-1933 perception of Heidegger as an unpolitical existentialist. This perception also explains the considerable attention Horkheimer gave to Scheler; the latter’s contributions to social questions made him more relevant than the resolutely individualistic Heidegger. This same feature, however, also made Scheler problematic. Notwithstanding his stern opposition to Nazism, throughout his life, he defended the superiority of an aristocratic social order and dreamt of a new community that would redeem the modern disenchanting West.<sup>6</sup>

Horkheimer continued his address by taking up the urgent dilemma of relativism, the view that social philosophy was unable to

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5. Horkheimer, “Present Situation of Social Philosophy,” 1–7.

6. Spiegelberg, *Phenomenological Movement*, 233n2; Staude, *Max Scheler*, viii–ix.

reach its object “other than in ideological, sectarian, and confessional terms.” With an implicit reference to *Ideology and Utopia* by his colleague, Karl Mannheim, whose sociology of knowledge interpreted different ideas as reflections of their author’s social standing, Horkheimer lamented that today, one was inclined “to see in the social theories of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Max Scheler differences in articles of faith rather than differences in true, false, or at least problematic theories.” While the sciences could give objective judgments in partial matters, no rational preference could be made about the truth content of more far-reaching theories about the social whole. On Horkheimer’s account, this relativistic view was based on an anachronistic understanding of the division of labor between philosophy and the sciences; the latter supposedly dealt with boring facts, the former with perennial questions of life. The way out of relativism, Horkheimer suggested, lay in collaboration between the two. Philosophy should no longer try to offer fixed “yes-or-no answers” to its questions but rather provide empirical studies with “animating impulses.” The findings of the latter would, in turn, stimulate the philosophical questions themselves. No individual could process the amount of material or master the various methods required by such an undertaking. “Even Max Scheler, despite his gigantic efforts, came up short in this respect.”<sup>7</sup>

For an example of such collaboration, Horkheimer referred to the recent social-psychological study by the Institute for Social Research. This study, guided by Horkheimer and Fromm, epitomized the goal Horkheimer attached to his novel notion of social philosophy: to scrutinize the links between “the economic life of society, the psychical development of individuals, and the changes in the realm of culture in the narrow sense.” Essential, Horkheimer stressed, was to pay careful attention to psychology, something that previous attempts to disclose these links—economic reductionism of a “badly understood Marx” and spiritual reductionism of a “badly understood Hegel”—had failed to do. In this regard, most recent attempts fared little better. Anti-psychological attitude also

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7. Horkheimer, “Present Situation of Social Philosophy,” 7–12.

plagued Scheler's metaphysically inclined reflections on the human condition.<sup>8</sup> Although in the obituary for his colleague, Horkheimer had praised Scheler for bringing into the scope of psychologists once more the perennial questions of life and death, elsewhere he expressed his uneasiness with Scheler's downplaying of pleasure. "If I were a phenomenologist," he stated, "I would bring in pleasure and unpleasure as examples of existence of genuine essences." Phenomenologists, however, "instead of having even once seized the opportunity of putting their intuition of essence into service of humanity, instead of holding against modern philosophical anthropology—which conceals these conditions—the intuitive certainty that the striving for pleasure is one or even the decisive determination of the human being, have crawled in flocks to it."<sup>9</sup> What Horkheimer wished, in other words, was for phenomenologists to pay heed to the centrality of bodily gratification in human life—a central lesson among the teachings of Freudian psychoanalysis.

Like Scheler, Heidegger too failed to live up to Horkheimer's wish. While Heidegger appreciated the Gestalt psychologists' attempts to conceive the human psyche in holistic terms, Freud's teachings were a different matter. Heidegger claimed that psychoanalysis operates with an inauthentic notion of time: "Insofar as that which is alive is abandoned to drives, it is related to *to ede hedu*, that which immediately is there and stimulates; drives strive uninhibitedly towards this, toward the present, the available." Yet, as "*aisthesis chronou*, the sensation of time, is found in human being, the latter has the possibility of presenting *to mellon*, the future, as something possible for the sake of which it acts."<sup>10</sup> Again, when Heidegger in 1929 stressed that the contestation with Hegel was a

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8. Ibid., 11–13.

9. Horkheimer, "Max Scheler," 153; Horkheimer, "Notizen zu *Dämmerung*," 272–273.

10. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007). Quoted in Franco Volpi, "Being and Time: A 'Translation' of the *Nicomachean Ethics*?" trans. John Protevi, in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and John van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 211.



struggle with our current selves, he added, in an unmistakable derogatory reference to Freud, that this contestation was not about “psychoanalysis [*Seelenzergliederung*] and self-ogling.” On Heidegger’s account, psychology did not lessen the current helplessness of human beings but increased it.<sup>11</sup>

Horkheimer could not have disagreed more with these phenomenological denigrations of psychoanalysis. If Gestalt theory had intrigued Horkheimer in his student days, after his shift around 1925 from epistemological concerns toward a more historically sensitive thinking, and especially after stimulating collaboration with Fromm in the late 1920s, he came to see Freud’s ideas as far superior. In 1929, Horkheimer played a pivotal role in the founding of the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute. Even though the psychoanalytic movement had come a long way since originating in Vienna some thirty years earlier, it was by no means accepted in academia, not even in the otherwise modernist University of Frankfurt; Freud himself later expressed thanks to Horkheimer for helping to make psychoanalysis respectable in German academia. What most attracted Horkheimer in psychoanalysis was the ability of Freud’s early drive theory, with its insights into repression and malleability of libidinal drives, to account for the rise of Nazism.<sup>12</sup> Horkheimer’s stress on the individual psyche as the mediating link between economy and culture is usually seen as the point that most clearly separated his critical theory from orthodox Marxism, including the work done at the Institute for Social Research under Carl Grünberg in the 1920s. It should be emphasized, however, that Horkheimer’s attention to psychology also set him apart from Heidegger’s and Scheler’s neo-ontological approaches.

Besides working against a proper understanding of human psychology, post-Husserlian phenomenology also obstructed a real understanding of history. The latter issue was at the heart of Horkheimer’s lecture on “History and Psychology” in Frankfurt’s Kant Society on July 15, 1931. The aim of the lecture was to find a con-

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11. Heidegger, *German Idealism*, 233, 15.

12. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 185–196, 208–209; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination*, chap. 3.

ception of history compatible with the psychological premises of the Freud-Marxist position that Horkheimer had introduced in his inaugural address. Before arguing that this conception was to be found in Hegel, Horkheimer weighed the suitability of two popular approaches to history: neo-Kantianism and especially phenomenology. Whereas the neo-Kantians sought to refine the epistemological basis of empirical historiography, the phenomenologists maintained “no such modesty with respect to the available sciences.” Referring to Heidegger and Scheler, Horkheimer noted that “a new concept of historicity has emerged particularly from the phenomenological school, the fundamental doctrine of which was at first completely ahistorical.”<sup>13</sup>

For Scheler, Horkheimer had written in his eulogy, whether “history contains progress or regression, whether it is determined by ideas or material circumstances, whether the individual or the majority is decisive, all this can according to Scheler only be decided by a particular philosophical conception of the essence of man.”<sup>14</sup> The cognitive superiority of the Judeo-Christian narrative of providence, Marxist belief in historical progress, or the decline of the West preached by Oswald Spengler was to be decided by checking whose anthropology was the best. For the late Scheler, all three were flawed. The correct image of the human being was to be found in Nietzsche’s idea of the superman; morality and responsibility were valid not in spite of the death of God but because of it, for only without the idea of divine providence was the human being really free. Of course, these heroic attributes applied only to a few individuals. As for actual historiography, Scheler’s elitist idea found its counterpart in the monumental “great men” approach of historians around the George circle, among them the Frankfurt-based Ernst Kantorowicz.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Max Horkheimer, “History and Psychology,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 111–112.

14. Horkheimer, “Max Scheler,” 156.

15. Scheler, “Man and History,” 90–93. On the George circle, see Martin A. Ruehl, “Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry: Stefan George and his Circle, 1918–1933,” in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter E. Gordon

Scheler's conception of history lost the individual under overpowering supra-individual entities. Without this precondition, Scheler's celebration of the tragic struggles of heroes and geniuses with the dark impulse pervading the cosmos would be incomprehensible. The same went for Heidegger, whose ideal of authenticity made sense only on the presupposition that the individual was helplessly thrown into the unfathomable workings of history. To Horkheimer's dismay, despite the abstract ontological nature of Heidegger's approach, "it seems appropriate today to begin from this meaning of 'history' in any fundamental discussion."<sup>16</sup> Horkheimer could tell that by digging beneath the objectifying language of science and looking for "concrete" reality in the first-person encounter with the world, Heidegger aspired to rejuvenate the role of the human individual amid the systemic forces of the modern "iron cage." From a Marxist perspective, this effort could be seen as a rehabilitation of the "subjective pole" of the historical dialectic that during the Second International had been overshadowed by the "objective pole," the belief in the automatic movement of history. But what was really needed, Horkheimer insisted, was a critical analysis of concrete historical, sociological, and psychological obstacles standing in the way of political liberation. Thus, in Horkheimer's critical theory, the "static ontology" of post-Husserlian phenomenology was to be replaced by "the psychology of human beings living in a definitive historical epoch."<sup>17</sup>

While Heidegger and Scheler could not offer a conception of history in tune with the teachings of Freud and Marx, Horkheimer proposed that Hegel could. In his inaugural address, Horkheimer had bemoaned how current social philosophers had inherited from Hegel only his most undesirable idea: the motif of transfiguration. Horkheimer applauded, instead, Hegel's sensitivity to concrete historical reality. Although Hegel's speculations about the world spirit flew high above the sciences, he always took his point of departure

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and John P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 240–272.

16. Horkheimer, "History and Psychology," 112.

17. *Ibid.*, 113.

from sciences such as political economy and historiography. Indeed, the latter provided knowledge not only of facts and events—as went the charge against traditional historiography by the historians close to the George circle—but also of organizing principles such as periodization. Most importantly, in Horkheimer's estimation, Hegel's dialectical approach to history was not out of tune with psychoanalysis. To be sure, Hegel shared the Enlightenment belief in the centrality of individual passions as the motor of history. Yet, he also held an eye to the impersonal side of history. This insight, although metaphysically transfigured by Hegel, marked a crucial advance from the commonsense approach of the Enlightenment. Marx's critique of capitalism took Hegel's insight further. For Horkheimer, this impersonal side was essential. Yet, equally important was the defense of the individual. This was where psychoanalysis came into play as an indispensable moment of investigations to the shifting relations of power between the individual and structural aspects of historical development.<sup>18</sup>

Of immense importance were the unconscious psychic mechanisms, disclosed by Freud, through which ideologies, especially ones at odds with the true interests of the people carrying them, reproduced themselves. For Freud, human beings were defined, on the one hand, by stable egoistic drives aiming at physical self-preservation and, on the other hand, by more plastic libidinal drives looking for sexual gratification and recognition within a community. What was politically relevant here was the idea that whereas the egoistic drives could admit satisfaction only in limited ways, the libidinal drives, when left unsatisfied, could find compensatory satisfaction in a religious belief or in an imagined community.<sup>19</sup> Against all existential and anthropological doctrines of invariants of human existence, Horkheimer was willing to admit only those of Freud's drive theory. As natural characteristics of human beings, however, invariants such as pleasure and unpleasure had little to do with metaphysical claims. Against the accusation that this emphasis on the drives and pleasure implied utter egoism, Horkheimer argued in 1931—and in

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18. *Ibid.*, 113–120.

19. *Ibid.*, 119–125.

more detail in his subsequent essays—that pleasure or happiness could be found not only in egoistic material gratifications but also in “solidarity with like-minded souls,” and that “nonegoistic instinctual impulses have existed during all periods, and are not denied factually by any serious psychology.”<sup>20</sup>

We have seen that Horkheimer’s programmatic lectures presented his interdisciplinary critical theory as an alternative to the influential phenomenological approaches of Heidegger and Scheler. What is more, in “History and Psychology,” Horkheimer proposed that his Hegelian-Marxist-Freudian meditations could be “fruitful even for those among you who see historical questions from the perspective of a subjectivistic philosophy.”<sup>21</sup> I believe that this was a reference to Horkheimer’s Heideggerian-minded colleagues in Frankfurt: the philosopher and university rector Kurt Riezler and the theologian Paul Tillich.

## Horkheimer in the Frankfurt Discussion

The “History and Psychology” lecture in July 1931 took place less than a month after the *Kränzchen* discussions on philosophy and dread on June 19 and on “religious Urmotives” on June 27. These discussions—key instances of the Frankfurt discussion, examined in Part II—between Horkheimer, Adorno, Riezler, Tillich, and others revolved around the question of nature of the current crisis of Western modernity, its origin, and competing solutions to it. Horkheimer later praised Riezler and Tillich for always opposing popular *völkisch* ideas in the circles that convened around them: the “wisdom seminars” and the *Kränzchen* discussions, respectively.<sup>22</sup> Yet, he was also of the opinion that Heideggerian prejudices weighed down the thinking of both. As seen in Chapter 6, in the

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20. Ibid., 123.

21. Ibid., 113.

22. Max Horkheimer, “Letzte Spur von Theologie—Paul Tillichs Vermächtnis,” in *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs: Ein Gedenkbuch* (Stuttgart, Germany: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967), 126.

discussion on philosophy and dread, Horkheimer had accused Tillich of Heideggerianism. And in November 1931, he would refer to Heidegger and Riezler as representatives of “subjective idealism.”<sup>23</sup> I contend that the criticism by these Frankfurt Heideggerians of Horkheimer already pushed the latter in “History and Psychology” but especially in his subsequent essays in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* to articulate better his own position.

In Riezler, Horkheimer faced a thinker standing at an uneasy crossroads in interwar European thought between conservatism and modernism. In his 1928 inaugural address, Riezler had emphasized the importance of “being and becoming a person” as an antidote to positivist specialization, and it is little wonder that he felt at home among the elitist Georgians frequenting his “wisdom seminars.” Yet, Riezler’s philosophical elitism did not prevent his gradual adoption of republican sympathies during the 1920s. Bespeaking Horkheimer’s suspicion of Riezler, however, is the fact—a surprising one in hindsight—that when in 1931 Herbert Marcuse sought contacts with Riezler due to his unsuccessful “habilitation odyssey” with Heidegger, Horkheimer at first had no interest in a “student of Heidegger recommended by Riezler.”<sup>24</sup> The quarrel between Horkheimer and Riezler would revolve around the issues of the accurate diagnosis of the current crisis, the significance of Freudian psychoanalysis, and the Heideggerian idea of authenticity as opposed to materialist ideals.

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23. Max Horkheimer, “Wissenschaft und Krise. Differenz zwischen Idealismus und Materialismus. Diskussionen über Themen zu einer Vorlesung Max Horkheimers,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 12: Nachgelassene Schriften 1931–1949*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985), 367.

24. Horkheimer to Marcuse, December 8, 1963. Quotation and translation from Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 41. Horkheimer seems to have acted less suspiciously toward Edmund Husserl’s student Ludwig Landgrebe, whose habilitation prospects too were hindered by Heidegger’s objections. Reporting on his visit to Frankfurt in May 1931, Landgrebe wrote how Horkheimer, besides offering encouraging words about his research, arranged meetings with his colleagues, among them Riezler with whom Landgrebe got to discuss Heidegger’s philosophy, which Riezler knew “very accurately.” Landgrebe to Husserl, May 7, 1931, in Husserl, *Husserliana Dokumente: Die Freiburger Schüler*, 260–261.

In the discussion on “religious Urmotives,” Riezler diagnosed the modern secular world as a field of ruins dominated by the nihilism of new intellectual currents, sociology for instance, which attacked every tradition without offering new normative guidelines. Riezler called for a novel existential metaphysics that, like Heidegger’s rehabilitation of the question of the meaning of being, was supposed to be reachable through human finitude, through the individual who “in this field of ruins first of all bethinks an originality [*Ursprünglichkeit*], that which one designates as genuineness, authenticity.”<sup>25</sup>

“To begin with,” Horkheimer argued as he commented on Riezler’s diagnosis, “I do not believe, *cum grano salis*, that we have before us a field of ruins. What are we actually talking about here? If I may speak with my categories, I would say that capitalism is no field of ruins.” Turning to the critique of modern technology by the theologian Heinrich Frick, who had kicked off the discussion with a vivid description of the modern industrial society and its inhabitants obsessed with technology, Horkheimer continued that he was not convinced that “the profane civilization” came down to “technology and the worldview supporting technology.” He maintained that “this glorification of the machine is a rather ephemeral phenomenon, in Russia certainly in a very different sense than in America.” Opposing this equation, Horkheimer said that as “an economist, I would like to say that it is a superficial assessment to treat America and Russia as one in this manner.”<sup>26</sup> Horkheimer felt uncomfortable with Riezler’s and others’ focus on “the opposition of religious and worldly” and their accompanying lack of economic understanding. To counter their interpretation of the present crisis as a crisis of norms, Horkheimer complained that “the metaphysician or the religious man are not enough moved by the actual

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25. Kurt Riezler’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 363–364.

26. The claim that capitalism and communism were of a piece was a judgment held by many conservative German observers. Heidegger would claim in 1935 that Europe “lies today in the great pincers” between Russia and America,” both of which reflect “the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man.” Martin Heidegger *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2nd ed., trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 41.

suffering, have not enough love for the perishable man.” Demanding attention to the flagrant economic inequalities of the present, he stated that “I am of the opinion, and cannot free myself from the theory of the world that I have, that the organizational form, namely the societal organizational form that is dominant today, essentially induces this suffering and this real distress.”<sup>27</sup>

Another issue where Horkheimer and Riezler could find little common ground was the question of Freud. Riezler’s objections to psychoanalysis echoed those of Heidegger, as can be seen from the dispute in 1930 over Freud’s candidacy for the Goethe Prize awarded by the city of Frankfurt. Riezler specified his uneasiness with Freud by saying that the “anti-Goethean lies in the fundamentally causal-mechanical character of the Freudian world,” in the replacement of “a vitally felt conception of the whole” with an extremely rationalist construction. It was this distance between the worlds of Goethe and Freud that mattered the most, “entirely *regardless*,” Riezler somewhat strangely added, “whether psychoanalysis is in the *right*!”<sup>28</sup> Like Heidegger, Riezler found the holistic approach of Gestalt psychology superior to what he saw as Freud’s reductionism. His defense of Goethe was not unexpected either. As Leo Strauss notes, Goethe’s general humanity and wide-ranging interests had left a deep mark on Riezler.<sup>29</sup> Still, his harsh words for Freud were unexpected, coming from a man under whose leadership the University of Frankfurt had gained much of its open-minded character.

Horkheimer did not comment on the debate over the Goethe Prize. Yet, he would undoubtedly have sided with the pro-Freud faction led by Alfred Döblin, author of the 1929 *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. In *Dämmerung*, Horkheimer associated Goethe with current philosophical anthropology and blamed both for a lack of attention to the social reality ridden by class antagonism.<sup>30</sup> Whereas for Riezler and Heidegger psychoanalysis represented another manifes-

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27. Max Horkheimer’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 365–366.

28. Schivelbusch, *Intellektuellendämmerung*, 108–109.

29. Strauss, “Kurt Riezler,” 234.

30. Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 96.



tation of modern nihilism, Horkheimer emphasized its deeply ethical, anything but nihilist, implications. We can read his overall judgment of the significance of Freud's work in a note from 1959, "Psychoanalysis and Daseinanalysis," which plays Freud off against Heidegger. While "the pitiful derivatives of the Heideggerian ontology—*anxiety, anticipation of death, and authenticity*—lead to coldness towards the individual and to a dictatorship in society," Freud's teachings "lead to an understanding of the sick and the healthy, to humane upbringing and humaneness. They threaten the conventional lies that provide moral masks for the criminal justice and general brutality," and the fact that they "stem from a learned Jew is enough to put them away from consciousness *coûte que coûte*."<sup>31</sup>

Riezler's demand of authenticity and his aversion to psychoanalysis reflected his worldview, which stood opposed to what Leo Strauss called "the modern ideal." For Riezler, the philosophical premises of this politically cosmopolitan ideal were celebration of human life as such, regardless of how it is lived, as absolutely good, endorsement of universal compassion and humanitarianism, and the elevation of bodily pleasure above the dedication to higher ideals.<sup>32</sup> Riezler defied the widespread tendency to explain human behavior by economic self-interest. Rather surprisingly, in the discussion on "religious Urmotives," he used the enormous suffering in Soviet Russia, borne in the name of a distant socialist future, to show that human beings were motivated by higher ideals than material gratification. In Riezler's opinion, the Russian events expressed an age-old religious yearning disguised as atheist communism.<sup>33</sup> Commenting on Riezler polemics against "the modern ideal," Horkheimer conceded that "I agree with the strongest terms. The previously underlying psychology was too simple, as if man acted solely by economic needs." On Horkheimer's account, materialism would indeed be shallow if it meant "that man acts only according

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31. Max Horkheimer, "Notizen 1949–1969," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 6: "Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft" und "Notizen 1949–1969," ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1991), 295.

32. Strauss, "Kurt Riezler," 236.

33. Kurt Riezler's contribution to the Urmotive discussion 382–383.

to economic tendencies.” Horkheimer, however, disputed the accuracy of this disparaging view. Genuine materialism contained “thoroughly ideal motives,” such as love and solidarity. Moreover, while orthodox Marxism no doubt suffered from a simplistic utilitarian psychology, Horkheimer refused to interpret the revolutionary fervor in Russia as a manifestation of religious yearning. For him, it rather signified a materialist desire to end societal injustice: “today people are ready to die for entirely other things than Protestantism and religion.”<sup>34</sup>

If Riezler hesitated to embrace the teachings of Freud, Paul Tillich had tried to incorporate them into his own Christian anthropology since the end of the world war. While Tillich was a frequent visitor to Riezler’s “wisdom seminars,” he preferred the “religious, philosophical, [and] prophetic” *Kränzchen* discussions with Horkheimer’s circle. These discussions marked the beginning of the “eternal dialogue” between him and Horkheimer that after 1933 would continue in America. Like Adorno, Horkheimer held Tillich in high esteem, calling him “Paul among the Jews” (i.e., “accepted and admired”).<sup>35</sup> In a later recollection, Horkheimer praised Tillich’s persona and friendliness. Without Tillich’s support, it was unlikely that in 1930 Horkheimer would have been offered a professorship in his home university, which again would have blocked his directorship in the Institute for Social Research. Horkheimer, on his part, took some credit for having prevented Tillich’s socialist declarations from costing him his life. In his 1933 *Die sozialistische Entscheidung* (*The Socialist Decision*), Tillich suspected that should “political Romanticism and warlike nationalism become victorious, the self-destruction of European peoples is assured.” In this book—which would soon end up in the Nazi book burnings—Tillich would not hesitate to state that “*the task of rescuing European society from a return to barbarism is given into the hands of socialism*” (italics in the original). Horkheimer, who already in 1930 had

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34. Max Horkheimer’s contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 383.

35. Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 117, 119, 223; Max Horkheimer, “Dokumente—Stationen,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 7: *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985), 324.

begun preparing for emigration, had shown Tillich how radical his thoughts really were and persuaded him to emigrate before it was too late.<sup>36</sup>

“Ambivalent” is the appropriate term to describe Horkheimer’s stance toward Tillich’s thinking. They shared an interest in Freud and Marx, as well as sensitivity to social injustice. But although Horkheimer always saw in Tillich a stern opponent of *völkisch* irrationalism, he found his friend’s thought as prone to misuse. In his 1967 eulogy for Tillich, Horkheimer referred to Tillich’s key idea of *kairos*, or the transformative historical moment and, in quoting Tillich’s main work, *Systematic Theology*, observed that this idea had been distorted by Tillich’s adversaries, “the false prophets who spoke for an idolatrous nationalism and racism.”<sup>37</sup> Like Adorno, Horkheimer found the chief liability in Tillich’s thought to be his adoption of the neo-ontological vocabulary of the 1920s. Even Tillich, he noted, “did not see through the palpable fact that in the disintegrating culture” once upright and rigorous ideas “decay into big words” and “serve the existing order as an ornament.”<sup>38</sup> While this charge applied to the entire neo-ontological revival of the 1920s, Horkheimer undoubtedly saw Heidegger’s influence on Tillich as the most significant case. Whereas in his Weimar-era lectures and essays Horkheimer did not mention Tillich, the *Kränzchen* discussions, private reflections in *Dämmerung*, and later recollections enable us to reconstruct their disagreement over Heidegger.

Let us begin by going back to the unpublished discussion on philosophy and dread on June 19, 1931, in which Horkheimer took Tillich, as well as Adorno, to task for their Heideggerianism. We saw that Tillich defended ontological questioning, and Adorno, at least from Horkheimer’s perspective, followed Tillich. Horkheimer complained that Tillich and Adorno were not satisfied with merely

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36. Horkheimer, “Letzte Spur von Theologie,” 127; Max Horkheimer, “Erinerung an Paul Tillich,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 7: *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985), 276–277. Quoted in Pauck and Pauck, *Paul Tillich*, 126.

37. Horkheimer, “Letzte Spur von Theologie,” 126, 132. Quote from Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3: 371. Translation modified.

38. Horkheimer, “Letzte Spur von Theologie,” 131.

scientific explanations of phenomena but wanted deeper explanations. In overt frustration, he bemoaned that “the consequence of your [*Eurer*] question is Heidegger’s thesis: Why is there something rather than nothing?”<sup>39</sup> As much as Horkheimer sympathized with Tillich’s need to find spiritual security after his horrible war experience and his worry of the miserable lot of the urban proletariat, he could not but reject his friend’s ontological speculations, which he saw as giving in too much to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. Describing his theoretical differences with Tillich, Horkheimer later specified that “the point at which I found it difficult to follow him, and which during the long decades has made up the subject matter of my criticism, is his confidence that already the genuine, or as he at times says, the existential, despair attests the existence of that being that is different from this world.” For Horkheimer, the metaphysical need was just that, the mere existence of which was insufficient to legitimize metaphysics.<sup>40</sup>

Horkheimer’s and Tillich’s divergent views on Heidegger reflected their different views about capitalism and its critique. To Tillich’s description of capitalism as a demonic force in the discussion on “religious Urmotives,” Horkheimer replied that “Protestantism can never in a million years justify the conviction that capitalism is demonic.” He questioned Tillich’s vague notion of spiritual suffering by asking what “is the actual distress under which we all suffer? Do we all suffer from the same distress, and is it the distress of the problematic of profane culture that torments people?” Horkheimer was adamant that people “are tormented by way more real and brutal things” and that the “material suffering of people is primarily what torments me today.” Reflecting further on this theme, Horkheimer said that as “seen from here, I can do nothing else but take

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39. “Diskussion zwischen M.H., Tillich, Adorno, Mennicke, Mannheim, u.a. über das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Wissenschaft gegenüber dem Schrecken. Mitschrift von Friedrich Pollock [?] 19.6.1931,” the Max Horkheimer Archive VIII 12.9, Archives Centre of the University Library, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main.

40. Max Horkheimer, “Paul Tillich: Zum 75. Geburtstag,” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 13: Nachgelassene Schriften 1949–1972*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1989), 267.

a certain side in this struggle and believe that it comes down to steering this struggle so that the pointless distress, in so far as it is pointless, is eliminated, to the extent that it can be abolished." He added that when "I say pointless I mean something else than most here. By this I mean that distress which, given the intellectual and material forces at man's disposal, is not necessary." For Horkheimer, the entire problematic of the gathering, the "religious Urmotives," was misplaced. "Is it necessary," he asked, "that a man, by working with others to make the world a better place, thereby really needs religion?" Is it really so crucial, he went on, "whether the steering of this struggle is connected to religious Urmotives or not?" Following in Spinoza's footsteps, Horkheimer claimed that he did not have enough time to ponder "whether there is a philosophy or religious idea that would legitimize my stance as adequate." Yet, this rejection of theology and metaphysics, he insisted, would not lead to supposedly shallow materialism. Provoked by such accusations, Horkheimer declared: the "knowledge about the transience of the transient, about the finitude of the finite, about the relativity of our science; also we unreligious people have all this."<sup>41</sup>

This disagreement represented an instance of the wider intra-Marxist dispute in the interwar period between so-called warm and cold currents of Marxism. Stemming from Ernst Bloch's ruminations in the early 1930s, this dichotomy referred to the discrepancy in Marxism between, on the one hand, the instrumental-technological belief in science and progress epitomized by the Second International and, on the other hand, the later countercurrent, exemplified by figures such as Bloch and Walter Benjamin, which underscored Marxism's compatibility with a variety of philosophical, Romantic, and even religious traditions. Downplaying the blessings of analytic reason and stressing the importance of messianic hope, Benjamin entertained the redemptive idea of breaking the historical continuum of class domination. To defeat Nazism and to dismantle the lure of its myths, Bloch advised Marxists to pay heed to the spiritual dimension of class struggle and claim for themselves the

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41. Max Horkheimer's contribution to the Urmotive discussion, 365–366, 383, 396, 401.

radical potential of religious and utopian traditions exploited by the Nazis.<sup>42</sup> Tillich belonged more to the warm current with his claim that socialism had failed to answer to the spiritual needs of the workers. For him, something like “religious Urmotives” were legitimate sources against capitalist alienation, and socialism should join in the battle with Fascism over these forces. As John Abromeit emphasizes, the cold current had the upper hand in Horkheimer’s thinking. As much as he too mourned the sufferings of past generations in the “slaughter bench of history,” he rejected Benjamin’s messianic hope that socialist revolution could redeem these sufferings. Rejection of this quasi-theological motif also set Horkheimer at a distance from Adorno, as shown by his critical review of the latter’s habilitation thesis, *Kierkegaard*. What further placed Horkheimer in the cold camp was his insistence on the indispensability of scientific reason and technology as preconditions of any conceivable emancipation. Balancing the cold current, however, was Horkheimer’s pessimism concerning historical development, his anti-economistic motives of compassion, love, and solidarity, as well as his concern with the suffering of animals in modern industrial society.<sup>43</sup>

Bespeaking Horkheimer’s aversion to transfiguration, he attacked identifications of Marxist teachings with metaphysical doctrines, such as the equation of the supposedly “perfect” socialist society with “unconditional truth” and the understanding of socialism as the goal of “history” rather than of particular people. Such false approximations only resulted in extending the “stink” of doctrines such as the “primordial ground of being” and the “hierarchy of values.” Equally dubious for Horkheimer was the elevation of anxiety at the expense of bodily suffering. The claim that “physical pain is worse than spiritual suffering,” he admitted, is open to question, given that “spiritual suffering almost always accompanied physical pain.” Nonetheless, Horkheimer insisted, “material wants, physical

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42. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 97–148; Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 188–189.

43. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 231. On the last point, see Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 66, 97–98.

torture, imprisonment, heavy forced labor, fatal disease have more reality than the noblest grief.” Yet, he lamented that “we are supposed to believe that not only the poor and the hungry but also the Junker and the factory barons suffer severely, and that as their education and power increase, their worries increase along with them.” Horkheimer concluded that the workers “certainly have a greater share of anxiety than Krupp directors.” There was no question that the “spiritual suffering of the ruling class is nothing compared to the real wretchedness of the proletariat.”<sup>44</sup>

In a later remark, Horkheimer interpreted the Weimar-era neo-ontology as a reaction to the widespread historical relativism and the latter as a reflection of the accelerated tempo of societal change in that period. Popular as the neo-ontological search for invariants—allegedly uncontaminated by the rapid societal transformations—was, it was not “able to change anything of the deep disorientation that it sought to compensate.” Heidegger’s *Being and Time* had been so successful because “it declared as essence the pointlessness, the desolation, the empty anticipation of death, and elevated by its solemn language into meaning the meaninglessness before which the youth shuddered.” By turning this “lack of constants into a constant itself,” Heidegger’s existentialism “indeed proved itself as a real expression of its time.”<sup>45</sup> Demarcating Tillich’s teachings from these apologetic results of Heidegger’s philosophy, Horkheimer highlighted that as much as Tillich “verged on fundamental ontology and existentialism, he never made a concession to the rationalization of the dread of this world.” Unlike so many Christians who in the early 1930s welcomed the rise of Nazism, Tillich held fast to the Christian idea of brotherly love and what his religious socialism held as its societal manifestation, the idea of just society.<sup>46</sup>

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44. Horkheimer, “Notizen zu Dämmerung,” 268–269; Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline*, 105.

45. Max Horkheimer, “Invarianz und Dynamik in der Lehre von der Gesellschaft,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 8: *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany: Fischer, 1985), 54–55.

46. Horkheimer, “Paul Tillich: Zum 75. Geburtstag,” 265–266; Max Horkheimer, “Religion und Philosophie,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 7: *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949–1973*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt, Germany:

Our examination of Horkheimer's Frankfurt discussion with Riezler and Tillich has shown that his nascent critical theory, outlined in the 1931 inaugural address, was accused of numerous shortcomings in the *Kränzchen* discussions. For the Frankfurt Heideggerians, Horkheimer's materialist critique of modernity was not radical enough, and its emphasis on science and technology only furthered the hegemony of instrumental rationality. Riezler and Tillich also claimed that Horkheimer's critical theory, with its alleged overemphasis on economist self-interest and satisfaction of bodily needs, lacked an appreciation of higher ideals. For them, Heidegger's idea of Dasein disclosed something more primordial about human existence and offered the key to understanding the nature of the current crisis beyond economic and psychological considerations. Horkheimer offered counterarguments in the *Kränzchen* discussions and in the "History and Psychology" lecture. Unlike the neo-ontologists, he saw modernity not as a reign of economic values but as an overpowering societal structure, whose often unrecognized effects on other realms of life it was the task of critical theory to disclose, criticize, and ultimately transform. Horkheimer also claimed that critical theory did this not in the name of mere economic self-preservation but out of compassion for and solidarity with people suffering from material hardship and social injustice. Let us next read Horkheimer's subsequent essays from the early 1930s as more refined attempts to defend critical theory against the Frankfurt Heideggerians and the post-Husserlian phenomenology of Heidegger and Scheler.

### **Horkheimer's Classic Essays: A Dialectical Account of the Human Condition**

Horkheimer saw early twentieth-century German philosophy as an intensifying neo-metaphysical onslaught against the Enlightenment

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Fischer, 1985), 187. In his later writings, Horkheimer would adopt a more affirmative stance toward religion as a source of emancipatory potential. In so doing, he would move considerably closer to Tillich's position. See Max Horkheimer, "Theism and Atheism," in *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (New York: Routledge, 2005), 213–223.



tradition, a trend that reflected the shift from liberal to monopoly capitalism. The neo-metaphysical revival, Horkheimer argued, had “its logical genesis in the failure of rationalism in the face of social problems. Its power stems from the current decline of a society of self-conscious individuals.” Neo-metaphysics rightly called attention to “the bankruptcy of rationalism.” Yet, its conclusions could not be more erroneous. Instead of demanding a reorganization of society on more reasonable lines, it championed “an inner conversion and mere spiritual renewal.” Thereby, it turned “a complicated social problem” into “a primitive pedagogical issue.” Horkheimer, in contrast, wished to safeguard the rationalist tradition by showing that its legacy was alive in dialectical social theory.<sup>47</sup>

Before and shortly after his emigration to the United States in 1934, Horkheimer published several important essays in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, including “Materialismus und Metaphysik” (“Materialism and Metaphysics”), “Materialismus und Moral” (“Materialism and Morality”), and “Zum Rationalismustreit in der gegenwärtigen Philosophie” (“The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy”). These essays epitomized the relatively hopeful early phase of Horkheimer’s critical theory—a phase that would come to close by the end of the decade with the darkening of the world-political horizon and Horkheimer’s adoption of Friedrich Pollock’s theory of “state capitalism,” which saw as nonexistent the chances that capitalism was pregnant with anything else but barbarism. Feeding Horkheimer’s pessimistic turn was also his rapprochement with Adorno that culminated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s sweeping critique of the entire Western civilization. The goal of Horkheimer’s earlier essays, in contrast, was “anthropology of the bourgeois epoch,” a multidisciplinary account of the modern capitalist West, its economic, psychic, and cultural interconnections, and developmental tendencies.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, in these essays, Horkheimer also paid considerable attention to perennial questions re-

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47. Max Horkheimer, “The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 221, 263–264.

48. Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, chaps. 7 and 9.

lated to the human condition. Rather than outlining a static ontological doctrine of the human essence, however, he sought to conceptualize human finitude in materialist, historically specific terms. He admitted that the stimulus for these lengthy meditations on human existence—rather unexpected coming from a thinker with little patience with abstract ontological approach—came from the increasingly reactionary social function of the Weimar-era neo-metaphysics.

While Horkheimer's essays were also confrontations with logical positivism of the Vienna Circle and rivalling interpretations of Marxism, I will read them as responses to the demand by Heidegger and Scheler to base philosophy on an ontological conception of the human being.<sup>49</sup> First, I suggest that Horkheimer's theoretical goal was to demonstrate that even as critical theory abstained from postulating such ontological conceptions, it did not succumb to an ahistorical notion of the human subject. Second, I propose that Horkheimer's practical goal was to show that critical theory did indeed contain ideals other than the fulfillment of bodily desires, but that these ideals—compassion, love, happiness, and solidarity—did not spring from some mysterious metaphysical need but rather from human beings' natural constitution.

To begin with, Horkheimer challenged the common view of materialism as another metaphysical worldview, an inferior one as such because of its vulgar reduction of reality to matter. Materialism, understood as critical social theory, was "not interested in worldview or in the souls of men" but in transforming the unjust world that causes suffering and in which "their souls must become stunted." If the metaphysician wishes, in Scheler's words, to "*transcend* himself as a finite natural being, to make himself divine or like God," the materialist aspires to master the reality "according to his will rather than to direct himself according to it." Materialism does not view human action as springing from some ultimate

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49. For Horkheimer's struggle with these others opponents, see Olaf Asbach, *Kritische Gesellschaftstheorie und historische Praxis: Entwicklungen der Kritischen Theorie bei Max Horkheimer 1930–1942/43* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 1997), 42–64.

principles, and it has little interest in such principles “because it expects little profit from them for its own purposes.” In this respect, Horkheimer noted, materialism “is much less ‘radical’ than idealist philosophy.”<sup>50</sup>

Horkheimer saw himself standing between two fronts. On one side were positivism and neo-Kantianism, which held on to the ideals of cultural modernity. On the other side were various anti-scientific doctrines, which questioned the blessings of science and the Enlightenment legacy. What the two camps shared, Horkheimer emphasized, was “subjective idealism.” By digging into the human mind, both expected to find the ultimate norm for action without taking cognizance of the historical circumstances. Whereas the rationalist camp invoked “the powers of the immutable human intellect,” the irrationalist camp allotted “the soul, and its modern versions, the same task.”<sup>51</sup> For Horkheimer, dismantling the domination of subjective idealism across the philosophical spectrum required a contestation with Kant’s legacy.

Kant expressed the guiding motif of subjective idealism in *Critique of Pure Reason*: “in *a priori* cognition nothing can be ascribed to the objects except what the thinking subject takes out of itself.” No matter how far modern neo-metaphysics stood from Kant, Horkheimer claimed, it too held “absolute consciousness as the reflecting mirror of the innermost reality of being.” Referring to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, he noted that the subject and the object of knowledge are identical in metaphysics: “Only in this way can metaphysics, new or old, lay its foundations, however cautiously it may conceive the identity of subject and object.” This Kantian baggage explained the frustrating fact that despite neo-metaphysicians’ frequent emphasis on the historical character of human life, they ignored the actual historical embeddedness of human beings and deprived “science of the possibility of knowing the subject as himself part of history.”<sup>52</sup>

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50. Horkheimer, “Materialism and Metaphysics,” 13, 19, 32–33.

51. Ibid., 21, 27; Horkheimer, “Rationalism Debate,” 222.

52. Horkheimer, “Materialism and Metaphysics,” 27–28, 31; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the 2nd ed., 113; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, § 44 (269–273).

But if it was true that human beings transform nature as well as themselves, Horkheimer argued, then the neo-metaphysical doctrines were to be superseded by careful observation of human development *in* history, an approach initiated by Marx in *German Ideology*. To be sure, in some respects, human beings have not changed much in the course of history—they shared certain needs and beliefs, for instance. Yet, the fate of the individual in a given society and the “changing constellations between society and nature” created qualitatively different circumstances. Therefore, “new forms of behavior and characters emerge which by no means existed from beginning.” For these reasons, the “task that Max Scheler assigned to anthropology is unrealistic.” No matter how much one tries to integrate the idea of change into the concept of human being, there simply is “no formula that defines the relationship among individuals, society, and nature for all time.”<sup>53</sup>

Besides the path from Kant’s subjective idealism to neo-metaphysics, however, another path led from Kant’s critical philosophy to the dialectical approach to the world. Kant’s idea of knowledge as an “infinite task” anticipated the materialist conception of knowledge as always historically situated and open-ended. Truly fruitful criticisms of Kant’s were to be found in Hegel’s idea of determinate negation, which, instead of searching for new absolutes, overcame the one-sidedness of scientific findings by incorporating them into a conception of wider historical process. From here, there opened a path to Marx’s conception of knowledge as a product of the “social life process.” Instead of implying a teleology of history, Marx’s conception turned the static economic theories of pre-established harmony of interests into a critical scrutiny of developmental tendencies of the present epoch.<sup>54</sup> Behind Horkheimer’s reasoning lay a belief in the finite nature of human beings. Yet, for

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53. Max Horkheimer, “Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 152–153; Horkheimer, “Materialism and Metaphysics,” 25.

54. Horkheimer, “Materialism and Metaphysics,” 29–32; Horkheimer, “Rationalism Debate,” 234–237, 240–241; Max Horkheimer, “On the Problem of Truth,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans.

him, this meant different things than for Heidegger. Neo-metaphysical notions such as “life and existence,” no matter how “spiritually motivated, historical, and concrete,” were as abstract as the older rationalist principles. Horkheimer wanted to make good on the metaphysicians’ promise of concreteness by examining social, cultural, and psychological conditions of human life. What set his critical theory apart from metaphysics was its awareness of its own social genesis—an insight that “belongs to the materialist view of the finitude of thought.”<sup>55</sup>

If the path from Kant through Hegel to Marx inspired Horkheimer’s materialist conception of the human condition, it also guided his postulation of a materialist ethics compatible with this conception. Again, he articulated his own position via critique of neo-metaphysical doctrines. Horkheimer acknowledged that the neo-metaphysical search for emotional security was an understandable reaction to major societal transformations and the shattering of the traditional moral order. By the same token, he found it astonishing that rather than fulfilling this need by “uncovering social contradictions and by providing a means of overcoming them,” neo-metaphysics wastes its energies on ponderings of “the possibility of ‘real’ life or even of ‘real’ death” and to attempts “to cloak existence with a deeper meaning.”<sup>56</sup>

Horkheimer detected this flaw in neo-metaphysical ethics to the less laudable aspects of Kant’s moral philosophy. The latter was the exemplary expression of its age, the bourgeois epoch. This epoch, about to end in the early twentieth century with the rise of monopoly capitalism and the decline of the autonomous individual, was that of post-Renaissance capitalist Europe, which set people free from traditional church authority and promoted their individual self-interest and possessive instincts. The moral dilemma faced by this epoch was how to balance the general interest of society with rising individualism. Kant’s idea of the categorical imperative had

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G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 183–185, 204–210.

55. Horkheimer, “Rationalism Debate,” 243–244.

56. Horkheimer, “Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology,” 154, 156.

sought to safeguard the general interest by balancing egoism with the idea of duty. Drawn from abstract reason alone and focused on intention instead of actual consequences of action, Kant's precept was insufficient to change the paradoxical structure of bourgeois society. While its economy set individuals against each other, its normative ideals demanded respect for the common good.<sup>57</sup>

From this side of Kant's ethics, Horkheimer suggested, "a direct path leads to the modern mysticism of sacrifice and obedience."<sup>58</sup> Against the charge that neo-metaphysical ethics had little to do with Kant's, Horkheimer pointed out that "today the effort is made to demonstrate that the absolute demand is not necessarily connected with acceptance of an absolute consciousness." Instead, neo-metaphysics claims to discover the obligation "in the phenomena themselves if we penetrate deeply enough into them."<sup>59</sup> Whereas Kant deduced unconditional moral precepts from pure reason, the neo-metaphysicians "replace analytic thought with intuition or other transient stimuli, such as feeling, joy, boredom, anxiety, credulousness, or fellow feeling, as the conditions of insight." Yet, they shared Kant's subjectivism; the human being could reach, if not through reason then through a more immediate intuition, the ultimate ground of reality. The neo-metaphysical ideals had, then, "the same kind of commandment-like character as the categorical imperative."<sup>60</sup>

To illustrate this continuity, Horkheimer quoted Heidegger's words: "In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings—and not nothing." But Horkheimer called attention to the fact that the essences thus disclosed, whether "life, existence, or communion [*Volkheit*]," are understood as something "to which one can hold unconditionally." It changed little if this only meant "the command

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57. Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 18–21.

58. *Ibid.*, 24.

59. Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 18, 21.

60. Horkheimer, "Rationalism Debate," 243; Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 33.

always to call into question one's own principles and actions, or to affirm freely the place in which given individuals find themselves as a result of their fate." Underlying neo-metaphysical morality's commandment-like character, no less than Kant's moral philosophy, was the idea of "a timeless subject." By disclosing this at first sight surprising link, "materialism dethrones the deified spirit more fundamentally than irrationalism, which rejects analysis in order to deliver itself over to blind faith."<sup>61</sup>

As for the charge that the modern world was dominated by utilitarian motives, Horkheimer admitted that neo-metaphysics rightly questioned the triumph of acquisitive impulses—a line of criticism that went back to Nietzsche's depiction of "the last man" as the sad culmination of Western modernity. Yet, Horkheimer called for a better historical explanation of this phenomenon. Nietzsche failed to recognize that the bourgeois ideals of security and happiness that he despised "derive precisely from the dearth of propitious conditions for society at large." With the reorganization of society along more just and reasonable lines, these ideals would lose their basis, and new ideals and even new drives would emerge. The crisis of European civilization, Horkheimer maintained, was more about "the unrecognized effect of economic relationships on the overall shaping of a life" than about "conscious economic motives."<sup>62</sup> Critical theory was, thus, not about moral indignation at acquisitive impulses but rather about a demand to change the society that fostered them. Its anthropology was that of the bourgeois epoch not of the human being as such.

These reflections could be taken as a criticism of Kurt Riezler, who saw capitalism as a part of the "modern ideal" rather than a specific social structure. In the discussion on "religious Urmotives," Riezler had interpreted the revolutionary fervor in Soviet Russia and its people's readiness for self-sacrifice as veiled religious yearning under the communist mask. It was incomprehensible for him that

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61. Horkheimer, "Rationalism Debate," 243, 408n36; Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" 90.

62. Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 30–31; Horkheimer, "History and Psychology," 126.

a materialist could hold such non-egoistic goals. In what seems like Horkheimer's reply to such a view, he countered that countless "attempts to interpret such selfless dedication to the causes of humanity as a contradiction to materialist convictions lack every philosophical justification." This elitism was blind to the fact that "known and unknown devotees of the materialist outlook have for centuries given up their freedom and their lives in the struggle for the most varied goals, but especially in solidarity with suffering men." Most importantly, readiness for sacrifice was not simply a virtue, for it "may well be a useful resource in the service of any power, including the most reactionary." Instruction for action in the present was "given not by conscience but by the correct theory."<sup>63</sup>

Underlying Horkheimer's reflections was the idea of a moral sentiment. As he had stressed for years, morality represented a psychic constitution not an ontological one. It was the task of psychology to disclose "its personal conditions and its mechanisms of transmission" and, together with other sciences, to "explain the accepted values and their change at any given time." If neo-metaphysics drew on the repressive character of Kant's idea of duty, Horkheimer's moral sentiment went back to Kant's maxim to treat human beings always as ends rather as means. This maxim, together with his idea of a perfect constitution, anticipated the socialist goal of a rationally organized society. A specific kind of love defined the moral sentiment, love that saw in another person not a means or possessions but "a potential member of a happy humanity." This love wished all people "the free development of their creative powers" and maintained that "all living beings have a claim to happiness, for which it would not in the least ask any justification or grounds."<sup>64</sup>

The moral sentiment was active in two areas: compassion and politics. Compassion was required in a world in which the global struggle between powerful economic groups took place "amid the atrophy of kind human inclinations, the proclamation of overt and covert lies, and the development of immeasurable hatred." The

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63. Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 44; Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 24.

64. Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," 30–35.



material and intellectual riches produced by capitalist civilization would allow humanity to stand as one peaceful and flourishing unity. But attempts to repress this fact have led to a hypocritical “diminution of cultural endeavors (including science) and a brutalization of personal and public life, such that spiritual misery is compounded with the material.” In a world in which human beings were futile cogs in the machine rather than subjects of their fate, compassion was an appropriate response. Moreover, the solidarity between human beings was part of the “solidarity of life in general.” Despite the superior cognitive capacities of humans, “the relationship of their happiness and misery with life of animals is manifest.”<sup>65</sup>

Concerning politics, against countless German detractors of the Enlightenment legacy, Horkheimer stated that the “battle cries of the Enlightenment and of the French Revolution are valid now more than ever.” He declared that “the bourgeois ideals of Freedom, Equality, and Justice” have by no means been discredited. The problem lies rather in the social conditions working against them. Progressive politics was not supposed to adopt these ideals in their historical form but to realize them “in accordance with their meaning.” This meant the surpassing of monopolized capitalism and the sanctity of private property by a planned economy, which was not only about distribution of goods but rather about enabling the free development of all. Referring to the Marxist separation of base and superstructure, Horkheimer noted that this idea says nothing about the hierarchy of material and intellectual goods. By seeking to improve the material lot of people, and thus their intellectual abilities as well, materialism is closer to classical German philosophy than it is to modern metaphysics, for the latter only talks in an elitist manner about the primacy of spiritual values but does little to improve the capacity of people to appreciate these values.<sup>66</sup>

In accord with his anti-foundational epistemology, Horkheimer noted that there was “no obligation to this politics, any more than there is an obligation to compassion.” Rather than by duty or metaphysical guilt, the materialist was motivated by her sense of justice

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65. *Ibid.*, 35–36.

66. *Ibid.*, 37–42.

and solidarity, accompanied by a lack of acquisitive instincts and an indifference toward possessions and property. With his demand of greatest happiness to all, Horkheimer saw himself as standing in the lineage of such great bourgeois thinkers as Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill. Their critique of the positivist departmentalization of thought stood out in an exemplary fashion against today's Weberian preference for value freedom and specialization. Specialization had certainly once functioned progressively by turning attention from the workings of God to those of the real world. Today, however, it formed an obstacle to liberation. Against Weber, Horkheimer held that critical theory was consciously biased. Yet, its emancipatory goal was not a subjective whim among others but rather dialectically reasoned from its adherence to the universalist ideals of the bourgeois epoch.<sup>67</sup>

With the goal of making the world a better place, the materialist had no more than hope and historically developed human capacities at his disposal. Given the finite nature of human undertakings, there was no guarantee of success. Nevertheless, when "a transparent and adequate relationship between individual action and the life of the society" is realized and "when a manifold of seemingly free activity among individuals is replaced by a society that unfolds and protects its life against threatening natural forces, then it is impossible to provide a deeper foundation for the activity of free human beings." Individuals try to fulfill their needs and desires and avoid death not because they wish to act according to some "absolute imperative" but because "the longing for happiness and the fear of death" simply belong to human life. To be sure, there was no escaping from the anxiety related to the finite character of all human efforts. But rather than a metaphysical search for the ultimate ground of being, the "actual social battle for real security against suffering and death assumes responsibility for the elimination of this emotion. However, the sorrow that necessarily remains preserves its own form and cannot be eliminated by any system."<sup>68</sup>

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67. *Ibid.*, 44–47; Horkheimer, "On the Problem of Truth," 181.

68. Horkheimer, "Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology," 155; Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 26.

In what could be taken as the crystallization of Horkheimer's stance toward the question of what it means to be human posed by Scheler and Heidegger, he remarked that the search for absolute justification for one's intellectual position in metaphysical doctrines had "meaning only when one presupposes that God exists." Scheler's post-Catholic reflections on philosophical anthropology in the late 1920s came close to the point where the letting go of metaphysics would have been possible. But rather than taking this step, which "leads in the direction of a materialistic theory," Scheler opted for a search for metaphysical invariants of human essence.<sup>69</sup> The critical theory of society, not Scheler's philosophical anthropology or Heidegger's metaphysics of Dasein, would have been the correct step forward from this insight.

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69. Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics," 157.

## CONCLUSION

Corresponding in 1972 with Hermann Mörchen, who at the time was sketching his pioneering study on Theodor W. Adorno and Martin Heidegger, Max Horkheimer noted skeptically that given the profound philosophical differences between Heidegger and Frankfurt School (as testified by Adorno's polemical *Jargon of Authenticity*), he saw few possibilities for "a productive debate" between the two sides. Yet, Horkheimer added that had he more time at his disposal, he would be interested in facing a Heideggerian in a debate.<sup>1</sup> Seeking recently in Mörchen's footsteps to make room for such a fruitful debate between the two sides, Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek note that the fact "that no such debate ever took place only reflects the deeply entrenched view that Horkheimer expresses in his correspondence with Mörchen." What Horkheimer

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1. Horkheimer to Mörchen, February 21 and March 16, 1972, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. 18, 794–795.

kept from Mörchen, however, was not only his own youthful enthusiasm over Heidegger in the early 1920s (a point noted by Macdonald and Ziarek<sup>2</sup>) but also the fact that such a debate between the Frankfurt School and thinkers sympathetic to Heidegger—the Frankfurt discussion—had already taken place on the eve of Hitler’s Third Reich.

This book has attempted to show that when Horkheimer, Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse articulated the initial versions of their neo-Marxist critical theories in 1927–1933, the confrontation with Heidegger’s monumental *Being and Time* constituted an urgent issue for them all. Given Heidegger’s rising status in German philosophy at the time, it is no big surprise that the young Frankfurt School thinkers should have seen in him a great challenge. Like Heidegger, the critical theorists saw neo-Kantian trust in bourgeois culture and science as a product of the bygone pre-1914 era. Like Heidegger, they rejected idealist narratives of history, hypostatization of instrumental labor, and economic and contemplative explanations of human motivation. Like Heidegger, they thought that human beings were finite. But what this finitude meant was a different matter. In order to show that Marxism, not Heidegger’s existentialism, possessed the best resources to understand this finitude, the critical theorists had to demonstrate that Marxism did not necessarily entail a view of history as a preordained success story or an image of the human being as *animal laborans* or *homo economicus*.

In emphasizing Heidegger’s role, my aim has not been to belittle the Frankfurt School’s debt to the tradition of Western Marxism, to its founding fathers Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, or to its more marginal figures such as Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. It was admittedly these renegades who, by casting Marxism as philosophical critique rather than positive science, paved the way for the Frankfurt School thinkers, in whose post-World War II works Western Marxism would develop from an intellectual subculture into a major tradition of twentieth-century philosophy. And yet, my historical reconstruction of Heidegger’s role in Marcuse’s “concrete philosophy,” Adorno’s “natural-history,” and Horkheimer’s “mate-

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2. Macdonald and Ziarek, Introduction to *Adorno and Heidegger*, 1, 183n3.

rialism” has shown that we cannot fully understand these theories without appreciating them as critical rejoinders to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. For Marcuse and Adorno, the contestation with Heidegger was a problem in the very center of their intellectual efforts. Both thought it crucial not only to fight Heidegger’s influence but also to make good, in the sense of immanent critique, on his openings. For Horkheimer, the struggle with Heidegger was a more marginal issue, an effort to contest the influence of a thinker who had intrigued him in his youth.

We have seen the young Horkheimer navigating amid authoritative intellectual voices of the 1920s. Disillusioned with Max Weber’s plea for a detached social science, Horkheimer could not help but be impressed with Heidegger’s engaging early ponderings on factual life experience. Heidegger’s anti-academic pathos represented something new that was intriguing and disconcerting at the same time. Although for a moment Horkheimer wondered whether Heidegger was the one to follow, the future founder of the Frankfurt School had reservations even early on. By the end of the decade, these reservations had grown into a systematic opposition. Horkheimer’s comments on *Being and Time* testify to his principled discontent with Heidegger’s lack of social consciousness—a lack that made Max Scheler’s “material phenomenology” the main point of contestation in Horkheimer’s struggle with the neo-metaphysical revival of the Weimar years. Yet, instead of becoming inattentive to Heidegger, Horkheimer recognized his hegemonic status in German philosophy and saw *Being and Time*’s categories of historicity and care as major competitors to his critical theory.

Horkheimer’s lectures on German idealism and his private ponderings in *Dämmerung* show that in the Weimar era, he identified with Marx’s effort to overcome metaphysics some eighty years earlier. Advocating materialism and radical social change, both Marx and Horkheimer were forced to come to terms with the hegemonic metaphysical doctrines of their day, in which they saw undisputable merits but also dubious mystifying elements that obstructed political and social progress. Whereas Marx strove to channel Hegel’s critical energies into a critique of political economy, Horkheimer saw himself as continuing Marx’s struggle with

metaphysics by playing the French Enlightenment and empirical sciences against the popular doctrines of Weimar-era neo-metaphysics: Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Scheler's philosophical anthropology. Yet, given Heidegger's anti-idealist animus, it is not so surprising that Horkheimer occasionally showed him qualified sympathy.

If Horkheimer's priority in his confrontation with Heidegger was to contest the latter's unhealthy influence on German thought, for Adorno this confrontation was always a more ambiguous matter. At his most critical, Adorno's venomous polemics against Heidegger far surpassed Horkheimer's. On the other hand, Horkheimer's writings contain no comments on Heidegger as positive as those found in Adorno's. It is thus not implausible to say that Adorno's *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger forms the most interesting occasion in his lifelong effort to turn arguments of conservative cultural criticism to serve progressive ends. That ambiguity is already present in Adorno's Weimar-era thought, and this book has sought to illuminate it by reconstructing Adorno's previously uncharted Frankfurt discussion with three Frankfurt Heideggerians: Kurt Riezler, Paul Tillich, and Max Wertheimer.

I believe that my demonstration of the intensity of Adorno's encounter with Heidegger has made evident that the attention he gave to Heidegger was not about academic tactics, a conjecture one could present considering that as a graduate student, Adorno was surrounded by a supervisor sympathetic to Heidegger and by equally Heideggerian-minded senior colleagues. But this conjecture does not hold critical scrutiny, since Adorno had already earned his habilitation in 1931 with his *Kierkegaard*. There was no need for him to please Tillich or anyone else in his subsequent lectures. While the criticism by his colleagues certainly shaped the outer settings of Adorno's confrontation with Heidegger, given Adorno's view of *Being and Time* as a mystified critique of reification, he would have engaged in an immanent critique of it in any case. This can also be seen in the facts that Adorno planned to visit Heidegger in Freiburg, that he praised Dolf Sternberger's immanent criticism of Heidegger in 1932, that he showed sympathy to Riezler's and Tillich's neo-ontological ponderings in the Frankfurt discussion, and, finally,

that he continued this immanent criticism in his main work, *Negative Dialectics*, where he also referred positively to his 1932 lecture on natural-history.

A question from another perspective is whether Adorno's eagerness to consider the merits of Heidegger's philosophy shows that he had gone too far and fallen under Heidegger's *mythoi*. Adorno had used ontological vocabulary in his musical writings in the late 1920s and cut this vocabulary from the later editions of these writings. We also saw that Adorno kept using ontological vocabulary in the Frankfurt discussion in the early 1930s *after* he and Benjamin had teamed up against neo-ontology in their 1929 Königstein program. Adorno's references to "ontological dignity," "ontological reorientation of history," and "ontological design of socialism" can be interpreted in various ways. If we take them as unreflective slips of the tongue, then they testify to Adorno's uncritical proximity to Heidegger and the wider neo-ontological movement. Even if this was the case in Adorno's earlier musical writings, however, in the early 1930s, his use of the above terms was more likely a self-conscious attempt to put his immanent critique of Heidegger into action. By using ontological terms at critical junctures of his reasoning, Adorno wanted to persuade his colleagues to see, from their Heideggerian perspective, the strengths of his materialist idea of natural-history.

Robert Hullot-Kentor perceptively notes that more than these occasional uses of ontological terms, what testifies to Adorno's proximity to Heidegger—and which marks his early formulation of "natural-history" as inferior to the later "dialectic of enlightenment"—was his unmistakably Heideggerian manner of forming philosophical concepts. Like Heidegger's term "Dasein," Adorno's natural-history was a neologism, an ahistorical invention based on "a literal analysis of the term's ambiguity." In contrast, although the equivalent term in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, *Aufklärung*, could also be celebrated for the dual meaning of the word *aufklären*—"to empty" and "to illuminate"—Adorno and Horkheimer would develop their argument "according to the philosophical experience sedimented in the word." In Hullot-Kentor's estimation, it was perhaps because of this deeper affinity between



Heidegger and the young Adorno, not as easily removable as the explicit references to Heidegger or ontology, that made Adorno reluctant to publish his 1932 lecture in his lifetime.<sup>3</sup>

In hindsight, it is interesting to note that at the turn of the 1930s when Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse were trying to make good on *Being and Time*'s promise of concreteness, Heidegger was sketching the guiding idea of his later thought, the "history of being." The recently published *Black Notebooks* leave little doubt that this idea was connected to Heidegger's concurrent turn to National Socialism. Examining the significance of the notebooks for Heidegger's legacy, Peter Trawny speculates how Heidegger's many Jewish acquaintances would have treated him after the war had they been aware of the notebooks. Had they known about Heidegger's obsessions with "World Jewry," would Hannah Arendt have forgiven Heidegger, would Karl Löwith have sought contacts with him again, and would the poet Paul Celan have paid his visit to Heidegger's Todtnauberg hut?<sup>4</sup> Had Adorno known about the *Black Notebooks*, he would neither have written positively about Heidegger to Horkheimer in 1949 nor continued his immanent criticism of Heidegger in his later works. Personal disgust toward Heidegger would have prevented Adorno from doing this—disgust that would have overshadowed the still legitimate question of whether *Being and Time* was, rather than "fascist down right to its innermost components," as Adorno once exaggerated, a genuine contribution to philosophy. Further, had Heidegger's vocal anti-Semitism been public knowledge in the 1950s, Heidegger would not have been able to reclaim his status as Germany's first philosopher. Hence, Adorno, back in Germany from his American exile, would not have encountered the adored and highly influential "Swabian sage" that he did and whom he promised to dethrone in five years.<sup>5</sup>

Again, had Marcuse known about the *Black Notebooks*, he would hardly have bothered to visit Heidegger's Black Forest hut

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3. Hullot-Kentor, "Introduction to T. W. Adorno's 'The Idea of Natural-History,'" 235–241.

4. Trawny, *Heidegger und der Mythos*, 106–107.

5. Heidegger, "Das Fernseh-Interview mit Richard Wisser," 283.

in 1947, where Heidegger offered him, instead of an apology, a staggering revisionist account of the Holocaust. In the Weimar era, however, things had been more complicated between them. Seventeen years earlier, Heidegger had written to Marcuse from this same hut about his mixed feelings on the latter's Hegel study. I have argued that Marcuse's Freiburg writings formed a continuous effort to reinterpret *Being and Time's* existential analytic of Dasein in terms of Hegelian-Marxist ontology of labor. As a Marxist trying to rehabilitate ossified "scientific socialism," Marcuse would likely have engaged in this effort in any case, regardless of what he thought about Heidegger's intentions. Yet, what encouraged Marcuse was his belief that in the absence of *Being and Time's* yet unpublished second part, Heidegger had not yet made up his mind about the direction of the existential analytic. Further, Marcuse's belief that *Being and Time* might have things in common particularly with Hegelian Marxism has been illuminated by our analysis of Maximilian Beck's review of *Being and Time*, which proposed that the book was a critical rejoinder to Georg Lukács's theory of capitalist reification. Perhaps Marcuse saw himself as providing existential-ontological depth to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*—depth that Heidegger (in Lucien Goldmann's famous estimation) had complained was missing in Lukács's theory.

Marcuse's Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of *Being and Time* reached its climax in his Hegel study, which reconstructed Hegel's notion of life as the origin of the problematic of "being and time" and, implicitly, as the foundation of Marxism. The important place of *Hegel's Ontology* in the history of the Frankfurt School should not be underappreciated. Not only did it function as Marcuse's calling card to Horkheimer's circle, it also inspired the young Jürgen Habermas in the 1950s to take a step from orthodox Heideggerianism to critical theory.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, our concentration on Heidegger's Hegel lectures, rather than solely on *Being and Time*, has allowed us to reconstruct the unexplored debate between Heidegger and

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6. Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Habermas: A Biography*, trans. Daniel Steuer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 79, 442n41; Peter Dews, ed., *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1992), 189–190.

Marcuse over Hegel's legacy. This high point of the Weimar-era Hegel renaissance shows Heidegger struggling with his own influence, with the ways his call for a contestation with Hegel, as well as his entire idea of a destruction of the history of philosophy, was understood or misunderstood by his contemporaries. Heidegger's unintentional midwifery to the German Hegel revival could be compared to his more consequential impact on a generation of French philosophers through Alexandre Kojève's legendary lectures on Hegel in Paris in the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

These historical observations aside, the most remarkable aspect of the Hegel debate is that it opens a window to the philosophical and ideological stakes in Marcuse's encounter with Heidegger; it was through a critical confrontation with Hegel's dialectics that both the teacher and the student sought to articulate their emerging theoretical positions, the "history of being" and "concrete philosophy." Although Heidegger called for a contestation with Hegel's occasionally perceptive insights into time and being, he was adamant that Hegel's philosophy marked the culmination of the onto-theological forgetting of being that had governed Western philosophy since its Greek inception. Marcuse, in contrast, applied Heidegger's destruction method to Hegel's works to disclose in them a repressed, but potentially explosive, tendency toward historically sensitive social criticism. While Heidegger rejected Marcuse's study, and thereby blocked his academic path, Marcuse's provocative meditations on labor's ontological status may have influenced Heidegger to theorize his own ontological notion of authentic labor along Nazi lines in 1934.

Heidegger's role in the formation of the Frankfurt School cannot be compared to his positive influence on major twentieth-century currents of thought such as French existentialism and deconstruction. Yet, we would miss an important dimension in the early critical theories of Marcuse, Adorno, and Horkheimer if we were to ignore their genuine need to come to terms with Heidegger's philosophical revolution and to make good on his promise of concrete-

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7. On Kojève's lectures and debt to Heidegger, see Kleinberg, *Generation Existential*, chap. 2.

ness. The great majority of recent scholarly interest in the possible parallels between Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics and Frankfurt School critical theory has focused on the post-World War II period. By reconstructing the Frankfurt School's overlooked Weimar-era debates with Heidegger and Heideggerians and by reading these as stimulating intellectual encounters rather than hostile confrontations, this book has hopefully succeeded in paving the way for future attempts to bridge the wide, but perhaps not insuperable, gulf between what were arguably the two most important currents in twentieth-century German philosophy.



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