
The Legitimacy of the Modern Age

Hans Blumenberg

Translated by Robert M. Wallace

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Series Foreword

From Hegel and Marx, Dilthey and Weber, to Freud and the Frankfurt School, German social theory enjoyed an undisputed preeminence. After the violent break brought about by National Socialism and World War II, this tradition has recently come to life again, and indeed to such an extent that contemporary German social thought has begun to approach the heights earlier attained. One important element in this renaissance has been the rapid and extensive translation into German of English-language works in the humanities and the social sciences, with the result that social thought in Germany is today markedly influenced by ideas and approaches of Anglo-American origin. Unfortunately, efforts in the other direction, the translation and reception of German works into English, have been sporadic at best. This series is intended to correct that imbalance.

The term *social thought* is here understood very broadly to include not only sociological and political thought as such but also the social-theoretical concerns of history and philosophy, psychology and linguistics, aesthetics and theology. The term *contemporary* is also to be construed broadly: though our attention will be focused primarily on postwar thinkers, we shall also publish works by and on earlier thinkers whose influence on contemporary German social thought is pervasive. The series will begin with translations of works by authors whose names are already widely recognized in English-speaking countries—Adorno, Bloch, Gadamer, Habermas, Marcuse, Ritter—and by authors of similar accomplishment who are not yet so familiar outside of Germany—Blumenberg, Peukert, Schmidt, Theunissen, Tugendhat.

Subsequent volumes will also include monographs and collections of essays written in English on German social thought and its concerns.

To understand and appropriate other traditions is to broaden the horizons of one's own. It is our hope that this series, by tapping a neglected store of intellectual riches and making it accessible to the English-speaking public, will expand the frame of reference of our social and political discourse.

Thomas McCarthy

Translator's Introduction

Hans Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* is a book that rethinks both the substance and the process of Western intellectual history in a remarkably thorough and original way, shedding light on some of the most difficult questions of our time. *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* was published in 1966, the first major work of a younger German philosopher who, without being identified with any one of the dominant philosophical schools in Germany, had clearly assimilated all of them, together with the historiography of philosophy, science, and theology. The book soon became the center of a widespread discussion, and it continues to be one of the recent works most frequently cited in German philosophical discourse. A second edition, substantially revised in order to respond to criticisms and dispel misunderstandings evident in the reviews, appeared in three paperback volumes in 1973, 1974, and 1976. It is this second edition that is here presented in a complete translation.

1. The Intellectual Situation in Which Blumenberg Intervened

An English-speaking reader may wonder, to begin with, what can be meant by the title, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Assuming that the "modern age" is the age succeeding the Middle Ages and continuing through to the present, one might wonder why it should be described as "legitimate." Has it ever been suggested that it might be "illegitimate"?

While readers may not be familiar with this way of posing the question, they are certainly aware of related questions, of which the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the modern age as a whole is a natural extension. For over two centuries now—Rousseau's *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1755) is a convenient benchmark for the period—serious thinkers have been questioning the dominance and even the validity of such basic modern concepts as reason, science, progress, freedom of the individual, and technology. Usually, of course, these criticisms are formulated with reference to what are taken to be antithetical ideals, such as imagination, intuition, nature, community, order, or transcendence. Sometimes these antitheses are seen as constant aspects of 'the human condition,'^{a,*} and what is questioned is only the superior status ascribed to reason (etc.) by the Enlightenment and its adherents. More often, though, the contrast is seen, at least to some degree, as representing a historical process whereby an initial, positively valued state of affairs (nature, cosmos, community, relation to transcendence, or whatever) was supplanted by the 'modern' condition. And the crisis-wracked state of the 'modern world' in the twentieth century is then naturally interpreted as evidence of the unhealthy effects of the turning away from the original, preferable state of affairs.

This kind of analysis is common among literary people—one thinks of T. S. Eliot, or of Russian and French authors such as Tolstoy, Dostoevski, Baudelaire, and Flaubert, whose resonance is still so great. Related attitudes are also present in various forms in the population at large, for example, in the recent 'counterculture' and in the current wave of anti-'secular humanist' Christian fundamentalism in the United States. In academic philosophy, the critical focus on the 'Cartesian' premises of empiricism and twentieth-century philosophy of science also comes very close to implying an original error behind certain basic modern concepts, though the critics are generally too sophisticated to call for an outright return to Aristotle, Aquinas, or other premodern authorities.^b

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of major works of German scholarship have focused on questions related to the nature and status of the modern age and its basic concepts and attitudes. Marx's concern to define 'capitalism' and to analyze its

^aAuthor's notes, cited by superscript Arabic numbers, appear at the end of the book. Translator's notes, cited by superscript lowercase roman letters, appear at the end of each chapter.

genesis from precapitalist economic and social formations and Nietzsche's celebration of the Renaissance as the greatest attempt to break free from what he considered to be the suffocating influence of Christianity are early landmarks in this effort. Wilhelm Dilthey's *The World-View and Analysis of Man since the Renaissance*, Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Ernst Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* are others, more tentative and less spectacularly comprehensive than Marx or Nietzsche but equally serious in their effort to define basic characteristics of modernity—of something with which, without being able to identify it with 'the human condition' or even the whole of our Western tradition, and without exalting it above other civilizations or periods, they nevertheless felt inextricably involved. But no single, clear definition of this 'something,' of the modern period or modern attitude, emerges from their work.

It took radical opposition to provoke a more precise definition. Germany has experienced more extreme forms of some of the crises of the twentieth century than most other Western countries, and since, the 1920s German philosophy has also perhaps taken extreme positions more seriously. Heidegger, for instance, suggested that the history of philosophy is characterized largely by forgetfulness of the most important question (the question of the meaning of Being). Husserl, in his *Crisis of the European Sciences* (written in the late 1930s), traced the agony of his times to a failure in the original formulation (somewhere deep in the Western past) of the theoretical attitude. Adorno, in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written with Max Horkheimer in the 1940s) and his *Negative Dialectics*, tended to see the social and intellectual reality of his time as so thoroughly delusive that philosophy was reduced to a "negative dialectic" of refusal. To all of these thinkers there seemed to be something radically wrong in their tradition and their world. They did not, in general, locate the original error or fault in the modern age as such. To the extent that they situated it in history at all, they imagined it as earlier, as already beginning to be evident in, for example, Greek thought. However, it did appear that the modern age exhibited most clearly the results of the fatal error or fault embodied in the tradition.

The writer of this period who focused the question of the nature and legitimacy of the modern age most clearly in a major work is Karl Löwith. Löwith employed a more 'historiographical' approach in

formulating his philosophical issues than did most of his contemporaries. In *Meaning in History* (1949)^c he undertook to diagnose and analyze historically a central modern misconception: the idea of progress. In the process he established what seemed to amount to the illegitimacy of the modern age as a whole, an illegitimacy that followed from his thesis that some central modern ideas (especially that of progress) were secularized versions of what were originally—and properly—medieval/Christian ideas.

Löwith's outright characterization of the modern age as crucially illegitimate was one of the main provocations leading to the original analysis and defense of modernity that is presented in Blumenberg's *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Part I of this book is devoted to a fundamental critique of theories, including Löwith's, that describe central modern phenomena as products of the secularization of Christian ideas. It also describes how the *appearance* of secularization, in such cases as the idea of progress, arises. Part II presents a comprehensive alternative account of the genesis of what Blumenberg takes to be the legitimate modern concepts and attitudes, as a human response to the late-medieval crisis of the Christian relation to the world. Part III then traces the history of interpretations of the human interest in theoretical knowledge of the world ("theoretical curiosity") from the ancients to Feuerbach and Freud in order to bring into better focus the nature and status of modern science;^d and part IV examines the epochal "threshold" from medieval to modern in still greater detail as it appears in the thought (on opposite sides of the "threshold") of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno.

2. Löwith's Indictment of 'Progress' and the Modern Age as Products of Secularization

To understand Blumenberg's train of thought, one needs to have a clear idea of the way in which Löwith (and others) cast doubt on the legitimacy of modernity. Löwith's *Meaning in History* focuses on the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'philosophies of history'—from Voltaire, Turgot, and Condorcet to Hegel, Marx, Proudhon, and Comte—in which he finds the classical formulations of the modern idea of progress. Not content with optimism about their own times and their own futures, these authors (with the partial exception of Voltaire) interpreted history as a whole as embodying a logic of in-

evitable progress in which apparent relapses (what used to be called "dark ages," for instance) have to be understood as necessary stages in preparing for subsequent steps forward. In the course of the twentieth century, most of us have become more or less skeptical about such theories, but certainly no alternative pattern of interpretation has achieved anything like the broad acceptance that the idea of progress once had. And one may reasonably wonder whether it does not still underlie many of our attitudes, such as our continuing faith in science and the sense of superiority and of somehow inevitable world leadership that certain Western countries still seem to possess.

In any case Löwith is not satisfied to note the prevalence of the idea of progress in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought and to congratulate those of us who think we have overcome this illusion. He respects the intellectual claims of the 'philosophers of history' whom he studies, so that for him their ideas constitute a real philosophical problem and not just a historical or psychological 'phenomenon.' The possibility of interpreting their ideas as naive projections of contemporary scientific and technical progress, economic growth, and 'bourgeois-democratic' revolutions onto the screen of the history of the human race as a whole is something that he does not even entertain.⁶ How then *does* Löwith interpret the modern 'philosophies of history'? He interprets them as a "secularization" of the eschatological pattern set up by the Jewish and Christian religions, of their faith in a fulfillment of the world's history through 'final' events (coming of the Messiah, Last Judgment, etc.), a faith whose essence he describes as "hope," "living by expectation," or simply "futurism." In contrast, he describes ancient philosophy and religion as founded on a "reverence for the past and the ever present," which are embodied in the cyclical pattern of reality exemplified by organic life and the revolutions of the heavens. In history this pattern took the form of the continual growth, maturity, and decline of individuals, cities, peoples, and (for some ancient thinkers) entire 'worlds.' It was Judaism and, above all, Christianity that broke the rule of this model in the Hellenistic/Roman world, introducing the entirely novel ideas of creation from nothing and total final destruction, of a unique world history centered (in Christianity) on a unique Incarnation and directed at one absolutely final Judgment. This, Löwith argues, is the only possible source of the modern notion of a single, unified, future-directed history of progress,

despite the irreligious and even antireligious postures of many of the modern theorists of progress.

Whether or not English-speaking readers have previously encountered Löwith's thesis, they are undoubtedly familiar with the similar proposition that Marx's idea of communism (and other similar 'revolutionary visions') are 'really' secularized versions of the biblical paradise or the coming of the Messiah. This particular 'secularization theory' has been repeated so often (Löwith too subscribes to it), and so seldom directly denied, that it might almost be described as "common knowledge." A similar situation existed in Germany during the 1950s and early 1960s with regard to Löwith's thesis that the idea of progress is a secularization of eschatology. It was more or less independently proposed by several other writers in the 1940s and 1950s,^f was not systematically criticized by anyone, and became, in effect, part of the 'conventional wisdom' of German scholarship.

It is a profoundly pessimistic doctrine. Löwith (to continue to use him as our prime example) was not discussing Marxism alone but modern 'philosophy of history' *in toto* (apart from twentieth-century authors such as Spengler and Toynbee and his admired nineteenth-century predecessor in the criticism of 'progress,' Jacob Burckhardt), and he did not hesitate to extend his diagnosis to the "modern mind" in general. Since abandoning the Christian versions of creation and consummation, Löwith writes, "The modern mind has not made up its mind whether it should be Christian or pagan. It sees with one eye of faith and the other of reason. Hence its vision is necessarily dim in comparison with either Greek or biblical thinking."^g The bastard nature of the idea of progress—a pattern whose true meaning is Christian and Jewish but whose modern form is non-Christian and non-Jewish, that is, "pagan"—is seen as characteristic of the modern mind in general. In Löwith's later writings it becomes increasingly clear that the 'alternative' he has in mind is unambiguously "pagan": It is a return to the cyclical cosmos of Stoicism. Such a return would presuppose the destruction not only of belief in ongoing progress but also of the minimal underlying idea of the irreversibility of basic historical change. It is not surprising, then, that this alternative is mainly implicit rather than being systematically argued for.^h

Löwith's 'alternative' was not as universally adopted as was his theory of the secularization of eschatology. Heideggerians, theologians—everyone had his own preferred 'alternative,' but everyone

seemed at least tacitly to agree that the modern idea of progress had been definitively analyzed and disposed of. And numerous other basic modern ideas were quickly found to be secularized versions of this or that Christian antecedent. German philosophical and historical scholars have usually been more aware of and better grounded in Christian theology than is common among their counterparts in the English-speaking countries, and young scholars quickly made maximum use of the new interpretive model.¹

3. Blumenberg's Defense of Possible Progress and His Account of the Origin of the Modern Age

This, then, was the situation when Blumenberg first presented his critique of the secularization "category" at the Seventh German Philosophy Congress in 1962, a critique that was expanded and equipped with a complete alternative account of the origin of the modern age in *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (1966) and was defended and further elaborated in this revised edition.

Very briefly, as it applies to Löwith's theory that the idea of progress is the result of a secularization of Christian eschatology, Blumenberg's critique (part I, chapter 3) has two main elements. First, he points out that the 'future' that the modern idea of progress anticipates is conceived of as the product of an immanent process of development rather than as a transcendent intervention comparable to the coming of the Messiah, the end of the world, the Last Judgment, and so forth. And if the common element is supposed to be "hope," the Christian attitude to the final events has been characterized far more by fear than by hope for most of the Christian era and has been such as to discourage precisely the kind of forward-looking constructive effort that is implied in 'progress'—so that the transformation of the one into the other is very difficult to picture. Second, there are in any case alternative accounts of the origin of the idea, accounts that do not reduce it merely to a naive projection of an optimistic period in European history any more than Löwith's does. Blumenberg describes the idea of progress as arising from two primary early-modern formative experiences: the overcoming of the fixed, authoritative status of Aristotelian science by the idea of a cooperative, long-term scientific progress guided by method; and the overcoming (in the literary and aesthetic realm) of the idea of ancient art and literature as permanently

valid models of perfection in favor of the idea of the arts as embodying the creative spirit of their particular ages and in that sense as capable of again achieving validity equal to that of the creations of the ancients. These two parallel developments, both of which occur primarily in the course of the seventeenth century, are then followed by a process in which the idea is extended to other realms (technology, society) and generalized as the idea of progress 'across the board', which figures in the writings of Voltaire and his successors in the 'philosophy of history.'

Anticipating Löwith's response that this cannot be a complete account of the origin of the idea of progress because "it cannot be a mere accident that Greek philosophy did not come up with any philosophy of history or of freedom, and that Greek historians thought very differently from post-Christian metaphysicians about human nature and the nature of history,"³ Blumenberg presents in part II, "Theological Absolutism and Human Self-Assertion," a highly original interpretation of the role of Christianity in bringing about modern "human self-assertion," of which 'progress' is to be understood as a mode of implementation. Blumenberg makes it clear here (and in parts III and IV) that while the modern age is not the result of a transformation (whether through 'secularization' or any other process) of something that was originally Christian, this does not mean that it sprang into existence spontaneously, as though into a historical void. The continuity underlying the change of epoch is, he says, a continuity of problems rather than of solutions, of questions rather than of answers. Instead of remaining forever fixated on 'doctrines' or 'ideas' as the stuff of our tradition, we need to learn to relate these to the human activity of inquiring, of questioning, which gives them their relevance and concrete meaning. When we do so, Blumenberg suggests, we may find other kinds of continuity besides those of rightful inheritance or illegitimate misappropriation, and other kinds of novelty besides that of unprovoked 'creation from nothing.'

To summarize very briefly the analysis that Blumenberg unfolds in part II: The problem to which modern "self-assertion" (science, art, 'individualism,' etc.) is a response was posed for us by the overriding emphasis in the late Middle Ages on the theme of divine omnipotence. As expressed in Ockham's nominalism, it was this theme that finally destroyed the credibility—in a sense, even the conceivability—of the cosmic order to which Löwith looks back and that High Scholastic

Aristotelianism had tried to reaffirm. Given the absolute and unlimited power of God to create (or destroy) whatever He pleases, with or without reason (the only ultimate reason being "Quia voluit" [because He willed it]), the actual, finite world becomes totally contingent, no longer the embodiment of the full range and variety—the order—of what is possible. In the face of such utter contingency, one can, of course, persist in focusing one's hopes on salvation in the 'next' world, which was the official medieval 'solution'; but this solution was rendered just as desperate by omnipotence, in the form of (undeserved and unearnable) 'grace' and predestination, as was the older reliance on the cosmos. Alternatively, one can set out (experimentally, hypothetically) to construct whatever may be possible in this particular world in the way of security and self-realization "even if there is no God" (part II, chapter 3, last paragraph). If one takes the latter route, one need not be applying Christian ideas in a non-Christian context (trying "to be God oneself," as Luther suspected—see part II, chapter 3, text to note 55), but neither is one starting absolutely from scratch. The nature of what one undertakes is deeply determined by the problem—the contingency of existence in the world—that one is addressing. And that problem is evidently not an 'eternal' one. (Or else, Löwith might ask, why didn't the Greeks et al. address themselves to it?) It is posed, and becomes inescapable, at a particular historical point for particular historical reasons, which we have to reconstruct if we want to understand our age and ourselves.

In his reconstruction of this process, Blumenberg does not put "theological absolutism" in the place of Descartes's *Cogito* as the truly absolute and inexplicable source of the modern age, now pushed one chronological step backward in history. Instead, he interprets it, in some of the most fascinating passages of part II (chapters 1 and 3), as the ultimate working out of the 'solution' developed by the Christian "Fathers," in particular by St. Augustine, to the problem of Gnostic dualism. And Gnosticism in its turn appears as a new response to the ancient questions (about order versus chaos, for example) that had reached such an extreme form in, for instance, Neoplatonism (see part II, chapter 1, first three paragraphs) as to be ripe for reformulation as the contest of good with evil.

4. Blumenberg's Explanation of the Modern Doctrines of 'Inevitable Progress'

It is important to notice, though, that problems or questions do not always function in this relatively straightforward way as the focus of the central interests and efforts of an age, from which its secondary ideas flow (like progress from "self-assertion"). Questions that do not have such a central role do not for that reason fade away when an epochal change dissolves the context in which they originated. And this fact helps to explain some very confusing phenomena, for example, the great modern 'philosophies of history.' Löwith might very naturally have responded to Blumenberg's critique of his interpretation of progress as secularized eschatology with the following question: If the modern idea of progress is essentially so modest as your account of its genesis implies—just a hypothetical projection into the future of the kind of process and success that Europeans had begun to experience by the seventeenth century in certain areas of endeavor—then why is it that in nearly all of its best-known modern formulations, in the great 'philosophies of history,' it is presented as the universal and necessary pattern of human history as a whole?¹ However, a defense of the legitimacy of the modern age does not entail a defense of every prominent phenomenon of that age, but only of those that are essential to its central undertaking. And the notion of progress as a necessary and inevitable process is certainly not essential to human self-assertion; indeed from one point of view it might almost be described as its antithesis. Blumenberg describes this notion, and the 'philosophies of history' that embody it, as the result of an attempt—which was 'natural' but was nevertheless doomed to failure—to answer a premodern question by modern means, means that were not adapted to the task. Christianity, he says, through its claim to be able to account for the overall pattern of world history in terms of the poles of creation and eschatology, had put in place a new question, one that had been (as Löwith so forcefully insists) unknown to the Greeks: the question of the meaning and pattern of world history as a whole. When modern thinkers abandoned the Christian 'answers,' they still felt an obligation to answer the questions that went with them—to show that modern thought was equal to any challenge, as it were. It was this compulsion to "reoccupy" the "position" of the medieval Christian schema of creation and eschatology—rather than leave it empty, as a rationality

that was aware of its own limits might have done—that led to the grandiose constructions of the ‘philosophy of history.’ And naturally these constructions drew more attention to themselves than did the modest idea of possible progress that was overextended (and discredited) in their service.

5. Some Other “Reoccupied Positions” in the Modern Age

Up to this point in my summary of Blumenberg’s analysis of the modern age, the idea of progress has been my leading example, and for several reasons: because its problematic character is widely recognized, because it has been the subject of a highly focused attack in Löwith’s *Meaning in History*, and because that attack led directly to the general question of the legitimacy of the modern age as a whole. The alternative analysis that I have been describing—according to which the legitimate modern idea of ‘possible progress’ was distorted and largely discredited as a result of its being forced to “reoccupy” a “position” that was established by medieval Christianity (the “position” of an account of history as a whole)—is an instance of a pattern that Blumenberg describes as affecting quite a number of equally important modern ideas, so that it ultimately serves to clarify and to defend the legitimacy of the full range of what Blumenberg takes to be genuinely modern. I shall now briefly list four other instances of Blumenberg’s use of his model of “reoccupation,” so as to give an idea of the range of its applicability and to lead into a concluding discussion of the model in its full generality. Without developing these instances in the extensive detail that they deserve, I shall add a few comments on their potential importance for the particular areas of inquiry in which they are situated.

First, Blumenberg tells us in part II, chapter 2, that the assumption that “the world has a particular quality for man”—specifically, an “endangering” quality—which “prescribes his basic mode of behavior” as “self-preservation” (part II, chapter 2, last two paragraphs), reoccupies the position of the idea of divine providence as the teleology determining the “quality” of the world for man, and thus man’s necessary basic mode of behavior. This is one upshot of Blumenberg’s reformulation (to which most of this chapter is devoted) of Nietzsche’s critique of the remnants of teleology in modern thought, specifically in the idea of ‘self-preservation’ which is such a powerful ‘overriding end’ in modern theories all the way from Hobbes to Darwin and

contemporary 'sociobiology.' Blumenberg wants to distinguish sharply between this teleology, with its requirement of behavior aimed at "self-preservation," and "self-assertion," which is not required by anything inherent in the world or in man, but is purely historical. If I read this chapter correctly, Blumenberg is suggesting that the relation between "self-preservation" and "self-assertion" is the same as that between "inevitable Progress" and the possible progress that he defends. It is certainly true that since the time of Hobbes, if not earlier, the self-assertion of individuals has been seen largely as their quest for survival and 'security,' which is a much narrower project than "self-assertion" as Blumenberg defines it—as the "existential program" in which "man posits his existence in a historical situation and indicates to himself how he is going to deal with the reality surrounding him and what use he will make of the possibilities that are open to him" (part II, chapter 2, third paragraph). What seems to have happened, then, is that our unformulated, semiconscious project of self-assertion has been forced to play the role of—to "reoccupy" the "position" of—a basic mode of behavior required by a supposedly crucial characteristic of reality. So it has appeared mainly in the guise of the 'self-preservation' required by the 'dangerous character' of reality. And in the process, self-assertion's authentic meaning and relation to the past (as a response to "theological absolutism" in the process that I have sketched), has been prevented from coming into focus, and it has been discredited as a merely 'instinctive,' egotistical, and ignoble attitude in comparison to the ideal human attitudes of other ages.

A second example: The early modern mechanistic mode of explanation of nature, with its absolute 'matter,' reoccupies the position of the late-medieval nominalistic mode of explanation with its absolute (divine) 'will.' (See part II, chapter 3, paragraph 15.) When we consider how since Descartes the syndrome of the 'mind/body problem' repeatedly emerges from the feeling that matter is somehow 'ultimate,' in which case 'mind' must be reducible to it—and how, in the idealistic reaction, exactly the reverse is asserted—then the potential importance of this suggestion becomes evident. Again, Blumenberg is not indicting modern materialism as mistaken or illegitimate *in toto*. Instead, he is suggesting that a legitimate core idea—that of a reality that can be grasped mathematically (*res extensa*: 'matter') for the purpose of "self-assertion"—has been forced into the "inherited," alien "position" of

the sole principle of all explanation or understanding whatever. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of part II lay out an extensive context for this suggestion.

A third case is the supposedly secularized paradise or messianic expectations of Marxism. Blumenberg points out (part I, chapter 7, last three paragraphs) that as with 'progress,' the process and the end state projected by Marx differ from the religious ones in that their accomplishment is supposed to be the result of immanent human processes rather than of transcendent intervention. The *appearance* of secularization here arises, Blumenberg says, because just as the philosophy of history "reoccupied the position of" the "salvation story" (from the Creation to the Last Judgment) as an account of world history as a whole, so the ideal of communism ends by reoccupying the position of the 'beatific vision' of Christian theology as a conception of happiness that (unlike classical, Greek conceptions, for example) cannot be disappointed by concrete experience. "The constancy of language" here (the 'evangelistic' language of, say, the *Communist Manifesto*) "is an index of a constant function for consciousness but not of an identity of content." And presumably the Marxian 'content' cannot fairly be judged on the basis of the role it has been forced into, any more than the modest idea of progress can be so judged.

A fourth example is to be found in part I, chapter 8, where Blumenberg deals with the thesis (put forward by Carl Schmitt, the controversial professor of jurisprudence, in his *Politische Theologie* [*Political Theology*] of 1922 and 1934) that "all the significant concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts." (See part I, chapter 8, text to note 3.) Blumenberg introduces his discussion of Schmitt's 'secularization theory' (a discussion that is much expanded in this edition to deal with a new book that Schmitt published in 1970 under the title *Politische Theologie II*) with four paragraphs on the relation between Christianity and modern politics—more specifically, between theological absolutism and modern political absolutism. It is clear from this discussion and from his subsequent discussion of Schmitt's secularization theory of the state that Blumenberg does not share that theory. It is also clear, however, that he agrees with Schmitt that there is a marked contrast between "the modern doctrine of the state" (where Schmitt has in mind concepts like sovereignty, *raison d'état*, 'will,' 'decision,' 'friend and enemy') and the modern rationalism that tries to comprehend politics in terms of such concepts as contract, consent, liberty, law, and rights. The latter concepts are all consistent

with "self-assertion" and the fundamental individualism that it implies, whereas the former, those used to explicate the notion of the state itself, all suggest the possibility, with which we are so familiar in modern history, of the state overriding the interests of individuals. How is this discord within both modern thought and modern practice to be explained? Again, Blumenberg clearly agrees with Schmitt that medieval Christianity is a necessary part of the explanation. There is a "mirror-image correspondence between political and theological absolutism." The "intolerability of the factionalization of absolute [religious] positions within the state" that resulted from the Reformation "was counteracted by means of the transfer of the category of the unconditional friend/enemy relation onto the conflicts between the national states that were in the process of integrating themselves. . . ." (It is no accident that both royal "absolutism" and Hobbes's theory of the sovereign were born during this period.) But Blumenberg evidently does not see this "projection," the national state's "taking over of the pseudomorphic qualities of absolute [divine] authority," as a process of secularization. "The symmetry of the development of internal conflicts between absolute positions and the setting up of an absolute agent may be describable as an 'inducing' process but hardly as the transfer of specific attributes of one realm to the other"; it was a consequence of the disintegration of Christianity as a unity in the European world, of the multiplication of Christian 'denominations' and the political problems created by that multiplication, rather than of a unilateral and uncoerced 'adoption' of theological attributes by the secular state.

Blumenberg does not use the terminology of "reoccupied positions" here, but I believe that the same idea underlies what he says. He has described another case where a conflict in modern thought appears to be explained by a 'secularization' theory, but that explanation in fact distorts the reality. As he said in his brief discussion of Schmitt in the first edition of this book, "The doctrine that 'all the significant concepts of the modern doctrine of the state are secularized theological concepts' has not become more plausible since it was propounded in 1922, to the extent that we have learned to doubt whether this 'modernity' was ever modern—here there are the striking nonsimultaneities in what is chronologically simultaneous, the durability of the not yet modern in the modern age, the fundamental delay of enlightenment."^m In other words, the "modern doctrine of the state," like 'inevitable

Progress' and so forth, is not modern in the same sense as "self-assertion" is and needs to be understood and radically criticized if self-assertion, enlightenment, and true modernity are ever to prevail.

6. Blumenberg's Project as a Radicalization of Enlightenment

These accounts and others that I have not the space to mention cut a wide swath through the intellectual phenomena of our age. One could imagine them, if effective, clearing our minds—and even, by extension, our lives—of some very pervasive and destructive patterns of confusion. To that extent, Blumenberg's work would embody in a new form the Enlightenment's vision of philosophy as a liberating force in the world. Thus it is very important that we be clear about the nature of his model and its implications.

What exactly does Blumenberg mean when he says that these phenomena—the great philosophies of history, the axiom that the self's overriding concern is 'self-preservation,' early modern mechanistic materialism, the anticipation of communism, the modern 'primacy of the political,' and so on—result from the reoccupation of positions established by medieval Christianity? To begin with, some of our ideas, like the original modest idea of possible progress, are simply articulations of the "existential program" of "self-assertion." Others, however, are attempts at answering questions that do not naturally arise as part of the project of "self-assertion," questions that we "inherit" from earlier phases of our history and that we feel we ought to be able to answer. But the process is not as simple as this description makes it sound. There are two important qualifications. First, of course, the "inherited" questions have lost their specifically medieval/Christian character. We no longer feel, for example, that we need or ought to be able to describe the overall pattern of God's dealings with the world, as medieval Christianity did. Instead, we want to be able to describe the overall pattern of history as a whole—a project that does not, on the face of it, necessarily require the theorist to have recourse to hypotheses that modern rationality has forsworn. And second, the problem to be addressed has more the character of a need, or perhaps an obligation, than the articulate, conceptual character of an explicit question. In the medieval Christian context it was so fundamental as hardly to require formulation as a question—obviously one wanted to be able to grasp the overall pattern of God's dealings with the

world; otherwise what was the purpose of revelation? In the modern age we inherit this need, and in trying to satisfy it with the means available to us, we *imply* what we now understand the question to be, rather than consciously and critically stating it.

It is this quality of 'need' or 'obligation,' this absence of explicit derivation and formulation as a question—and the 'translations' that these qualities make possible between one epoch and the succeeding one—that lead Blumenberg to use the metaphor of a system of "positions" that are "occupied" (and "reoccupied") by ideas. And this metaphor, explicated in terms of the contrast of "content" with "function," figures in his central doctrine that "totally heterogeneous contents [can] take on identical functions in specific positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself" (part I, chapter 6, third paragraph). The contrast of content with function is what ultimately distinguishes Blumenberg's model from the secularization theory, which it obviously resembles in the importance it assigns to the medieval Christian experience in determining modern phenomena. The idea of progress, for example, is viewed neither as a secularized Christian idea nor as a modern idea unaffected by Christianity; in Blumenberg's account, it is essentially modern in its content (the initial idea of possible progress) but heavily affected by Christianity in the function that the content is forced to perform (the function of explaining the meaning and pattern of history as a whole). (This is in addition, of course, to being "affected by Christianity" in the sense that self-assertion, of which it is a part, originates as a response to the crisis of medieval Christianity, to theological absolutism.)

What exactly does Blumenberg expect to result from this sort of analysis? Its implications obviously extend well beyond the satisfaction of scholarly curiosity about the origin of modern intellectual phenomena. Certain ideas are shown to follow from a project or a posture—"human self-assertion"—which while not inevitable or universally obligatory, at least seems to involve no necessary 'false consciousness'; while a second set of ideas (that of 'inevitable Progress,' for example) is presented as resulting from attempts to meet 'needs' that are not rational," are not humanly universal, but came into being as the presumed background of a third set of ideas (medieval, Christian) that are incompatible with the first set. One cannot help thinking that to the extent that this situation is understood, the power of the second set of ideas must be diminished. However, unlike his eighteenth-century

predecessors, Blumenberg has a powerful awareness of the obstacles to this sort of enlightenment. It is not by accident that he uses the term "need" for the motive that produces "reoccupations" rather than using the dismissive terminology of "idols" or "prejudices" with which science and enlightenment were originally satisfied to label their opponents. He thus recognizes a certain 'rootedness' in the phenomenon that cannot simply be swept away by rationality, though it should be noted that this is not the 'rootedness' of a 'philosophical anthropology'—if needs come into being in history, presumably they can also disappear, or at least be altered by their owners' changed attitudes to them.

Blumenberg often mentions the Enlightenment's intolerance of the ages preceding it, expressed in the common idea that dogmatic religion prospered only because of the lies of priests—an intolerance that led the Enlightenment to underestimate the resilience of some of the 'prejudices' that it set out to combat. He clearly intends not to repeat this sort of error.^o And yet the question might be asked whether he does not slip into a similar error when he distinguishes between questions that we confront as a result of "reoccupations" of medieval Christian "positions" and those that arise directly from the project of self-assertion and appears to suggest that it is the latter with which we should really be concerned. A defender of the timeless nature of metaphysical questions (the "great questions," as they are often called) might argue that this is an invidious distinction, that all questions should be taken on their own terms, whether they are open to modern, scientific treatment or not (unless we are going to fall into the kind of dogmatism represented by logical positivism, which declared questions that were not amenable to scientific treatment meaningless^p), and that the way in which questions happen to have arisen has nothing to do with their claim to our attention.

Blumenberg is so aware of this possible objection that he has devoted a major part of his book—part III, on "The 'Trial' of Theoretical Curiosity"—to a consideration of its nature and historical roots. For the innocence of theoretical curiosity—in other words, the equivalence of all theoretical questions, none of which are to be regarded as inherently distracting or unworthy of attention—is itself one of the distinctive beliefs of the modern age, which that age asserted against the medieval Christian suspicion (beginning with Augustine) that curiosity distracted the soul from its overriding interest in God and salvation. If we decide that certain questions are to be avoided because

they would not have arisen in the modern context had we not felt obliged to emulate the accomplishments of preceding ages, this would seem to raise questions about our faith in the innocence of curiosity. Is it possible that Blumenberg is again prescribing a kind of discipline of the soul, based on a fear of its getting dispersed and lost among incompatible interests?

The answer is no, Blumenberg is not constraining curiosity because he is not in fact recommending that certain questions be avoided. Rather, he is expanding the range of curiosity, and compensating for the difficulty or impossibility of satisfying it in certain cases, by raising and undertaking to answer second-order questions about how the troublesome questions of, for example, the philosophy of history arose. What he says to the defender of metaphysics is that when certain questions have been frustrating all efforts at answering them for centuries, sometimes to the point (as in the great philosophies of history) where those efforts have themselves become disreputable or have been abandoned in exhaustion, we should try stating them clearly *as* questions and investigating the circumstances in which questions of this nature first came to be asked. When we satisfy this second-order kind of curiosity, we may discover that the question seems more at home in its original circumstances—as the question of the meaning and pattern of the world's history as a whole, for example, seems in the context of medieval Christianity—than it has ever seemed in the modern contest. Without perhaps being critically 'destroyed' or removed from the system of 'valid' questions by this process, the question certainly presents itself in a new light as a result of it. Seeing the question in this light, we are no longer simply curious people who happen to be confronted with an interesting and seemingly important question. Now, as a result of our analysis, we are conscious of our particular situation and commitments in relation to that question: a situation (probably) outside the context of its origin, and commitments (probably) that make it exceedingly difficult for us to generate an answer to it that we can defend against our own criticism. But this is not a merely negative result: It is a positive step forward in self-knowledge. By questioning the nature of our own questioning, we alter the dynamic of our curiosity not by fiat, by proscribing questions, but by extending it to and satisfying it on another level.⁹

An important consequence of our increased self-consciousness (since the eighteenth century) about central modern concepts like science

and progress, and of our increased sympathy for and understanding of other periods in our history (and other cultures) in which these concepts did not (and do not) play a central role, has been an ongoing and pervasive split in our thinking. On the one hand, we depend on science, progress, and so forth, and the rationality they represent, to an ever increasing degree. On the other hand, we often wonder what the grounds for this dependence are—is it not simply an expression of one among many possible human attitudes? Science and progress will never answer the 'great questions' of metaphysics; they will not save our souls; they will not even fill us with the *eudemonia* that the Greeks expected from the completion of theory, because they will never be complete. How is it that we are committed to them? Should we not perhaps be able to go beyond this seemingly arbitrary commitment?

And yet when we do attempt to go beyond it or back behind it—to formulate an alternative world view—the possibilities are so endless, and the grounds for choosing between them (other than faith and conversion) so slight, that we generally wind up in a very unsatisfying relativism: 'understanding' everything, committed to nothing.

Blumenberg's response to this situation is, first, to demonstrate that modernity is not an arbitrary commitment—that while it is not a transformed, 'secularized' version of earlier, Christian commitments, it is very much a product of them, as a response to the crisis of the medieval Christian world view, which in turn was intimately determined by what went before it. In other words, our modern commitments are highly determined by our history.

At the same time, by demonstrating this and also demonstrating (by means of the functional model and the idea of "reoccupation") that modernity's problems do not result from the inconsistency of its authentic elements, he shows that modern science and progress may be capable of more than we imagine in moods of sober resignation to our historical 'fate.' If modern science can clarify itself—the historical conditions of its possibility and necessity, and thus its nature; and if it can distinguish the questions to which it is suited from those that are forced upon it; and if it can help us, through this knowledge, to revise our attitudes to the latter; then it will be helping us to 'master' reality not only in the sense of 'the facts' but also in the sense of the very process of inquiry itself. And this would go a long way toward overcoming the alienation from that process that is expressed in both

our resignation and our relativistic dallying with 'alternatives.' As Blumenberg writes:

There are phases of objectivization that loose themselves from their original motivation (the science and technology of the later phases of the modern age provide a stupendous example of this!); and to bring them back into their human function, to subject them again to man's purposes in relation to the world, requires an unavoidable counter-exertion. The medieval system ended in such a phase of objectivization that has become autonomous, of hardening that is insulated from what is human. What is here called "self-assertion" is the countermove of retrieving the lost motives, of new concentration on man's self-interest. (Pp. 177-178)

Retrieving the lost motives of modern science and philosophy—restoring their relation to man's self-interest—by articulating and pursuing them more radically than has hitherto been done, is the central purpose of this book.

Notes

a. Throughout this introduction and the translation that follows it, single quotation marks have been used exclusively as 'scare quotes,' to draw attention to special uses of terms or to emphasize the problematic status, in the discussion, of the concepts referred to by the words in question. The only exception to this rule is a quotation within a quotation (i.e., within a set of double quotes), which requires single quotation marks for contrast.

b. A valuable, concise summation of the struggles of Anglo-American 'analytic philosophy' with the Cartesian tradition can be found in Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979).

c. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949—German edition: *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen: die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953). Löwith's other major work available in English is *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964)—original German edition: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Zurich: Europa Verlag, 1941).

d. "Science," here and throughout this introduction and the translation that follows, refers to what in German is called *Wissenschaft*, which covers both the natural sciences and the 'cultural sciences' [*Geisteswissenschaften*], to which Blumenberg's own work, for example, belongs.

e. For a more detailed discussion of Löwith's *Meaning in History*, Blumenberg's critique, and Löwith's response to that critique, see my "Progress, Secularization and Modernity: The Löwith/Blumenberg Debate," *New German Critique* 22 (winter 1981): 63-79.

f. Jakob Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie* (Bern: A. Francke, 1947); Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957)—later editions entitled *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*—German edition: *Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr,

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1958); C. F. von Weizsäcker, *The Relevance of Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964)—German edition: *Die Tragweite der Wissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 1966). Bultmann's and von Weizsäcker's books were both originally Gifford lectures, which is why their original publications were in English.

g. *Meaning in History* (cited in note c), p. 207.

h. Those who are acquainted with the writings of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss will recognize the affinity between their attitudes to ancient philosophy and Löwith's.

i. Two major earlier 'secularization' theorists, Max Weber and Carl Schmitt, might be seen as forerunners of this wave of the 1950s. Their writings did not, however, lend themselves so readily to imitation or generalization as Löwith's did. In Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the "secularization" process was almost an afterthought, not essential to the central thesis of the book. And for Schmitt (as Blumenberg describes in part I, chapter 8) secularization was (uniquely) a category of *legitimacy*, which was not an interpretation that could meet the kinds of needs that Löwith's did.

j. Review of part I of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* in *Philosophische Rundschau* 15 (1968):199.

k. For Blumenberg's definition of the term, see part II, chapter 2, paragraph 3.

l. Such a question is implied by a broader statement on p. 197 of Löwith's review (cited in note j).

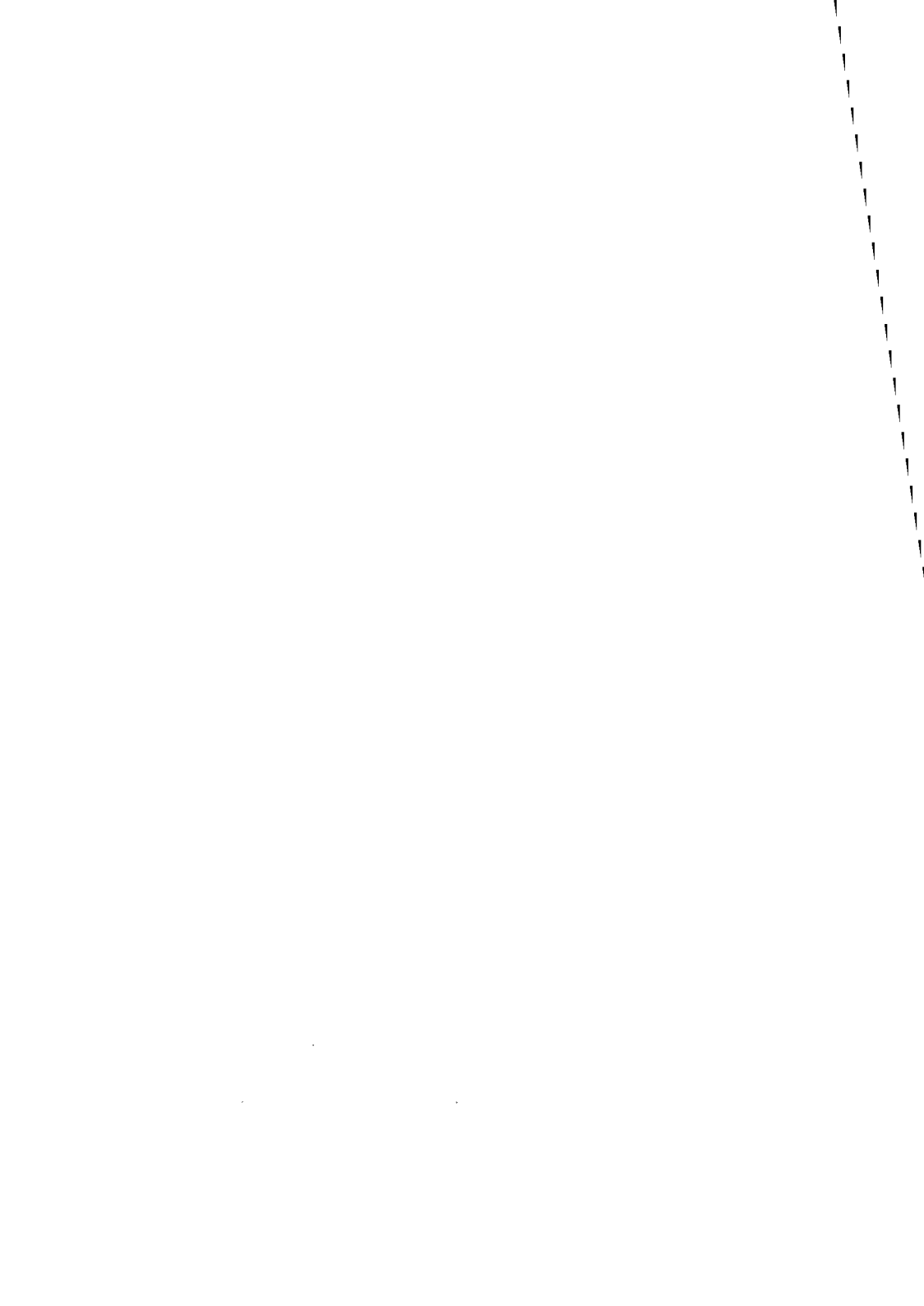
m. *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 60.

n. Blumenberg described the need for an account of the pattern of history as a whole as "not, in itself, rational" in the first edition (cited in note m), p. 36.

o. As is also clear from the themes of several of his other works: "Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 6 (1960):7–142; *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer: Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp taschenbuch wissenschaft #289, 1979); *Arbeit am Mythos* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979); and *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981). These examine the nature of metaphor and myth and their persistence through all the 'enlightenment' of the modern age. In fact a major focus of Blumenberg's remaining major work, *Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), is on the influence of Copernicanism as a dominant *metaphor* in modern times.

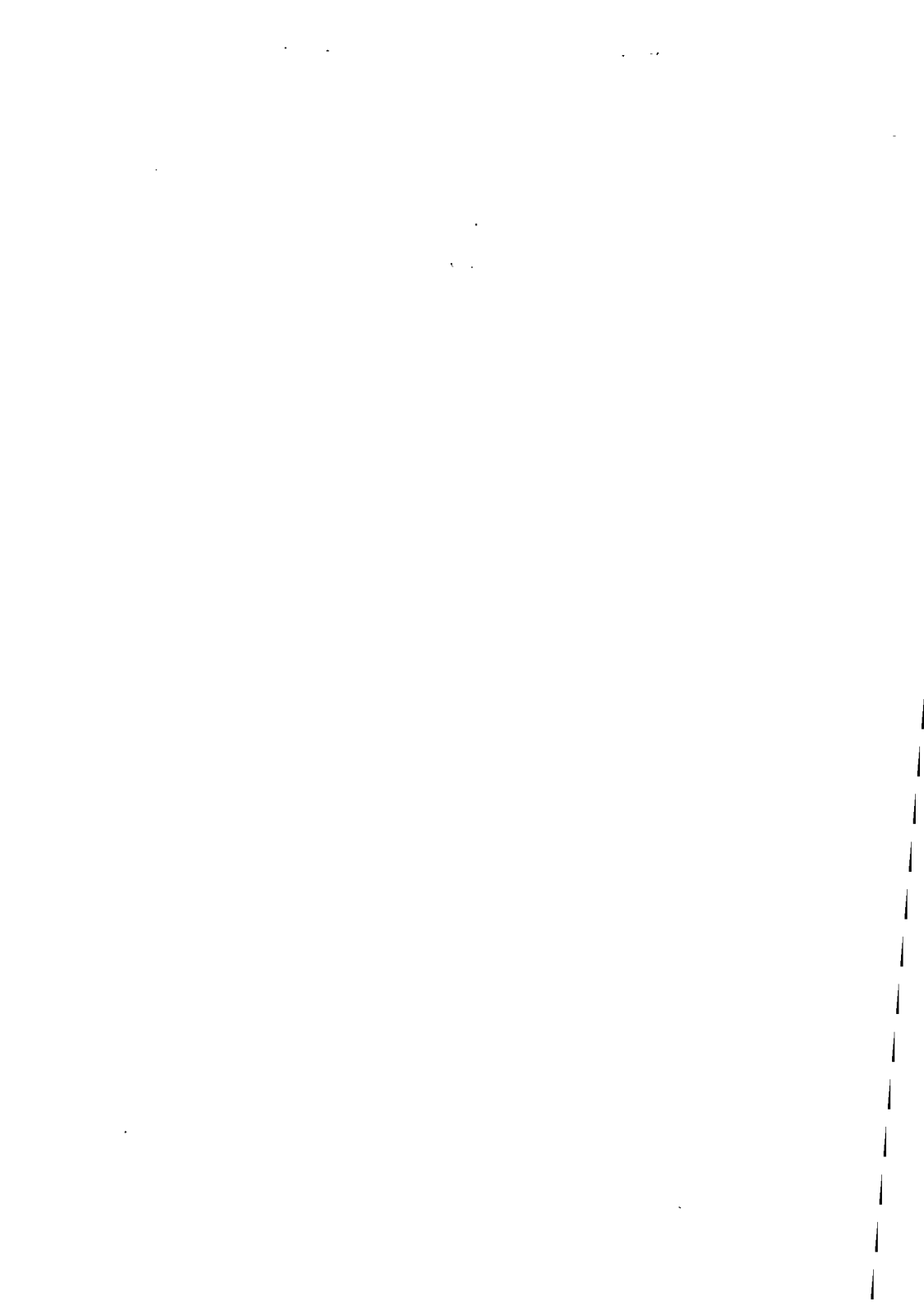
p. Blumenberg has in fact been accused, by at least one German critic, of falling into "positivism." See G. Rohrmoser, *Emanzipation und Freiheit* (Munich: Goldmann, 1970), pp. 13–14.

q. This turning can be seen as an extension (and a reformulation) of Kant's "transcendental" turning, which sought to protect reason from self-inflicted antinomies through inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of objective knowledge, and thus to limit reason's ambitions by enhancing its self-knowledge. The relation is evident in Blumenberg's discussion of Kant in part III, chapter 10.



I

**Secularization: Critique of a
Category of Historical Wrong**



Status of the Concept

What the term "secularization"^a signifies should, it seems, be readily determinable. Whether as an observation, a reproach, or an endorsement, everyone is familiar with this designation for a long-term process by which a disappearance of religious ties, attitudes to transcendence, expectations of an afterlife, ritual performances, and firmly established turns of speech is driven onward in both private and daily public life. One need not even stick to the data (though of course they are the easiest to fix empirically and statistically) of institutional membership and influence, which are characterized by a higher degree of inertia than their motivational basis in the human life-world. It used to be one of those standing turns of speech to lament the world's becoming "ever more worldly" (rather than ever less so), while now what is asserted is that the modern age is an epoch of pure "worldliness," and its body politic is accordingly the secular state.

We would not be able to accept the formulas of 'secularization' as so much a matter of course if we did not find ourselves still within the horizon of the operation of this process: We are describing something that would not even exist for us if we were not still in a position to understand what had to precede it, what the hope of salvation, what the next world, transcendence, divine judgment, refraining from involvement in the world and falling under the influence of the world once meant—that is, to understand the elements of that 'unworldliness' that must after all be implied as a point of departure if we are to be able to speak of "secularization." That there are fewer sacred things

and more profane ones is a quantitative determination to which any number of differentiations could be appended in order to describe this same disappearance. Its final stage would be a situation in which no remains of these elements were left in existence, but at that point one would cease to be able to understand the term "secularization" at all. In this descriptive sense one can cite almost anything as a consequence of secularization, including specific losses, as, for instance, when someone says that the crisis of all authority is a phenomenon or a result of secularization. Something is absent, which is supposed to have been present before. Such a statement hardly explains the loss; it simply subsumes it in the great stock of what was somehow fated to disappear.

Bear in mind also that the use of the expression no longer implies any clear judgment of value. Even one who deplores secularization as the decay of a former capacity for transcendence does so with hardly less resignation than someone who takes it as the triumph of enlightenment—since after all it has not turned out to be the final, definitive triumph. The historian will incline to neither attitude. But what attitude will be appropriate for him when he speaks of "secularization"? One would think that that would have been to some extent clarified. It is just that assumption that will be disputed here.

Expressions of such a generous character, of such a degree of generality and intransitive indeterminacy, are allowed to pass, in our overrich supply of terminology, until almost without arousing notice or suspicion they present themselves in a more precise function. The world that became ever more worldly was a subject whose extension was about as obscure as that of the impersonal "it" in the proposition "It's raining." But in the more precise function, propositions of an entirely different form appear, propositions of the form 'B is the secularized A.' For example: The modern work ethic is secularized monastic asceticism; The world revolution is the secularized expectation of the end of the world; The president of the Federal Republic is a secularized monarch. Such propositions define an unequivocal relation between whence and whither, an evolution, a change in the attributes of a substance. The great all-inclusive process of the secularization of the world now no longer appears as a quantitative loss but rather as an aggregate of specifiable and transitively qualitative transformations in which in each case the later phase is possible and intelligible only in relation to the earlier phase assigned to it. What we have here is

no longer the simple comparative statement that the world has become more 'worldly' but rather, in each asserted case, only the assertion of a specific mutation leading to the specific 'product of secularization.'

I am not proposing a linguistic prohibition here. Anyone who wants to speak of secularization as a tidal wave, which at a particular time has reached a particular point, which perhaps presses irresistibly forward or may be dammable, which here or there breaches the dam, which appears to recede at another point—such a person may hold to his description of changing conditions and their general direction, unaffected by what is at issue here. Only the claim to render intelligible by this terminology something that would otherwise not be intelligible, or would be less so, will be contradicted here.

Insofar as "secularization" is nothing but a spiritual anathema upon what has transpired in history since the Middle Ages, it belongs to a vocabulary whose explanatory value depends on presuppositions that are not available to theory and that cannot be credited to or expected of the understanding of reality that is itself characterized as "worldly." But secularization has been accepted as a category for the interpretation of historical circumstances and connections even by people who could not be prepared to conform to the theological premises. Here the difference between the theological and the historical uses of the categories of worldliness and secularization lies neither in a change of the prescribed evaluation nor in the reinterpretation of loss as emancipation. For a positive evaluation of secularization is perfectly possible even in theology: The very people who were attempting to restore the radicalness of the original religious distance from the world and to renew theology's declarations of transcendence "dialectically" could see in the massive evidence of the manifestation of the world as 'worldliness' the advantage of its unmistakable character of immanence. What is foreign to the world, and appears to it as the paradoxical demand that it give itself up, was supposed to withdraw itself, in a new distinctness, from the entanglement and camouflage in which, perhaps for the sake of demonstrable success, it had become falsely familiar and acceptable.¹ A theology of 'division,' of crisis,² had to be interested in making clear the worldliness of the world rather than in overlaying it with the sacred. That is what gave the use of the term "secularization" its specific theological pathos.

The full calamity of the world—but precisely of the 'world,' in the full sense of the term—is required in order to secure evidence for the

expectation of a salvation that is 'not of this world'—however such calamity or salvation may (epochally or episodically) be defined. Once 'secularization' had become the cultural-political program of emancipation from all theological and ecclesiastical dominance, of the liquidation of the remnants of the Middle Ages, it could equally well be formulated as a postulate for the clarification of fronts, for the decisive and ineluctable division of souls (of 'the sheep from the goats') in anticipation of the final eschatological judgment dividing 'this world' from 'the next.' Thus what had in fact occurred in the process of secularization did not have to be protested as a loss of substance but could appear as an abandonment of encumbrances. The secularization that was thus expected to clarify fronts went over, in a not untypical process of reception—or, more harshly put, of the capture of terminology—from one front to the other. The case of "secularization" is not the last one in which such a crossover has occurred.

What followed the theology of crisis (and its existential-theological forerunners) lay in the same tendential direction: a theological justification of secularization. From an unexpected direction—that of theology itself—came vindication of Feuerbach's thesis that it could only be understood as a detour of anthropology. The patterns and schemas of the salvation story were to prove to be ciphers and projections of intraworldly problems, like a foreign language in which is expressed the absolutism of the world, of man, of society, so that all unworldliness would be a metaphor that had to be retranslated into literal speech. The problem in such a case, quite logically, is not secularization but the detour that made it necessary in the first place. For detours, of course, we do have the trusty schema of the consciousness that finds its way to itself, that achieves consciousness of its own identity. What is in order after this detour is no longer the division of sheep from goats, the clarification of fronts, but rather the unveiling of the identity of the *one* interest for the realization of which a God had to exist at most as an assistant in the process of its accomplishment. But would it not have been better then if He had not existed at all?

The philosophical observer of this scene of theology's self-interpretation recognizes the familiar pattern of all self-pervations: the pattern of the reduction of the endangered substance to an intangible core content, of accepting the supposedly or actually relevant role of rendering theoretical service for this or that practice, in the end of making oneself at home in the role of assistant to the most

up-to-date human interest. The strength of these secularization theorems lies in the fact that they carry with them a supplementary theory, which not only makes it possible to find good, after the fact, the loss of respect and the forfeiture of meaning that has set in, but also provides itself with a revaluation of this process as itself a providential one. Thus a loss of power, influence, occupied positions, and cultural ambience can be understood "as a providential process with a purifying effect on Christianity."² Then the assessment of secularization as a threat to the existence of religious forms and contents in the world, as the decline of the respect accorded to theological statements and to their pragmatic transpositions, is only (in its turn) a 'worldly' fearfulness, which is no more suitable to the trustingness implied by faith than is a failure to understand the refusal of dominion that characterizes the biblical figure of the kenosis, of the savior as servant. Secularization itself is not refused but rather the service it is supposed to render as an argument vindicating the 'meaning,' the 'cultural value' of Christianity within the world. Not only is the end of history held in reserve for theology, but the historical process itself (contrary to all the apparent failures of earlier claims, if not to conquer the world, at least to explain it) is opened up to a comprehension that follows the schema of a contemporary paratheory, according to which resistance to therapy is the chief symptom of its progress toward its goal.

The world that in this way is not only accepted and tolerated but systematically 'provided for' cannot resist such cooptation by providence any more than it need do anything special in order to take upon itself a role whose point is precisely not to understand itself. Then the incomprehension of the historical or philosophical critic vis-à-vis the category of 'secularization' would be exactly what was to be expected of him. But at the same time this expectation cannot motivate him to decide not to seek further, by means of his own authentic capacity for comprehension, for what can be accomplished by means of the term "secularization."

The difficulty that begins here is due to the fact that everyone 'still' thinks he understands to a certain extent what is meant by the term "secularization" and ascribes the sense he finds in it to the common usage we are discussing. The query, what then it is meant to signify and to assert, must reckon with a certain annoyance on the part of the person to whom it is addressed. Is it not enough to admit that quantitative statement about the lessening of an influence, the dis-

appearance of an imprint, the subsidence of an intensity, in order to grasp the limiting case to which the formulation that describes worldliness as the signature of the modern age refers?

It is not only a question of where a linguistic element properly belongs, not only a question of words, but also a question of things. It must be remembered that the signature of the modern age has been described not only as the taking over and the expansion of the world but also as its loss. The contrast provided by this thesis of Hannah Arendt's, a thesis that is directed against the dogma of secularization, at least makes clearer what must be gained in the way of precision in order to make the concept of secularization fit for use in historiography.

Hannah Arendt speaks of an "unequaled worldlessness" as the hallmark of the modern age. "Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world." The reality of the world over against which he saw himself had at this very point begun to seem doubtful, in that direct contact through the senses had been exposed by mathematical physics as a presentation of only the superficial appearances of more substantial realities. This thesis also presents the modern age as a continuation of Christianity by other means, but as a continuation in the same direction, a direction of world alienation [*Entweltlichung*]. Man has "removed himself from the earth to a much more distant point than any Christian otherworldliness had ever removed him." However one may assess the weight of these statements, they do in any case show that the 'worldliness' of the modern age cannot be described as the recovery of a consciousness of reality that existed before the Christian epoch of our history. There is no historical symmetry according to which this worldliness would be, as it were, a disposition for the return of the Greeks' cosmos. The Renaissance was only the first misunderstanding of this sort, an attempt to forestall the new concept of reality that was making its entrance by interpreting it as the recurrence of a structure already experienced and manageable with familiar categories. The point is that 'the world' is not a constant whose reliability guarantees that in the historical process an original constitutive substance must come back to light, undisguised, as soon as the superimposed elements of theological derivation and specificity are cleared away. This unhistorical interpretation displaces the authenticity of the modern age, making it a remainder, a pagan substratum, which is

simply left over after the retreat of religion into autarkic independence from the world. In any case one does not achieve a historical understanding of secularization by conceiving its implied 'world' as the recovery of an 'original' reality that had been lost with the entry of Christianity. "Whatever the word 'secular' is meant to signify in current usage, historically it cannot possibly be equated with worldliness; modern man at any rate did not gain this world when he lost the other world, and he did not gain life, strictly speaking, either; he was thrust back upon it. . . ."³

Hannah Arendt's thesis of 'world alienation' is not, as such, the subject of our discussion here; but what it shows is the dubiousness of setting up worldliness and unworldliness as a pair of alternatives that are tipped now one way and now the other in history, so that when transcendent ties and hopes are abandoned, there is only one possible result. As soon as one leaves the sphere of influence of the theological system of categories, the world to which the modern age appears to have turned its full attention can be an 'unworldly' world in regard to its concept of reality or to the nature of its intuition as compared to an immediacy ascribed to the ancients. Only where the category of substance dominates the understanding of history are there repetitions, superimpositions and dissociations—and also, for that matter, disguises and unmaskings.

The question how the term "secularization" is used in texts of contemporary historical theory is directed, above all, at the difference between descriptive and explanatory uses. One particular type of statement does not, in accordance with its own claims, come up for discussion in this context at all because no greater objection can be brought against it than that very little is asserted by it. Even if what is meant is not only the qualitative disappearance of features having a sacred or ecclesiastical derivation but also a type of transformation of this realm of derivation itself, that is, an "alteration in the social form of religion" in the direction of a 'cultural-religious' function, and thus a "tendency towards the inner 'secularization'" of religious institutions themselves,⁴ still this means only an obscuring of differentiations, an approach toward and an increasing resemblance to what is expected (or maybe only what is supposed to be expected) by the surrounding society. Someone might say that it would be purely arbitrary, and excessively demanding, to ask, on methodological grounds, for more than this descriptive finding. Nor do I ask for anything more;

rather I encounter claims to something more, and in fact find these claims indicated by a specifically different manner of speaking. There is after all a difference between, on the one hand, saying that in a particular state the "secularization of the countryside" is very advanced, and that this is indicated by the empirical decline of obligations owed by village communities to the church, and, on the other hand, formulating the thesis that the capitalist valuation of success in business is the secularization of 'certainty of salvation' in the context of the Reformation doctrine of predestination. For quite unmistakably, in this latter thesis—a model one for the secularization theorem—a certain specific content is explained by another one preceding it, and indeed in such a way that the asserted transformation of the one into the other is neither an intensification nor a clarification but rather an alienation from its original meaning and function.

Clearly the characterization of a relation as the historical dependence of an "alienated" formation on an "original" one is not enough to make it a case for the meaningful application of the term "secularization." And here the question arises whether that which must still be added to complete the term's meaning is not unavoidably a theological element. Does the concept of secularization then go beyond what can be accomplished in the comprehension of historical processes and structures by implying not only a dependence but something like an exchange of worlds, a radical discontinuity of belonging, together with, at the same time, identity of that which belongs? Does this concept not introduce into our understanding of history the paradox that we can grasp the modern age's basic characteristic of 'worldliness' only under conditions that, precisely on account of this quality, must be inaccessible to us?

Hermann Lübbe has pointed out that "the use of concepts that are current in the 'politics of ideas' is not free of consequences" and that he who does not want to find himself unexpectedly in the front lines must be concerned about clarifying [*Aufklärung*] and neutralizing what is latent in concepts. Lübbe considers it "possible to delineate a strictly scientific use of the concept of secularization." In fact, he suggests, this would be "in agreement with the insights and aims of the most recent theology of secularization."⁵ Here one may question whether such a convergence of insight and interests must not encounter its limit at the point where 'clarification' [or 'Enlightenment': *Aufklärung*],^c which according to C. H. Ratschow's definition is nothing other than

“acute secularization,”⁶ proceeds to the secularization of the concept of secularization itself.

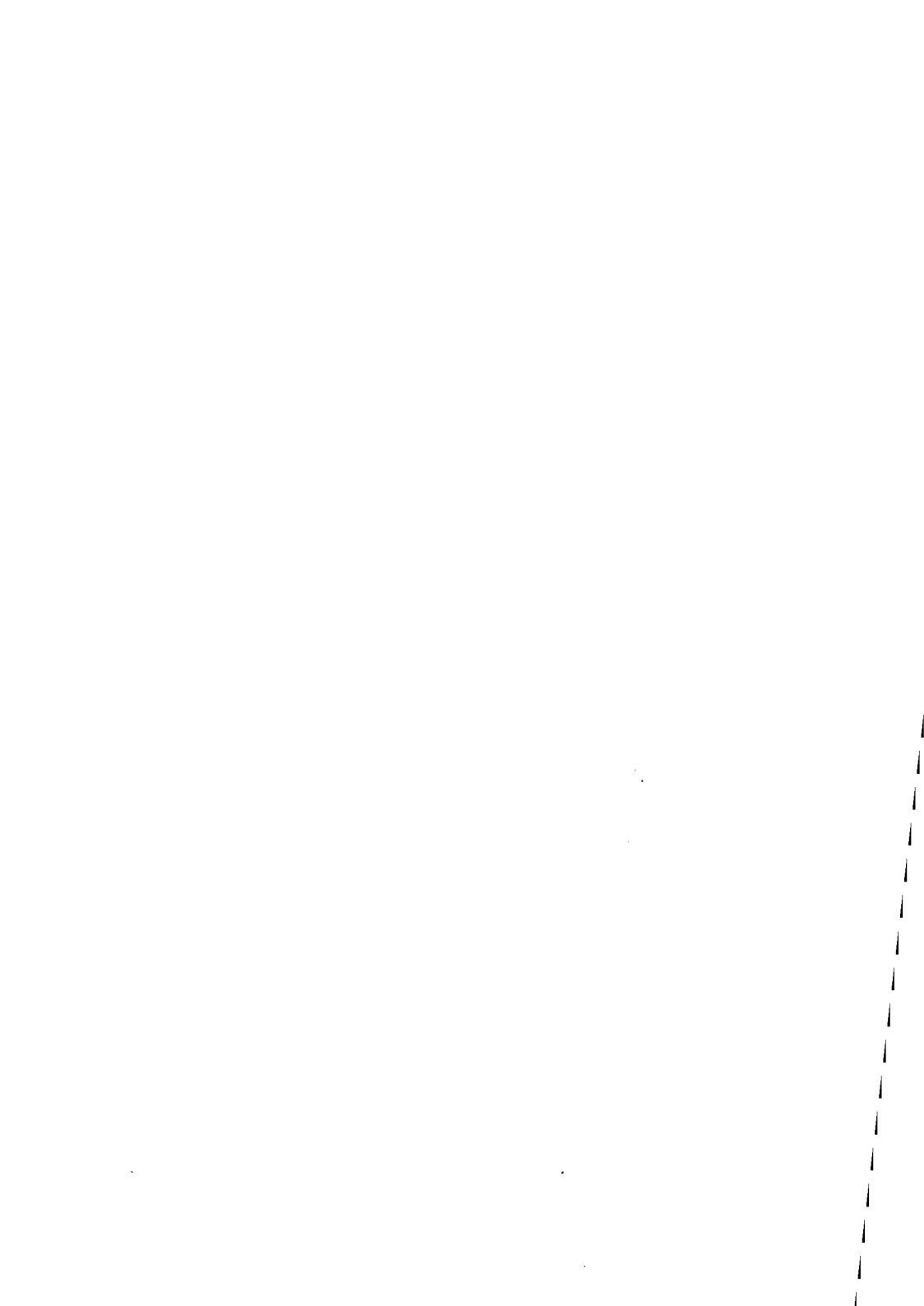
When the question is posed here of the possibility of a scientific use of the term “secularization,” the criterion of scientific status is not identical with the postulate of science as the only status. This clarification is called for in view of the joyful solidarity that has recently broken out among those who believe they can share in the overcoming of the limitations of that scientific status by means of an enharmonic confusion of interdisciplinary with superdisciplinary work. The mere symbiosis of opposition to ‘positivism’ (or to whatever is taken for it at any given time) does not by itself legitimize all of the heterogeneous presuppositions that have been brought into this relation.

Translator’s Notes

a. In German the terms *Säkularisierung* (literally: secularization) and *Verweltlichung* (literally: being made, or becoming, worldly) are used interchangeably because the *saeculum* from which the Latin *saecularisatio* derives (and thus *Säkularisierung* and “secularization”) refers to an “age,” hence “the present age,” “this world” (as opposed to the next), and ultimately “the world” as opposed to the transcendent. As English has no substantive term (such as “worldification”) corresponding to *Verweltlichung*, “secularization” has been used to translate both words. The reader will better appreciate a number of the author’s arguments if he remembers the equivalence of “secular” with “worldly” and bears in mind the connotations of the latter term each time he sees the word “secularization.”

b. The reference to “theology of crisis” is to the theology of Karl Barth and his followers, also known as “dialectical theology.” “Crisis” here is used in a sense relating to its Greek root verb, *krisinai*, which means to separate, to divide, to choose, or to judge.

c. The point of this sentence depends on a special characteristic of the German philosophical vocabulary that cannot be reproduced in English. *Die Aufklärung*, the German term for what we call “the Enlightenment,” has more useful connotations than our term because while in English we can only “enlighten” one another, in German one can *aufklären* (clear up, clarify) the subject itself. *Aufklärung*, then, designates not only a historical period (and a quasi-missionary activity: “carrying enlightenment” to other, benighted people) but also a type of activity directed at problems and subject matter generally, a type of activity that is epitomized in “the Enlightenment” but is understood to be possible and in order now as much as then. This is what makes possible the paradoxical situation in which Lübbe’s attempted “clarification” (*Aufklärung*) of the concept of secularization would itself (according to Ratschow’s definition of *Aufklärung*) be “acute secularization”—and the suggestion that a ‘neutral’ and uncommitted approach to the concept of secularization will be a difficult thing to achieve.



A Dimension of Hidden Meaning?

If one took the frequency of its application as evidence, there could be no doubt about the historical applicability of the category of secularization. Its productivity seems to be unlimited. To demonstrate the full extent of the phenomenon seems to me to be superfluous. The examples that I am about to present are only intended once again to create awareness of the way in which the concept is applied, so that the explanatory claim, as opposed to the merely quantitative statement and description of conditions, is not lost from view.

In modern epistemology the priority of the question of a guarantee of knowledge, of theoretical certainty, is said to be the secularization of the fundamental Christian problem of certainty of salvation. This connection is supposed to be made clear by the way in which the epistemological problematic emerged "from absolute doubt about reality as such"; that is, by the degree of absoluteness of the skepticism underlying the claim to certainty. It is further asserted of Descartes that the science he founded "will take over the function performed up to that point by church dogma, the function of a universal spiritual safeguard for existence." If that were so, then Descartes in his own case would already have fulfilled Ludwig Feuerbach's dictum: "Our philosophers up to now are nothing but mediated theologians, operating through the abstract concept."¹

Measured by the frequency of its repetition, the assertion that the modern work ethic is a "secularization of saintliness" and of the attendant forms of asceticism has made no less of an impression. But

the dandy too is supposed to be a secular descendent of the Christian saints, though he is also reminiscent—by Baudelaire's formula, that he causes astonishment but cannot be astonished himself—of the Stoic ideal of the wise man. Finally, the recklessness of self-disclosure in literary self-presentations of the most various kinds is supposed to be nothing other than the "secularized self-examination" of pietism and puritanism, the candor of religious reflection raised to a quasi-scientific precision, just as earlier the Spanish picaresque novel is supposed to have arisen from the prototype of Augustine's *Confessions*, and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* from the spiritual journal of the puritan, kept for the purpose of gaining certainty of salvation—in which connection the sheer survival of the shipwrecked Robinson as demiurge has made immanent that transcendent certainty of salvation.

I intend no polemic here. I do not wish to dispute the argumentation in individual cases. My only purpose is to induce a kind of anamnesis by reminding the reader, by means of a few examples from the writings of unnamed authors, of the abundance of analogous assertions, which cannot have escaped him in the literature of recent years but which perhaps have already made themselves such a matter of course for him that the relations they posit, however daring they may be, hardly attract his attention any longer.

The postulate of the political equality of all citizens is supposed to have secularized the prior concept of the equality of all men before God, while the basic ideas of our criminal law "function like a secularized theology" and imply a "concept of guilt borrowed from the sacral relation." In political theory it has been asserted, and frequently repeated, that "all the significant concepts of the modern doctrine of the state . . . [are] secularized theological concepts." This assertion relates not only and not primarily to the history of concepts but also to the systematic structure in which such concepts function: States of emergency have an analogous position in politics and law to miracles in theology. A "secularization of the tidings of salvation" is said to have been carried out by Machiavelli, specifically in the form of the idea of propaganda, which "seeks to hold the absolute strivings and desires of men in the world fixed, in spite of changing circumstances, on such leading ideas of worldly salvation as, for example, the power and unity of their native country." It has become almost a fashionable pastime to interpret expectations of political redemption, like those

typified by the *Communist Manifesto*, as secularizations either of the biblical paradise or of apocalyptic messianism.

Once one has come to understand the idea of progress as a transformation of a providentially guided 'story of salvation' [*Heilsgeschichte*], then either the infinity of this progress will have to be given out as the secularization of the omnipotence that had reigned over history previously, or an expected final stage of progress, a 'golden age,' 'permanent peace,' or 'universal equality after the dismantling of the state' will have to be a sort of "eschatology without God": "What used to be known as 'the fullness of time,' perfection of the present in eternity, the locus of salvation, is now called by Saint-Simon 'perfection of the social order,' by Kant 'the kingdom of pure practical reason,' by Goethe, Schiller, and Hölderlin 'humanity and new mythology,' by Rousseau 'return to nature,' by Winckelmann 'return to the ancients,' by Wieland and Gessner 'imaginative power of the poet.' " The world of the Middle Ages was finite, but its God was infinite; in the modern age "the world takes on this divine attribute; infinity is secularized."

Finally, science—of which Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* already said that in its claim to freedom of teaching it "develops itself like a Church into a totality with a characteristic principle, which can with considerable justice regard itself as taking over the place of the Church itself"—this science that wants not only to understand the world but also to deduce principles of conduct within it, as in Descartes's program for his *morale définitive*, acquires such an "excessive competence" precisely because it is the "secularization of the originally Christian combination of world design and directions for action."

So simple is it, apparently, to identify the substance in its metamorphoses, and to line up the metastases relative to their one origin, once one has found the formula. Naturally its easy applicability and the consequent frivolous multiplication of instances do not speak against the procedure itself; they only make the examination of its admissibility, of its rational presuppositions and methodical requirements, all the more urgent. For the procedure's genuine efficacy, or the appearance of it, diffuse the light of a superficial plausibility even over applications that I can only describe as secularization "run wild." It seems as though one need only make specific a highly general statement like Nietzsche's: "How science could become what it now is can only be made intelligible from the development of religion."²² One then obtains a series of

derivative theses such as that the concern of modern physics about the laws and the construction of nature can only be understood as "a variant of the idea of creation in secularized form"; or that the academic examination system is the secularized Last Judgment, or at least a secular variant of the Inquisition; or that "the scientist purified of all concrete history," epitomized in the 'professor,' is the product of a "secularized form of ancient purification and mortification rituals." And so it goes on. Every literary supplement shows that it still goes on.

What the examples collected here have in common is that they go beyond the quantitative/descriptive use of the term "secularization" and no longer have anything to do with the old lamenting confirmation that the world grows ever more worldly. The extension of the area of competence of worldly authorities and of types of life planning and regulation of action that are no longer founded on and directed by religion, the displacement of responsibilities in education and instruction, the development of rituals no longer derived from liturgy—all of this is still not secularization in a precise sense whose aim is the understanding of historical processes. The examples I have cited bring together phenomena that are separate in historical time in such a way as to assert that the later are the result of the secularization of the earlier, that the one results from the other. Thus a more or less precise concept of secularization picks itself out. "Secularization is not to be understood as a simple process of the dissolution of traditional religion, but as a transformation of the ruling value system into various institutional 'ideologies,' which still underpin the actual interrelated workings peculiar to the institutions."³ This is cited not as an authoritative definition but rather as an example of the kind of more precise formulation that lies between the designations "dissolution" and "transformation." For a usage defined in this way, what is called for is not only calculation of quantitative shares, analysis of comparative weights, or comparison of different total situations over time but also evidence of transformation, metamorphosis, conversion to new functions, along with the identity of a substance that endures throughout the process. Without such a substantial identity, no recoverable sense could be attached to the talk of conversion and transformation.

Against my critique of the concept of secularization, Hans-Georg Gadamer has asserted that this concept performs "a legitimate hermeneutic function." He describes this function of the secularization

concept as follows: "It contributes a whole dimension of hidden meaning to the self-comprehension of what has come to be and presently exists, and shows in this way that what presently exists is and means far more than it knows of itself."⁴ And he adds a sentence that is significant for his conviction of the epochal range of this category: "This holds also and especially for the modern age." A concept legitimizes its hermeneutic function by what it produces. What is to be produced is described by Gadamer as something that is hidden from the self-comprehension of the present, and thus of the modern age—indeed as a whole dimension of hidden meaning. This is a very strong assertion when one considers that hermeneutics in general has only to do with a surplus of meaning over and above what is granted and understood as self-evident, in accordance with the axiom of Matteo Mattesilano:⁵ "Semper mens est potentior quam sint verba" [The mind is always more potent than words]. "A whole dimension of hidden meaning"—after all that can only mean, in this context, that by the concept of secularization the self-comprehension of the modern age as worldliness has to be explained as a superficial, foreground appearance. It is revealed as a consciousness that is not transparent to itself in its substantial relations, a consciousness to which hermeneutics discloses its background. To that which has only been projected, by secularization, on the foreground of worldliness, this hermeneutic accomplishment first restores and makes plain its historical fullness. The genuine substance of that which was secularized is 'wrapped up in' [*die Implikation des*] what thus became worldly, and remains 'wrapped up in' it as what is essential to it, as when, in the model instance developed by Heidegger for the hermeneutics of his school, "Dasein's understanding of Being" is essential to it and yet "in the first instance and for the most part" hidden and withdrawn from it. I am almost inclined to say that that was what I was afraid of.

I do not want yet to go into the question of how one is to conceive this dimension of hidden meaning after it has been rendered present once again. First I must ask how the hiddenness of the surplus in what is given, of the hidden meaning in what is overt, came about. For this will determine how the hermeneutic method can operate. No doubt it will proceed, after all, simply by relating the given to what preceded it by an unequivocal nexus of dependence. In the hermeneutic retrogression through secularization, the understanding must hit upon the conditions of the possibility of what it undertakes in this way to render

intelligible. Everything turns on the question whether the worldly form of what was secularized is not a pseudomorph—in other words: an inauthentic manifestation—of its original reality.

Without doubt, the concept of secularization in its “legitimate hermeneutic function” gains in pregnancy of meaning. It becomes still more difficult to oppose its application or to set limits to it. But the concept does not gain in solid methodical utility. It does not allow the product of secularization to detach itself from the process of secularization and make itself autonomous. The illegitimacy of the result of secularization resides in the fact that the result is not allowed to secularize the process itself from which it resulted. For the hermeneutic function remains legitimate only so long as it lays open to self-consciousness what is hidden from it, convicts it of having been subject to the illusion of autonomous presence, and thus binds it to the newly disclosed dimension.

I myself have made use of the license of hermeneutics to uncover an implication that is hidden from the contemporary understanding in referring, for the sharper definition of the concept of secularization, to its latent metaphoric content.^b This attempt neither was meant as nor presupposed a history of the concept,^c and it can be made neither meaningless nor meaningful by a demonstration that the use of the term “secularization” in the history of ideas does not take the term’s political/legal or canon-law uses as its point of departure; it is entirely independent of such evidence. It is perfectly possible—in fact it is probably the case—that the concept of secularization was introduced in a purely descriptive sense and was only associatively and occasionally supplemented by a reference to the political expropriation of ecclesiastical goods. Only I believe that I am able to observe that this historical association impelled the development of increased precision in the term’s use in a particular direction. And I do not think that this was accidental. The alienation of a historical substance from its origin, which it carries with it only as a hidden dimension of meaning, unavoidably raises the question whether this is a process of self-alienation or externally induced deformation. The difference here is the difference between the proposition that the attribute of infinity crossed over from God to the world because in its highest intensification the idea of creation simply cannot avoid this consequence and the alternative proposition that infinity was usurped for the world in order by this means to let the world take over God’s position and function.

In the latter case the cosmological antinomies in Kant's Transcendental Dialectic, for example, would be the dead end to which we have come as the result of a sort of forcible violation of God.

Thus, contrary to all the assumptions of etymologically oriented conceptual historians, there is no need for a continuum of verifiable instances of the metaphorical content of "secularization." Nevertheless the demonstration that this metaphORIZATION is not verifiable early in the term's history, that is, that "secularization" was not initially used in a sense modeled on the juristic concept, has had a reassuring effect if only because the application of a metaphor to the inner sacred values of Christianity was felt to be extremely disturbing. A metaphor is after all a rhetorical artifice, nothing serious and certainly nothing that can lead to any sort of knowledge. But I think that an account of the word's literal history proves too little when the first hearer of the expression who was not entirely ignorant of history could have remembered its juristic meaning, and when a retroactive definition by orientation to the juristic concept would always suggest itself as soon as one felt a need to formulate the concept transitively, that is, to indicate a what and a whereto. For, to clarify it thus one more time, a 'secularized' bishop, something that scarcely calls for further inquiry, is very different from a 'secularized' saint or a 'secularized' eschatology, by which surely a question is meant to be answered and not just a moral qualification assigned, as in the case of the 'secularized' prelate. The eschatology that was secularized is still present, though hidden, in the horizon of an expectation of violent salvation in which, according to the secularization thesis, it is supposed to have been dissolved—or better: "suspended and carried forward" [*aufgehoben*]"—as something that carries on or is carried on in the new phenomenon.

Thus the category of secularization need not have been derived from a metaphor initially; it is possible for it to have taken on the metaphorical orientation precisely for the purpose of conceptual definition. Only if one sees language as setting the pace for all concept formation will one be able to exclude the possibility of the later consolidation of a designation for an already accomplished concept. The juristic act of secularization as the expropriation of church property was so practiced and so named from the Peace of Westphalia onward. The canon-law use of *saecularisatio* designates the release of a cleric from the community and the obligations of his order into the status of a secular priest; this intraecclesiastical transposition, so defined since

the end of the eighteenth century, plays no role in the history of the formation of the broader 'secularization' terminology but rather remains "a special case, which stands in some relation to the historical and political concept of secularization but . . . did not further determine or define the character of the category of secularization that was derived from that concept in the philosophy of history." On the contrary, the example of the 'Final Resolution of the Reichstag's Special Commission' [*Reichsdeputationshauptschluss*] of 1803^d established the term "as a concept of the usurpation of ecclesiastical rights, as a concept of the illegitimate emancipation of property from ecclesiastical care and custody." These defining elements make "the attribute of illegitimacy into a characteristic mark of the concept of secularization."⁵ One should not overlook here the fact that the French Revolution's seizures of church property, with their subsequent extension of 1803, were bound to appear as a consequence of the century of Enlightenment. The earliest explicit contact between philosophy and secularization, as far as I can determine, was constituted by the inclusion of the external procedure of expropriation in the a priori rational process of history. In his text of 1799 *On my Scholarly Education* [*Über meine gelehrte Bildung*], Berlin's Enlightenment critic Friedrich Nicolai ridiculed the wave of a priori historical speculation that had been set in motion above all by Kant's *Quarrel of the Faculties* and in the process referred among other things to a polemic set in motion in 1799 by a pamphlet entitled *Reason Requires Secularizations* [*Die Vernunft fordert die Säkularisierungen*]. In this pamphlet the measures were approved "on a priori grounds," whereas a counterpamphlet entitled *Reason does not Require Secularizations* [*Die Vernunft fordert die Säkularisierungen nicht*] disapproved this seizure of church property "on equally universal a priori grounds."⁶ Here, then, even before the Act of 1803, a connection is established between reason and secularization that unmistakably renders the transfer of property only an external episode and demonstration of the rule of rational progress, and that could encourage an expanded assault on the opposing forces on the other side. What was possible with external, legally transferable property would no doubt also be possible with less massive and still less protected spiritual residues. Not only did an extension of the realm of application of the basic notion suggest itself; it was practically enforced by a concept of history that placed every event in the context of the carrying out of a rational logic. The metaphorization of the Act of 1803 would then be only a linguistic postscript

to the fact that the juristic/political event itself was a merely symptomatic expression of a long-term—‘secular’—tendency. Marx employs the term in this way as late as 1843 in the introduction he wrote for his *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*: “But just as emancipation is not limited to the princes, so the secularization of property will not be limited to the confiscation of church property, which was practiced especially by hypocritical Prussia.”⁷ The concept of secularization defines a transferable, analogizable process with regard to ‘property’ of whatever type, in whatever mode of seizure. I have been charged with deriving the criteria for the categorial usage of the term “secularization” from what is taken to be my prior assertion that that usage originated in a metaphor—and since that assertion was mistaken, so also were the criteria. But I have ascribed no original and foundational significance whatever to the metaphorical usage, but only a methodical-heuristic significance with respect to an explanatory achievement of the concept, to which after all a claim is put forward when a statement is made of the type that describes a particular phenomenon as the successor of another, determined by the other’s having gone before and intelligible only in relation to it. What must one answer for when one makes an assertion of that kind? How is the burden of proof to be determined?

The question whether secularization as a “category of interpretation” arose from a metaphor based on the historical legal concept of the expropriation of church property has been extremely thoroughly investigated by Hermann Zabel.⁸ The result, in terms of conceptual history, is impressive but negative. Zabel leaves no doubt that he pursued his concept-historical problem from the beginning with the intention of testing the justification of the conception of secularization that relates it to the legal concept and that he would be ready to admit an involvement of the legal procedure with the concept of secularization only if a genetic relation could be shown to exist between the designations for that act of expropriation and those for other historical secularizations. But is conceptual history the sole and sufficient legitimation of the status of a concept? Must one not also keep in mind that there exists a high degree of indifference between a concept and its history? By showing the testimony of conceptual history to be overwhelmingly contrary to a historical nexus between the legal concept and the “category of interpretation,” Zabel thinks he can also keep what the secularization concept requires in order to define real cir-

cumstances separate from the elements of the legal concept. I would not exclude this possibility altogether if it were the case that the conceptual history to which Zabel gives us access could yield other criteria of conceptual definition. But that is not the case precisely because the evidence brought forward makes a basic state of affairs exceedingly clear: The term "secularization" is used for a very long time with an ambiguity that admits of no obligation, and in an occasional manner directed at anything but precision. Zabel sees his conceptual history as a homogeneous whole, in the course of which it is only at the very end that anyone occasionally hears in the terminology the metaphorical background of 'expropriation of church property,' whereas most of the authors who are serious and are to be taken seriously want nothing to do with it, but rather employ a loose usage of a descriptive nature.

What is one to conclude from this evidence? At least not that the early phases of a concept's history deserve precedence in a discussion of what can be accomplished by the 'dressed-up' function of the concept as a "category of interpretation," once the special relation to the legal concept has been picked out of the background so that the determinateness and the production of determinateness that are constitutive of a concept are finally able to come into play. Zabel's result seems to me interesting precisely because it makes it understandable why for such a long time, and in authors as important as the ones he cites, nothing substantial was accomplished when the term "secularization" was employed.⁹ Since concepts are something that we ourselves constitute, their history can be understood teleologically, so that conceptual history is not bound by the schema of degeneration, in which full weight and value are present only in the originality of the initial instant.

Thus investigation of the conceptual history of 'secularization' appears to have brought to light a contradictory result: On the one hand, it has dissected out a process that tends toward 'terminologization,' a process directed at removing any ambiguity of conceptual content, and thus toward methodical definiteness, while on the other hand, it describes the later phases of this process as phases characterized by a metaphorical usage. However, it is not the usage that is metaphorical but rather the orientation of the process of concept formation.¹⁰ A tightening up from a vague exhortative and lamenting usage to the definition of a typical process form makes the 'recollection' of the historical legal proceedings appear almost inevitable. This is an instance

of what I have tried to describe as “background metaphors,”¹¹ a process of reference to a model that is operative in the genesis of a concept but is no longer present in the concept itself, or may even have to be sacrificed to the need for definition, which according to firm tradition does not permit inclusion of metaphorical elements. One could also speak of implicative metaphors. Undoubtedly the process of ‘terminologization’ is driven forward by inclusion of the expression in the relevant lexicons and handbooks, which on account of their need for definiteness beget standardization by declaring it. To cite right away perhaps the most influential example of this process: “Secularization, that is to say, the detachment of spiritual or ecclesiastical ideas and thoughts, and equally the detachment of spiritual (consecrated) things and people, from their connection to God.”¹² This formula already represents a late stage of the process of concept formation because it integrates both the historical and the canon-law processes of secularization as subsidiary special cases of a comprehensive movement including, above all, ideas and thoughts. The connection to the juristic process that stands in the metaphorical background seems to be softened, rendered harmless, or neutralized by the term “detachment”; though when in the end the correlate of this “detachment” turns out to be a “connection to God,” then this expression’s weight of meaning makes it evident that a sanction must be thought of as having been violated and that a character of forcible injustice must be included in the concept.

Such quasi-definitional formulas, as substitutes for the indefinite term “secularization,” can bring with them their own indefiniteness to the extent that they give rise to specific additional questions. The fruitful concept of “detachment” ingeniously leaves open the question whether it is meant transitively or intransitively, that is, whether those ideas and thoughts, things and persons detach themselves from their connection to God or whether there is some agency present that carries out this detachment. I believe one must unfold the totality of these additional questions, omitted or impeded though they may be in a particular formula, as necessary parts of the process of concept formation. When we do so, an orientation toward the background metaphors of the legal process gives us as our guide in the application of the secularization category the catalog of the characteristic features of expropriation proceedings: the identifiability of the expropriated

property, the legitimacy of its initial ownership, and the unilateral nature of its removal.

In regard to the satisfaction of these criteria, one should not allow oneself to be disturbed by theological talk that perhaps justifies the unilateral removal with the loftier idea of a selfless surrender of the divine to the world but by that means implants in the unaltered historical process a mystery that the theoretical onlooker cannot penetrate. The legitimacy of the primary ownership, in view of the special origin of these ideas and thoughts, is—not accidentally—formulated with less hesitation. “Today people tend to speak of secularization where ideas and knowledge are detached from their original source, from revelation, and become accessible to human reason under its own power. Secularization, then, affects spiritual processes that were originally made possible by faith but then begin to be carried out by man by means of the faculties at his disposal.”¹³ The paradigm in the background shows through even in the cautious formulation that speaks of “detachment” from the original source; and the human reason that acts under its own power seems in doing so to exercise only a sort of ‘application.’ The arbitrary interchangeability of ‘detachment’ and ‘self-detachment’ is the riddle of such a formulation when we are told, “At first it was historians who spoke of secularization, meaning the transfer of ecclesiastical and spiritual authority and property rights to worldly powers. Then the word was applied to a process in the history of ideas in which ideas and modes of behavior detach themselves from the religious context of their original establishment and are derived from universal reason.”¹⁴ Here the derivability of ideas and modes of behavior from universal reason appears unexpectedly right alongside their religious origin, so that strictly speaking only a convergence could be established, rather than a nexus, in the phenomenon of secularization.

Often one will only be able to tell from the consequences that are deduced from secularization what characteristics are ascribed to the process. What is the result when secularization has been confirmed and consciousness of it has been aroused? A further formulation in this regard: “Uncovering the process of secularization and making it conscious preserves the continuity between present and past. . . . Even in the negative relation of the present to the past, there is a continuity of the historical. . . . The reality in which we really live is veiled by misleading ideas.”¹⁵ Worldly reason’s consciousness of its own au-

thenticity is a misleading veil over a reality that otherwise could not overlook its continuous historical descent from that upon which it denies its dependence. Indeed there is also a suggestion that the imputation of discontinuity is not disinterested, insofar as it allows the present to deny its obligation to the past. The category of secularization is meant to make it evident that the denial of historical dependence is motivated by an epochal self-interest; it presents the alleged break between modern rationality and its past as ideological. It makes conscious—and that is the inevitable consequence of the theoretical accomplishment to which it lays claim—an “objective cultural debt.”¹⁶

If “the modern world can largely be understood as the result of a secularization of Christianity,”¹⁷ then that must be demonstrable in the historian’s methodical analysis by reference to the criteria of the expropriation model. To define the burden of proof in this way does not at all mean that one cannot also speak of ‘secularization’ in a less precise sense. My only concern is to clarify how the claim can be established that assertions about the constitution of the modern age that are defensible, that at least point the way to possible confirmation, are being made. The mere observation that the modern world in which we live has in mind very little—and less and less, at that—apart from itself would not justify bringing this ‘secularization’ into a relation specifically with Christianity, which in such a case would only accidentally and arbitrarily happen to occupy the position of ‘unworldliness’ in the past that is contrasted with this present. The proposition that the modern world is to be understood as a result of the secularization of Christianity is certainly not meant to convey so little. But what must it say, if it is meant to say more?

Translator’s Notes

a. Matteo Mattesilano, jurist in Bologna circa 1435, “postglossator,” author of *De interpretatione legis extensiva* (Venice: 1557). His maxim, given here, is cited by (for example) Josef Esser, “Die Interpretation im Recht,” *Studium Generale* 7 (1954):877. (Information supplied by H. Blumenberg.)

b. The author is referring to his argument that as a model, the expropriation of church property contains the essential components of the contemporary concept of secularization: identifiability of the expropriated property, legitimacy of the initial ownership of that property, unilateral character of the expropriation. (See the fourth paragraph from the end of this chapter.) Here the author is addressing criticisms of this argument that have been made since it was presented in the first edition of this book, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 20.

c. A *Begriffsgeschichte*. 'Conceptual history' [*Begriffsgeschichte*] has become a recognized scholarly discipline in Germany, similar to our 'history of ideas' but, as the name suggests, more closely associated with philosophy. It characteristically examines the histories of specific concepts from their first emergence up to the present. In the process of responding to 'concept-historical' criticisms of his account of the concept of secularization, the author makes some important points in the remainder of this chapter about the kinds of conclusions that are derivable from conceptual history and about the historical relations between concepts and metaphor.

d. The reorganization of the German territories—arrived at under the pressure of Napoleon's annexation of the left bank of the Rhine—in which numerous bishoprics and other ecclesiastical properties were divided up among the secular princes.

Progress Exposed as Fate

Among the propositions that in the second generation can already be described simply as “well-known” is the thesis that modern historical consciousness is derived from the secularization of the Christian idea of the ‘salvation story’ [*Heilsgeschichte*] and, more particularly, of providence and eschatological finitude. Karl Löwith’s important book, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, has had a protracted dogmatizing effect in Germany since its first appearance in 1949 (and in German, as *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*, in 1953). Löwith takes German idealism’s conception of its historical position and achievement as an objective thesis about the genesis of the modern concept of history. For Löwith, Hegel’s theory of the “suspension and carrying forward” [*Aufhebung*] of the Christian and Reformation phase of history in the underlying structure of the modern spiritual and political world, especially in its constitutive consciousness of subjective freedom, degraded “sacred history to the level of secular history and exalt[ed] the latter to the level of the first.”¹ If the historical process were the self-realization of reason [as it was for Hegel], then according to its immanent logic, what presents itself externally as the discontinuity of secularization would have to possess internal continuity. Secularization would then be the process that brought theological pre-history to its logically necessary transformation and its final form. Seen objectively, the homogeneous reason in history is neither a factor nor a result of secularization except in part and from a special point of view.

Only if one considers Löwith's philosophical work in the two decades since the publication of his principal work on the philosophy of history does his affinity to this concept of secularization become fully intelligible. The secularization of Christianity that produces modernity becomes for Löwith a comparatively unimportant differentiation as soon as he turns his attention to the unique epochal break that in one stroke decided in favor of both the Middle Ages and the modern age: the turning away from the pagan cosmos of antiquity, with its cyclical structure of security, to the one-time temporal action of the biblical/Christian type. For one concerned with the fateful disjunction of nature and history, the accent shifts from the beginning of the modern age to the end of antiquity; for everything that followed, this gave rise to something like a collective historical liability, whose sum total is progress as fate.²

What is at issue is not Hegel. His concept of history only provides the argumentative instrument with which to regain the initial position that Löwith had reached in 1935 with his early work on Nietzsche: to set up the renaissance of cyclical cosmology, as proclaimed by Nietzsche in his doctrine of "eternal recurrence," against the dominance of the linear historical consciousness.³ The autonomy of this historical consciousness as an ultimate category is exposed as its self-deception as soon as it is recognized, in accordance with the secularization theorem, as existing 'by the grace of' Christianity. Potentially, then, the finality of history is once again only penultimate, before the recurrence of unhistory. Seen from the point of view of secularization, the false conflict of the medieval and the modern can be reduced to the *single* episode of the interruption of the human connection to the cosmos. This impressive, though cautiously expressed, total conception found in Löwith's later work explains both the vehemence and the delay of his response to the critique of secularization as a hermeneutic instrument.⁴

But precisely because such a weighty function is assigned to the category of secularization in Karl Löwith's thought, one that exceeds every other burden entrusted to it, one must be allowed to raise, if not the reproach of a lack of proof, at least the question of the proper burden of proof. In doing this, it is true, Löwith thinks I went too far when I included evidence of the identity of the secularized substance among the requirements of the burden of proof and at the same time

opposed any substantialistic conception of historical identity.^{5a} I do in fact regard the secularization theorem as a special case of historical substantialism insofar as theoretical success is made to depend on the establishment of constants in history, much as in the approximately contemporaneous "*topos* research."^b This anticipation of what knowledge has to accomplish seems to me problematic: Constants bring a theoretical process to an end, where on different premises it might still be possible to inquire further. This point, the shutting down of the theoretical process by substantialistic premises, must be a concern of any critique to which constants are submitted as supposedly final results. No a priori statement whether there are substantial constants in history can be made; all we can say is that the historian's epistemological situation cannot be optimized by the determination of such stable elementary historical quanta.

To speak of secularization under substantialistic premises would only shift the difficulty to the question of when the historically constant quantity was originally 'desecularized,' an indispensable precondition of its being exposed to any subsequent resecularization. This consideration makes it clear that the theological talk of secularization can avoid the problem of constants only because it presupposes as beyond question an absolute and transcendent origin of the contents that are affected by it. If Karl Löwith legitimizes secularization, insofar as for him it is still an intra-Christian and postpagan phenomenon—legitimate, that is, only within the overall illegitimacy of the turning away from the cosmos in favor of history—then he must already have 'secularized' the premise of the nonderivable originality of the whole system that has fallen away from the cosmos. Thus at one point or another the characteristic of unilateral removal crops up again even when the modern age is supposed to be legitimized precisely as the product of secularization.

The progress that is exposed as fate would then be the late (and in itself not illegitimate) consequence of an earlier illegitimacy, of the infringement of the right that nature has over man and that in antiquity was left to it and confirmed by a kind of thinking that for Karl Löwith would bear the imprint above all of the Stoa. For a change we can leave aside the question whether the transformation of the Christian story of salvation into the modern idea of progress is a legitimate, logical consequence or a unilateral deformation in order to test the evidence of the genetic nexus itself, which after all is not self-evident if only because other theses about the derivation of the idea of progress

are at least possible. The early modern age not only brought forth models of 'progress' itself but also found them already present, and for the first time explicitly identified them as such—for instance, that of astronomy, with the increased accuracy it gained as a result of the length of temporal distances.⁶ What signs are there that even suggest a likelihood that theological eschatology, with its idea of the 'consummation' of history by its discontinuance, could have provided the model for an idea of the forward movement of history according to which it was supposed for the first time to gain stability and reliability through its consummation or its approach to its consummation? How one assigns the values here is secondary compared to the question whether a relation of genetic dependence, if not demonstrable by pointing to the record of the original event, still at least can be made probable enough that further search for such 'records' would be justifiable.

There are entirely harmless formulations of the secularization theorem, of a type that can hardly be contradicted. One of these plausible turns of phrase is "unthinkable without." The chief thesis then, roughly put, would be that the modern age is unthinkable without Christianity. That is so fundamentally correct that the second part of this book is aimed at demonstrating this fact—with the difference, however, that this thesis gains a definable meaning only through a critique of the foreground appearance—or better: the apparent background presence—of secularization.

Much in the modern age is 'unthinkable without' the Christianity that went before it. So much one would expect in advance of any deep inquiry. But what does it mean in the particular case of the coordination of concrete characteristics? I rely on what seems to have become, if not universally, at least widely recognized. Regarding the dependence of the idea of progress on Christian eschatology, there are differences that would have had to block any transposition of the one into the other. It is a formal, but for that very reason a manifest, difference that an eschatology speaks of an event breaking into history, an event that transcends and is heterogeneous to it, while the idea of progress extrapolates from a structure present in every moment to a future that is immanent in history. Naturally the idea of progress did not generate the instances of progress that have always occurred in individual human lives, individual generations, and the combination of generations, as results of experience, will, and practice; 'progress'

is the highest-level generalization, the projection onto history as a whole, which evidently was not possible at just any point in time. We have to ask what it was that made it possible. My opinion is that it was novel experiences involving such a great extent of time that the spring into the final generalization of the 'idea of progress' suggested itself as a natural step. One such experience is the unity of methodically regulated theory as a coherent entity developing independently of individuals and generations. The fact that hopes for the greater security of man in the world grow up around this expansionism of progress, and that these hopes can become a stimulus to the realization of the idea, is demonstrable. But is such hope identical with Christian eschatology, now gone over into its secularized form? Eschatology may have been, for a shorter or a longer moment of history, an aggregate of hopes; but when the time had come for the emergence of the idea of progress, it was more nearly an aggregate of terror and dread. Where hope was to arise, it had to be set up and safeguarded as a new and original aggregate of this-worldly possibilities *over against* those possibilities of the next world. From a point of view that understands history as progress, the theological expectation of the final events impinging on it from outside—even if they were still hoped for—appears as a hindrance to the attitudes and activities that can secure for man the realization of his possibilities and the satisfaction of his needs. It is impossible to see how the one 'expectation' could ever result from the other, unless perhaps we were to represent the disappointment of the transcendent expectation as an agent of the immanent one. But then the time when the idea of progress first emerged and impressed itself on history would have to be moved forward by considerably more than a millennium.

The idea of progress and the utopian projections of its limiting cases have been seen as surrogates for a missing politics, surrogates that precisely as such enter into the function of expectations of transcendent salvation and thus transpose these into immanence. "Utopianism arose from an incapacity for political action that at first was historically conditioned but was then laid down as philosophy of history." But precisely because utopianism is grounded in the political deficit of the Enlightenment's moralistic critique of history—in its forgoing of contemporary applicability—it is questionable whether its relation to the future was laid down for it in advance by eschatology's imprint on consciousness. And then there is not much to be said for the proposition

that it was "the process of secularization that transposed eschatology into a progressive history."⁸ Why should the divine salvation plan be 'transformed' and 'enlightened' when the relation to history had become that of a moralistic critique, which after all certainly does not want to imitate the function of a Last Judgment, in relation to which all of history becomes pure past, that is, the opposite of a process that can be influenced by critique?

In regard to progress, the advocates of secularization theory should have decided early on whether they were going to make the Last Judgment or Providence the *terminus a quo* because the inclusion of the Stoics' providence in Christianity was itself already an attempt to provide some insurance for a history that eschatology no longer provided for, or at any rate no longer saw as in need of regulation: The eschatological God of the end of history cannot at the same time be the God who makes Himself known and credible in history as its caretaker. A secularized eschatology may correspond to the tribunal before which a victorious revolution brings its enemies and of which the absolute act would no longer have anything to do with ethics: "When one had successfully carried out a revolution, one can hang its opponents, but one cannot condemn them";⁹ but the idea of progress is precisely not a mere watered-down form of judgment or revolution; it is rather the continuous self-justification of the present, by means of the future that it gives itself, before the past, with which it compares itself. The post-Scholastic critique of the authority of Aristotle, to the extent that it did not consist merely of putting Plato in Aristotle's place, had continually to take care to justify itself, which it did by pointing to the progress of knowledge that the abandonment of Aristotle made possible. Self-comparison with the authorities of antiquity and reflection on method, thanks to which this comparison could be evaluated positively each time in favor of the present, were the most powerful beginnings of the idea of progress. In this process Descartes's *Cogito*, to which idealism retrospectively assigned a central role here, did not in fact function in a way that supports the idea that this punctiform act especially represented the absolute quality of a theological antecedent: "In the course of the unfolding of Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* as the self-guarantee of man who has got free of religious bonds, eschatology turns into utopia. To plan history becomes just as important as to get a grip on nature."¹⁰

But that is accomplished precisely not by the absolutism of the self-guarantee but rather by the idea of method, and indeed not by its organizing itself specifically for history in a different way than for nature but rather by making theoretical domination of nature the condition of the historical "marcher avec assurance dans cette vie" [to walk with confidence in this life].⁶ The idea of method is not a kind of planning, not a transformation of the divine salvation plan, but rather the establishment of a disposition: the disposition of the subject, in his place, to take part in a process that generates knowledge in a transsubjective manner.

Just as partially as in the field of theory, the idea of progress makes its appearance in the field of the literary and aesthetic argument with the tradition. Here it is not primarily the establishment of a continuous sequence of surpassings of what at each point has already been achieved but rather the comparison between the literature and art of antiquity, with its canonized exemplary status, and the output of one's contemporaries. Here the idea of progress arises from protest against the status of permanent prototypes as obligatory ideals. The *querelle des anciens et des modernes* [quarrel of the ancients and the moderns] is the aesthetic analogue of the detachment of theory from the authority of Aristotelianism.¹¹ In the course of this argument, both the champions of the preeminence of antiquity and the advocates of modernity at first made use of a thoroughly "natural-cyclical conception" of the course of history, so that the nexus between a prior Christian stage and the concept of history emerging from the *querelle* is made problematic by this intervening neopagan stage. Thus H. R. Jauss is right to warn, against Werner Krauss's thesis regarding the "origin of the historical world view" as well,¹² that the beginnings of historical consciousness are "not to be grasped by means of the category of a secularization of the theological understanding of history or of Bossuet's Christian philosophy of history." The disadvantage of the aesthetic model of progress, as is already made clear by the fact of the *querelle*, is the contestability and the controversial status of possible or actual instances of progress in this area; its advantage is the uncontested premise that here it is man, and man alone, who produces the realities in the aesthetic sphere, and hence would also be the agent of any progress that might take place in it. Even the aesthetics of genius could only express this state of affairs emphatically. The transfer of the structural schema of aesthetic, theoretical, technical, and moral progress

to the collective idea of a unified history presupposes that man sees himself as the only one in charge in this totality, that he takes himself to be the one who "makes history." Then he can hold it possible to deduce the movement of history from the self-understanding of the rational, demiurgic, or even creative subject. The future becomes the consequence of actions in the present, and these become the realization of the current understanding of reality. Only thus does progress become the sum of the determinations of the future by the present and its past.

Man-made history has an appearance of predictability. Kant speaks of an "a priori possible description of the events that should come to pass" in it, just as he speaks of the "soothsaying historical narration of what is impending in the future," because here the theoretical subject is at the same time the practical origin of the objects of the theory: "But how is an a priori history possible? Answer: When the soothsayer himself causes and contrives the events that he proclaims in advance."¹³ The idea of a providence from whose disposition history proceeds would not perhaps have had to be destroyed specifically in order to make possible this foundation of the rationality of the historical totality as long as this 'providence' was the pure world reason of the Stoics and had not taken on the character of the impenetrable acts of sovereignty of theology's God. For the proposition that man makes his history, taken in itself, arouses no greater confidence in the course of history than does the assumption of a world reason that superintends it; but once 'providence' is drawn into the absolutism of an unfathomable will, then the actions of men—even if for each individual they are always those of all the others—are more reliable. The proposition that man makes history still contains no guarantee of the progress that he could bring about in making it; it is initially only a principle of self-assertion against the uncertainty imposed on knowledge by the overwhelming heterogeneous theological principle, the irrelevance of which to man's insight into his own works—and that means into his own history as well—is postulated. The principle, beyond that, that knowledge of history is the precondition of the rational and thus progressive making of history, so that the idea of progress is a regulative idea for the integration of actions, could no doubt only have been derived from the model of the integration of theoretical actions in the new science. No, it is not to be believed that "secularized as the belief in progress, Messianism still displayed unbroken and immense vigor."¹⁴

It was certainly a result of the quick disappointment of early expectations of definitive total results that the idea of progress underwent expansion into that of 'infinite progress.' Descartes still seriously thought of the attainment during his lifetime of the final theoretical and practical goals of his program of method, that is, the completion of physics, medicine and (following directly from these) ethics. Thus the introduction of infinity here was hardly the winning of a divine attribute for human history; rather it was initially a form of resignation. The danger of this hyperbolizing of the idea of progress is the necessary disappointment of each individual in the context of history, doing work in his particular situation for a future whose enjoyment he cannot inherit. Nevertheless the idea of infinite progress also has a safeguarding function for the actual individual and for each actual generation in history. If there were an immanent final goal of history, then those who believe they know it and claim to promote its attainment would be legitimized in using all the others who do not know it and cannot promote it as mere means. Infinite progress does make each present relative to its future, but at the same time it renders every absolute claim untenable. This idea of progress corresponds more than anything else to the only regulative principle that can make history humanly bearable, which is that all dealings must be so constituted that through them people do not become mere means. If eschatology or messianism were really the substantial point of departure of the modern historical consciousness, then that consciousness would be permanently and inescapably defined by teleological conceptions, by ideas of ends. This proposition cannot be converted into the assertion that where absolute teleological conceptions do appear, as in Descartes's definitive ethics [*morale définitive*] or Francis Bacon's recovery of paradise, this is already enough to demonstrate the presence of secularizations.

Translator's Notes

a. The author's critique of "substantialistic" ontologies of history, referred to here, was presented in the first edition of *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 69. The parallel passage in this translation of the second edition is on pp. 113-114.

b. *Toposforschung*, "topos research" is the systematic investigation of recurrent rhetorical *topoi*—'topics' or subjects—seen as underlying thought and writing in a given tradition. The classic work in this field is E. R. Curtius's *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (Berlin: A.

Francke, 1948), translated as *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Pantheon, 1953).

c. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, part one; trans. Haldane and Ross, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (Cambridge University Press, 1911), vol. 1, p. 87.

Instead of Secularization of Eschatology, Secularization by Eschatology

Unlike the idea of providence that was taken over from Hellenistic philosophy into the patristic literature, the biblical eschatology is an element native to theology; in Greek philosophy world cycles and world incinerations were immanent processes of nature, the self-consumings of the cosmic process, which have their corresponding self-restorations. So the preference for eschatology over *pronoia* [Providence] in the secularization theorems corresponds to a quite sound, though unexpressed, understanding of the criterion [for the use of secularization as a historical explanation] that an element must belong originally to Christianity if it is to be possible to speak meaningfully of its later being secularized. A sufficient reason why the idea of providence could not be secularized in a late phase of the history of Christianity is that it had already participated, at the beginning of that history, in the one fundamental secularization [*Verweltlichung*: becoming worldly] of Christianity that was accomplished by rolling back eschatology and recovering a respite for history. The fact that the world as a whole is well administered has significance, as a source of satisfaction, only if its duration is once more supposed to have a positive value.

So the criterion of original ownership [by Christianity] as a condition of the possibility of secularization cannot be set aside on the grounds that it would require a demonstration of absolute originality, which does not exist in history. If someone is inclined to regard speculative trinities and triads as consequences of Christianity's divine trinity, then

he has the criterion of genuine ownership on his side in a way that someone who wants to trace the drive of the various monisms toward rational unity back to the meaning of monotheism in Christianity does not. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a high degree of specificity of the element suspected of being secularized rather than of original ownership. When Georg Simmel thought that he recognized the outbreak of World War I as the 'absolute situation,' it was not a lack of affinity to theological thinking that prevented this from having the appearance of a secularizing quotation but rather the absence of any specifically Christian homology, even if one allows that the absolute demands of the New Testament's Sermon on the Mount must have appealed to a kind of 'absolute situation.' That an idea belongs specifically within the theological horizon would be attested most clearly by a relation of ownership based on authorship, in regard to which an expropriation could then be very clearly demonstrated. However, this methodical ideal cannot deny its derivation from a standpoint within the modern system of reference. The idea of ownership of what one has originally produced, thought, and created is a modern idea. Even the justification of divine right by the Creation is not so self-evident as it seems to those who derive 'natural-law' conclusions from it. And one must also consider the fact that theology itself cannot in the strict sense claim authorship of its contents, to the extent that it traces these back to an act of 'bestowal' by revelation. On the other hand, the whole complex of secularization would never have contracted the odium of the violation of another's rights were it not for the (either open or secret) adoption of the premise that here something had entered the stream of history, from a unique, single, and unsurpassable source, that would otherwise have been withheld from that stream. The whole process of the historical criticism of the biblical contents has not been able to pry loose this presupposition of the secularization thesis.

Historical theology has represented almost every aspect of Christianity as the product of its Hellenistic environment. It is clear that the secularization thesis could only achieve its present-day significance in connection with the denial of this historical subordination, in connection, that is, with 'dialectical' theology and also with the separation of the 'kerygma' from the mythological conditions of its entry into the world.^a There is an implicit acknowledgment of the criterion of authentic ownership in all this. But at the end of the long campaign

of historicism,^b scarcely anything remains that satisfies this criterion. We especially have to bear in mind that the Hellenistic materials that were Christianized in the early centuries have once again become available, a millennium and a half later, to accomplish directly now, without the passage through Christianity, what then 'appears' as secularization. The rejection of Aristotelianism together with its Scholastic derivative forms allowed not only Platonism to become influential but also especially certain chief articles of the Stoic philosophy that had already made an impression on the Christian authors of the first centuries but that now took on an autonomous function. The extent of what Descartes, for instance, took from the Stoic tradition may well even now not have been fully identified: the precedence that it gave to ethics and its instrumentalization of physics for that end, its logic of hypothetical inferences, its anthropological model of the wise man as the invulnerable and inaccessible autarkic subject, the inaccessibility of consciousness to physical contingency and empirical uncertainty. Although Wilhelm Dilthey pointed to the importance of the Stoic tradition for the genesis of the early modern age's "natural system," this has not prevented an abundance of assertions of supposed 'secularization.' When Auguste Comte speaks programmatically of "organizing providence," then there is certainly no doubt to what his appeal addresses itself—namely, a diffuse religious trust in the fatherly regulation of the world's affairs¹—but no one will be able to deny that the philosopher is employing a concept of which there is no trace in the New Testament whatsoever. Thus the question regarding the burden of proof is not only directed at the Christian tradition's original ownership of contents that it might in fact merely have transmitted and turned over to worldly use, but it must also take seriously the fact and the function of the rediscovery of antiquity, which did not have to rely on the Middle Ages, and by which the original elements were set up alongside their Christianized correlates. What might appear to be a secularized reconstruction can always be the worldly original itself again, though admittedly now appearing in a function altered by the antithetical relation of modernity to the Middle Ages.

An instructive variant of the question of the burden of proof for the secularization thesis arises in connection with Rudolf Bultmann's "demythologizing" project. In the midst of the New Testament texts' historical conditioning and saturation with received ideas, Bultmann wants to rescue an irreducible and original core that resists all historicism

by means of its formal worldlessness. This "kerygma," by virtue of its definition, cannot be secularized: It cannot 'go over into' worldliness; it can only 'disappear' in it. This must be borne in mind when Bultmann speaks of the "historicization of eschatology" that was begun by St. Paul and radically carried through by St. John.² Theology always returns to its classical heresies: The doctrine of the kerygma is a variation of Docetism, and secularization repeats the (however conceptualized) Incarnation. Consequently it appeals to the theologian as a process with which he could not be more familiar: The *deus revelatus* [revealed God], historicized, becomes once again the *deus absconditus* [hidden God], as which He revealed himself. Secularization does not transform; it only conceals that which the world cannot tolerate and to be unable to tolerate which is its essential character. The advantage that Bultmann the New Testament scholar holds over Bultmann the philosopher of history is the way the onset of the process of secularization is moved forward to the beginning of Christian history; for secularization is already a foregone conclusion with that early "historicization of eschatology" between St. Paul and St. John. What pretends to be so formal is itself a Gnostic myth: The only things that escape the control of the world's powers are the untouchable core of the pneuma, on the side of man, and the kerygma's saving summons, on the side of God. The decision occurs in history, but not through it. But at the same time the early historicization of the essential contents of salvation consumes the substance that as a later secularization could have served to explain the modern age. How could something that on account of the transcendent nature ascribed to it was fated, almost from the moment of its proclamation, to be historicized, that as a cosmic eschatology had already lost its (in any case only reconstructible) authenticity, and that as a formless expectation of world catastrophe was handed over to the speculative calculations of the patristic and Scholastic literature and beyond—how could it be 'secularized' yet again? Just this is what Bultmann the philosopher of history seems to assume when he says that the idea of progress preserves the idea of eschatological fulfillment "in a secularized form," or when he describes Kant's attitude to history as "a moralistic secularization of the Christian teleology of history and its eschatology," or finally when he writes that in Hegel "the secularizing of Christian faith is carried out . . . consciously and consistently."³

For Bultmann the cosmic eschatology of the world's destruction and the Last Judgment took over the position of the kerygma and its unmediated summons to 'existence.' Hence it is possible to trace it back to the worldly context of the cyclical cosmic speculations in which Hellenistic thinkers engaged, correlating it with a fundamental myth typified by the Stoics' continuous world renewal. In this connection it is characteristic of Bultmann that he interprets Jewish apocalypics as merely a special case of this fundamental myth, one in which it is compressed into a single, unrepeatable cycle.⁴ One may wonder whether it can be correct to describe the division between a cyclical course of the world process and a one-time historical decision as merely a quantitative contraction of that fundamental myth; it seems to me that here Bultmann overlooks the fact that the development of the cyclical cosmology had to be grounded in a positive evaluation of the cosmic pattern that was repeated throughout all time, that is, that it presupposed the specific relation to nature of the late Stoa.

Jewish apocalypics contains no cosmological interest of this sort whatsoever; rather it compensates for the failure of the historical expectations of a nation by prophesying a fulfillment beyond history. It is a theodicy that vindicates the Old Testament God of the Covenant by devaluing the innerworldly history of the people to whom His favor was supposed to have been assured. No Hellenistic cosmology could take over this function of world devaluation. But in Bultmann's context this objection does not alter the fact that expectation of an apocalypse, as compensation for an interest directed at the world and at history, can itself only be 'worldly.' Still, these imaginings remain too distant and expansive to take on an immediate significance for the life of the individual man, a significance that influences and alters his behavior. This kind of significance results not from the contraction of the world cycles into one but rather from the further contraction of that one cycle into the lifetime of the generation that is told of the final events. This transformation into an 'immediate expectation' [*Naherwartung*] radicalizes both the exhortative and the normative urgency of the doctrine; it creates the horizon for the kerygma.

Let us pose the question differently for a change. Let us ask not what was originally 'unworldly' about Christianity but what the term "unworldly" could even have meant originally. Definition is necessary here because the Platonic/Neoplatonic concept of transcendence has

superimposed on genuine unworldliness the spacial schematism of an extraworldliness. We are bound by this superimposed schematism even in our understanding of the concept of secularization: What can be secularized (made worldly) is only what claims by virtue of its descent or specificity to be extraworldly. The schematism of transcendence presupposes a dualism of decision between simultaneously existing possibilities, intentions, directions. The unworldliness of the initial biblical situation implies a different schematism: An interest in the world is not just put in question by the presence of an alternative; rather it is robbed of all meaning because no time remains for the world. Only the fact that one cannot rely on a natural end of the world is sufficient to exclude the dominant naturalistic note that is implicit in the cyclical myth of the world process. But the world concept does not already lose its 'cosmic' character because the total process is assumed to occur only once, so that every event is unique. The sharpness of the difference lies in the New Testament's 'immediate expectation,' by which the promised events of the Parousia are moved into the actual life of the individual and of his generation. Expectations that extend into the future beyond the present generation are of a different kind, not only quantitatively but qualitatively; they do not displace people into a 'state of emergency.' 'Immediate expectation' negates every type of durability, not only the world's but also its own, by which it would refute itself. If it survives this self-refutation by means of the unnoticed reestablishment of a more distant expectation, of long-term indeterminacy, then its specific unworldliness is destroyed. In early Christian history another and a heterogeneous unworldliness, of the type of 'transcendence,' stood ready to reoccupy the vacant position.

So it is not the contraction of the cosmic cycles to a single one but the presence of the crisis of that one that creates what even apart from all theological interpretations is clearly 'unworldly' in the New Testament. Nature and history are equally affected by it. Acute 'immediate expectation' tears the individual free even from the historical interests of his people and presses upon him his own salvation as his most immediate and pressing concern. Assuming that this is the 'last moment,' demands can be made on every individual that are inconsistent with realism regarding the world and that would have the reverse of survival value were the world to endure. If one takes this to be essential to the original core of Christian teaching, then it has

nothing to do with the concept of history, or it has only one thing to do with it: It makes an absolute lack of interest in the conceptualization and explanation of history a characteristic of the acute situation of its end. Self-assertion then becomes the epitome of senselessness. In the subsequent history of Christian theology, people did indeed work with heterogeneous ideas and conceptual means, but the logic of Christian thinking drove it once again to deprive self-assertion of meaning through the absolute intensification of concern for salvation. This will be shown, in connection with the end of the Middle Ages and the initial situation of the modern age, in part II.

Precisely then where the genuinely specific character of New Testament eschatology can be grasped, its untranslatability into any concept of history, however defined, is evident. There is no concept of history that can claim identity of 'substance' with immediate expectation. Even if one were to say that it was a new intention toward the future, as the dimension of human fulfillment, which was introduced by the "historicization of eschatology," that would directly contradict the fundamental process of the "contraction of the allotted time." After the Babylonian exile, the Jewish idea of the apocalypse was able to reduce the impact of disappointed historical expectations by means of a more and more richly elaborated speculative picture of the messianic future. 'Immediate expectation' destroys this relation to the future. The present is the last moment of decision for the approaching kingdom of God, and he who postpones conversion so as to put his affairs in order is already lost.

The accommodation with the facts of the world that persisted in existence simply was not accomplished by projecting into the future what according to the promise should already have happened. On the contrary, the "historicization of eschatology" in St. Paul, and even more clearly in St. John, takes the form of a proclamation that the events that are decisive for salvation have already occurred. It is true that St. Paul still foresaw a final judgment, but 'acquittal' before the divine tribunal was already granted to those who by baptism and faith could subsume themselves in the death on the cross and thus lose their sinful identities. Saint John takes the next logical step of saying that the judgment itself has already occurred and that the believer already possesses 'life,' the ultimate gift of salvation. Thus the tendency in dealing with eschatological disappointment was not to explain away the delay, to reintroduce indefiniteness, but rather to relocate the events that were decisive for salvation in the past and to emphasize

(what was now only) an 'inner' possession of certainty deriving from that past. The future no longer brings something radically new, the triumphantly intervening victory over evil; rather it provides scope for the artificial transformations and speculative evasions that were needed in order to reconcile the inherited testimony of 'immediate expectation' with the unexpected continuance of the world and time.⁵

The eschatological future had not only become indefinite; it had also lost its connection with the blessings of salvation that had already been conveyed to redeemed mankind. Consequently the basic eschatological attitude of the Christian epoch could no longer be one of hope for the final events but was rather one of fear of judgment and the destruction of the world. If the original community of believers had still called for the coming of their Lord, very soon the Church was praying *pro mora finis*, for a postponement of the end.⁶ The concept of history that could be constructed from this basic attitude is at most one of an interval of grace, not of an expectation directed toward a future in which it seeks fulfillment. The final events become God's secret proviso vis-à-vis history, which serves not so much to place human consciousness before its decision for or against its maker as to justify God for not excepting the Christians from the manifestations of His anger against the heathen, and thus making the Christians pay the price of the desired continuance of the *genus humanum*, the human race, in which the elect and the rejected are still treated alike.

Early Christianity found itself in what was, in view of its foundational documents, the difficult position of having to demonstrate the trustworthiness of its God to an unbelieving surrounding world not by the fulfillment of His promises but by the postponement of this fulfillment. "Since He has fixed the eternal judgment after the end of the world, He does not carry out the separation presupposed by that judgment before the end of the world. In the meantime He is the same both in kindness and in anger for all of humanity."⁷ In order to demonstrate its usefulness to the surrounding world, which, while it is a source of affliction, is also itself afflicted, the ancient Church 'secularizes' itself into (takes on the worldly role of) a stabilizing factor. At the same time it 'organizes' its worldliness internally, most obviously in the Church's jurisdiction over its individual members, which Tertullian calls "the highest anticipation of the Judgment to come."⁸ The prayed-for interim of grace for the world fills itself with surrogates for absolute righteousness, which is not thereby prepared for but rather rendered

superfluous as far as the force of the need for it is concerned. And Tertullian is no exceptional case. Karl Holl added to his essay on "Tertullian as a Writer" the handwritten marginal note, sounding almost disappointed, "No apologist hopes for an early return of the Lord!"⁹

If one wished to characterize the process I have outlined as one of "secularization"—even though historically it does present itself in an unexpected place—then in any case it would be not the secularization of eschatology but rather secularization by eschatology. Its motive power could then be that the new intensity of the aspects of the world whose readmission was unhopèd for had to contribute to the renewed interest in the world. Franz Overbeck wrote that to the Church, the end of this world seemed near only so long as it had not yet conquered a piece of it. But this conquest came too late to repress 'immediate expectation,' to compensate for the great disappointment. It must have been the other way around: The energy of the eschatological 'state of emergency,' set free, pressed toward self-institutionalization in the world. But this does not falsify Overbeck's statement of symmetry: "As long as the Church possesses this piece, it will continue to be interested in the continued existence of the world; if the last piece is ever really endangered, then she will join her voice in the old cry again."¹⁰

In spite of recurring waves of eschatological-chilastic excitement, the Middle Ages carried on the tendency of taking the edge off of the biblical testimony of expectation of the end with allegorical interpretations, transposing it into expansive long-term speculations, and recasting the declarations of an impending salvation into a system of the internalization of what had already been effected and ensured and turned over to the Church as an inexhaustible store of mercy for it to administer. Added to this was the way the doctrinal unit called eschatology was divided up: For the Middle Ages there was both a *cosmic* and an *individual* eschatology. This split made it inevitable that man's interest would be absorbed by the question of his own 'last things.' The late doctrine of a special judgment for each deceased person at the moment of his death gave to the Last Judgment at the end of time the role of a finale that could no longer really affect the consciousness of the individual. The dimension of the future and of hope, of which secularization theorems speak as a model to be taken over by the modern age, is no match in its pallor for the wealth of

realistic images of the saving deeds in the past. That does not justify making every aesthetic realism into a secularized descendent of Christianity's Incarnation; but means of representation were unquestionably developed in relation to that remembrance, not in relation to hope (more nearly in relation to fear).

In the Christian tradition, paradise was never attractive; it was accepted as part of the bargain because it meant the avoidance of its opposite. This does not yet make the negation of the negation, or the negative dialectic, into a product of secularization. But it suggests the invaluable historical advantage of being able to say that the Messiah has not yet come. What has already been can only be disappointing. The chiliastic enthusiasts of both sacred and worldly peripeties have always understood that. The Messiah who has already appeared can only be treated dogmatically; one must be able to specify exactly who he was, how he identified himself, what he left behind him. The harmonization of what had already come about with what was still to come was the early Christian way of combining the advantages of unfulfilled messianism with the certainty of faith in an absolute that has already been promulgated.

Even if one could identify a genuinely biblical substance throughout the functional transformation of eschatology up to the threshold of the modern age, one would still have to inquire about the criterion of the unilateralness of the removal in order to secure the necessary precision for the asserted process of secularization. It must be admitted that the substantival formula "the historicization of eschatology" artificially avoids specification of who it is that historicizes eschatology, if it does not historicize itself. But it is precisely the quintessence of the state of affairs we have described that no foreign or external factor is at work here employing the authentic substance of eschatological ideas for its own purposes; on the contrary, eschatology historicizes *itself*—not, however, by transforming itself and continuing in a false 'incarnation' [*Scheinleib*] but rather by enforcing the reoccupation of its position by heterogeneous material. Here one gets into linguistic ambiguities. Certainly it can be said that the embarrassing situation of eschatological disappointment allowed the claims 'of this world' to come into play. There are forms of expropriation in which the surrender of substance, in anticipation of its removal, takes on the appearance of a free decision. Hermann Zabel has urged against my catalog of the criteria of secularization that the element of unilateral removal

was absent even in certain actual historical legal proceedings where the Church spontaneously secularized some of its property. Even if one is not prepared to grant in advance the omnipotence of material interests, one will still have to investigate in each particular case whether the situation of the surrender was not characterized by either acute or chronic coercion, which is still the case if it was a matter of prudent anticipation.¹¹ In relation to the process of the early Christian "historicization of eschatology," one might choose the formulation that the pressing or coercive situation of unilateral removal by a 'worldly' power arose solely through the persistence—inadmissible according to the gospel announcement—of this very world in existence. But the historian must go one step further: What the term "world" signifies itself *originated* in that process of 'reoccupying' the position of acute expectation of the end. Only now does it become necessary to digest the fact that it was the *created* world that in the eschatological announcement was reduced to the status of an episode and doomed to destruction. Only the great Marcion could resolve this dilemma—dualistically, and thus mythically. The dualism between the sphere of salvation and the created world was so unavoidable that it had to appear even in the orthodox systems, though mitigated by the allegorization of the counterpower as a political entity, as in Augustine's twofold *civitas* [city of man, city of God]. Only after two legal subjects have come into being can the history of transfers of property in the strict sense begin, in which there will be both genuine and false gifts (and thus 'sacralizations') just as there are genuine and false secularizations. That one of the two institutions present in the world is henceforth explicitly designated as "worldly" is only the expression corresponding to the other's conception of itself as "not of this world." But the reverse of this relation does not hold.

Thus the possibility of talk of secularization is conditioned by the process that established 'worldliness' in the first place. There was no 'worldliness' before there was the opposite of 'unworldliness.' It was the world released to itself from the grip of its negation, abandoned to its self-assertion and to the means necessary to that self-assertion, not responsible for man's true salvation but still competing with that salvation with its own offer of stability and reliability. This true 'creation of the world' [*Weltwerdung*] is not a secularization ('becoming worldly') in the sense of the transformation of something preexisting but rather, as it were, the primary crystallization of a hitherto unknown reality.

Secularization as an encroachment already presupposes the historically perfected demarcation of the agencies responsible for salvation, on the one hand, and for welfare, on the other, and presupposes the possibility of transposing the accents assigned to each of them as well.

The worldly power that is pictured as operative in the process of secularization is for its part, and as such, just as much a product of the original inadmissible persistence in existence of the world, which could not remain what it had been before, as was its self-described "unworldly" counterpart. This fact removes the suggestion of an almost Gnostic dualism from the rivalry of powers that is presupposed in the concept of secularization. The identification of autonomous reason with the worldliness that originated in this way is a hasty interpretation, and no doubt one that is attributable to a desire to subject reason to the demonizing effect of the antithesis.

But if it is not 'demonic,' it certainly is overextended. Modern reason, in the form of philosophy, accepted the challenge of the questions, both the great and the all too great, that were bequeathed to it. It is not the autochthonous and spontaneous will to knowledge that drives reason to overexertion. The pretension of an absolute new beginning suffers from an appearance of illegitimacy on account of the continuity that derives from its inability to shake off inherited questions. The modern age accepted problems as set for it that the Middle Ages had posed and supposedly answered but that had only been posed precisely because people thought they already possessed the 'answers.' For this phase, where the canon is being expanded to include new problems, Nietzsche's thesis that one hears "only the questions to which one is in a position to find an answer"¹² is correct; but it does not hold for the subsequent epoch, which cannot simply discharge the unanswered balance of its inherited questions with the admission that it is not a match for them. The continuity of history across the epochal threshold lies not in the permanence of ideal substances but rather in the inheritance of problems, which obliges the heir, in his turn, to know again what was known once before. Every attempt at resignation with respect to the unknowable then meets with the reproach of being 'positivist,' or whatever other catchword for that reproach may be convenient at the moment.

Thus, as we know, the modern age found it impossible to decline to answer questions about the totality of history. To that extent the philosophy of history is an attempt to answer a medieval question

with the means available to a postmedieval age. In this process, the idea of progress is driven to a level of generality that overextends its original, regionally circumscribed and objectively limited range as an assertion. As one of the possible answers to the question of the totality of history, it is drawn into the function for consciousness that had been performed by the framework of the salvation story, with Creation at one end and Judgment at the other. The fact that this explanatory accomplishment exceeded the powers of its characteristic rationality was not without historical consequences.

Thus the formation of the idea of progress and its taking the place of the historical totality that was bounded by Creation and Judgment are two distinct events. The idea of 'reoccupation'^c says nothing about the derivation of the newly installed element, only about the dedication it receives at its installation. If one wishes to speak here of an alienation or expropriation, a réinterpretation or overinterpretation, then its object was not the theological substance of eschatology in its late, medieval forms; rather what was laid hold of was the independently generated idea of progress, the authentic rationality of which was overextended in the process. As an assertion about the totality of history, including the future, the idea of progress is removed from its empirical foundation in the extension of the reality accessible to and manageable by theory and in the efficiency of the theoretical methodology employed for that purpose, and it is forced to perform a function that was originally defined by a system that is alien to it. The transformation of progress into a faith encompassing the future requires not only that it should be a principle immanent in history—that is, that it *can* emerge from the reason that is operative in individual human actions—it also requires that this principle should *in fact* be active and continue to be so. Even Auguste Comte's law of the three phases of history responds to the pressure to explain history as a whole by projecting a totality that from the perspective of the third, "positive" phase (in which after all this schema is proclaimed for the first time), and in the context of its critical restrictions, is no longer at all possible. This sort of philosophy of history perpetrates the contradiction of excluding itself from the rational criticism that it assigns to itself as the characteristic of its historical standpoint. Hegel's philosophy of history too is a later, retrospective attempt to rejoin the Enlightenment's model of history to the Christian conception of history and to relate them in such a way that the identity of the reason realizing itself in history can still be

seen to be confirmed by a subterranean constancy of the realized ideas. To the extent that the philosophy of history continues to be fixated on the definition of an overall structure of its object, it is burdened by no longer realistically fulfillable obligations toward the persisting 'great questions.'

One element did not play an important role in the early formation of the idea of progress: that of the intensity of the process, of acceleration. As soon as the new undertakings visibly began to exceed the dimensions of what could be accomplished in one generation and its immediate future, the question of speeding up the theoretical, the technical, and so far as possible even the moral processes had to become a matter of interest to those participating in and affected by them. This acceleration not only gave rise to and reinforced expectations; it also produced uneasiness, mistrust, negative utopias, fear of the future, visions of downfall, and so forth. But that does not lead to the limiting case of an accelerated running out of history that could efface the difference between the idea of progress and eschatology in such a way that the attitude to the future once again corresponds to the "belief in an imminent radical change in world history," that is, represents a secularized millenarianism.¹⁸ There are no grounds for saying that this acceleration is "in the first instance an apocalyptic category, which represents the shortened interval before the advent of the Last Judgment," and that this category was "transformed" after the middle of the eighteenth century into a "concept of historical hope."¹⁴ When Luther, according to Reinhart Koselleck's quotation from his "table talk" of 1532, takes exception to Melanchthon allowing the world a further endurance of four hundred years, and for his part insists on the biblical abbreviation of this term in the interests of the elect, then the difference is manifest between abbreviation of the world's remaining time and acceleration of the process that for the first time is supposed to make it pleasant to remain in the world. The biblical expectation, which Luther shares, of the shortening of the apocalyptic period, itself no longer has the unambiguous character of joyful expectation of the end that is brought still closer but exhibits instead a desire to decrease fear of the terrors to come. The significant evidence of 'secularization' here is on the side of Melanchthon, who is encouraged to speculate on the extended duration of the world by the fact that its end after all no longer affects the current generations and allows the *modus vivendi* with the world to continue as an advan-

tageous one. Melancthon's four centuries do not contain the secularized theological element of abbreviation of the final times; rather they serve to exclude the reality of the end from consciousness and to direct attention to the possibility of assigning a higher value to time, and making fuller use of it, by compressing what occurs in it. It is precisely the disproportion between the natural lifetime and the emerging technical requirements of the modern program of progress that provides the rational motive for acceleration once the other course, which had been envisaged at an earlier date, that of adapting the duration of the life of an individual to the dimensions of the new world by means of the art of medicine, had proved to be impracticable.

The history of the factors promoting acceleration, which has yet to be written, should not restrict itself to the appearance of expressions of an increased tempo but should rather explore the earlier phase of the experience of impatience with the slowness of the process, and of both resignation and summoning up of courage with regard to progress's seemingly ever greater consumption of time.

Translator's Notes

a. "Dialectical theology" refers to the theology of Karl Barth and his followers. The "demythologizing" of the kerygma is Rudolf Bultmann's project.

b. "Historicism," here and throughout this book, is not what Karl Popper baptized with that name (in *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and its Enemies*): the "holistic" claim to have found predictive "laws" of history. Instead, it is simply the endeavor of historical scholarship—especially since the early nineteenth century—to interpret any individual historical phenomenon as having a specific character that in each case is the product of a process of historical development rather than of a 'spontaneous generation' or a transcendent intervention (or of the repetition of eternally 'given' forms, archetypes, or whatever). This is the usual meaning of *Historismus* in Germany, the common core of the "historicisms" analyzed by Ernst Troeltsch, Karl Mannheim, Friedrich Meinecke, and Benedetto Croce. The "long campaign of historicism," in this sense of the term, is inimical to ideas of 'authentic ownership' inasmuch as it always seeks out earlier 'sources' or 'influences' that have produced the phenomenon in question through a process of development.

c. The author is referring here to his theory, adumbrated in the two previous paragraphs and presented at greater length in part I, chapter 6, of the continuity of history as a system of "positions" (in one respect, of "questions") that are "reoccupied" (with new answers) after changes of epoch.

Making History So As to Exonerate God?

If we define progress for once not as an increased quantity of goods but as a reduced quantity of 'bads' in the world, we can see more clearly what really differentiates the modern concept of history from the Christian interpretation and why, in the perspective of the latter, the former had to be illegitimate. The objectionable element is not the postponement by history, and dissolution in history, of a concept of transcendent salvation but rather the disruption of the function of a theodicy that operates with the argument that man is responsible for all that is bad in the world. According to the exemplary conception developed by Augustine, the physical defects of the created world are simply the just penalties for the evil that proceeded from human freedom. The inevitability of this train of thought in Augustine's actual situation lay in the fact that it made it possible for him to avoid the Gnostic dualism of good and evil world principles.^a To be sure, the converted Gnostic had to provide an equivalent for the cosmic principle of evil in the bosom of mankind itself. He found it in inherited sinfulness, as a quantity of corruption that is constant rather than being the result of the summation of individual faulty actions. While this sinfulness is inherited, it is at the same time a disposition to increase the actual evil and thus continually to reduce the chances of the good being realized—a negative concept of 'progress' that Kant would be the first to reverse. Augustine's explanation of the bad in the world as the result of human wickedness, as a species-wide quantity, made it necessary for any subsequent notion of progress that would undertake

to diminish the bad in the world also to establish man's ability to lessen his culpability by his own efforts. The idea of progress, as was to become evident much later on, requires a reversal of the causal relation between moral and physical evils; it is founded on the assumption that in a better world it would be easier to be a better person. But as had been laid down in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, death came into the world through sin, and consequently the reverse could not be said—that man sins because he must die.

Hans Jonas has correctly related the possibility of the idea of progress to the position that is the antithesis of the Pauline/Augustinian doctrine of grace, namely, Pelagianism, which he characterizes as the "leveling of divine grace into an instructive power working toward progress in the whole of human history and increasingly bringing men to the consciousness of their freedom and responsibility for themselves."¹

But to infer from this that the idea of progress has after all been traced back to a Christian origin would be mistaken. For though it is true that Augustinianism, and above all its late-medieval extreme forms, excludes the possibility of the conception of progress, it should not be assumed that Pelagianism represents the intratheological alternative to this position. It would be more correct to say that the naturalism of mere divine assistance holds to the young Augustine's doctrine of freedom without his Gnostic trauma but consequently also without the function of theodicy—unless one were to regard it as a variant way of vindicating the Creator that the defects of His Creation are eliminated in the course of time by the zeal and diligence of His creatures. If one looked in the modern philosophy of history for an equivalent to that Pelagian position with its opposition to the Augustine who was reconverted by the Epistle to the Romans, that equivalent would be Lessing's *Education of Humanity*.

'Theodicy' first became a literary reality under that name in the work of Leibniz. But although Leibniz did influence the development of the modern age's concept of history by his establishment of the positive uniqueness of the individual, this was not a result of his *Theodicy*. Nor could it have been. For in this work any tendency toward a philosophy of history is excluded precisely because it asserts the world's quality of being the best of all possible worlds. This leads to an optimistic statics of insurpassability, which denies man any significance in relation to the production of a 'better world.'

An essential characteristic of Leibniz's argumentation, by which he is distinguished from Augustine, is the integration of the bad aspects of the world into the design of the Creation. Even the God who is to be vindicated by His work can Himself generate physically bad things to the extent that they are unavoidable in the accomplishment of the optimal overall goal. There is no longer any relation of retribution between these bad things and human actions. Leibniz's theodicy characterizes the bad things in the world no longer in moral terms but rather in instrumental ones. Leo Strauss saw the element of 'secularization' precisely in this, that not only has providence lost its mysteriousness for reason, but at the same time the claim to absoluteness of the divine laws has been overlaid by the justification of evil means by the grandeur of the overall end. The *Theodicy* paves the way for the modern concept of history to the extent that it demonstrates the rationality of absolute ends by the model of divine action. "In proportion as the providential order came to be regarded as intelligible to man, and therefore evil came to be regarded as evidently necessary or useful, the prohibition against doing evil lost its evidence. Hence various ways of action which were previously condemned as evil could now be regarded as good."²

Is the absolutism of ends the bridge by which the secularization of the concept of providence into the concept of history was accomplished? The *Theodicy* is anything but a theological work; it could not even be the secularization of such a work, for one unmistakable reason: The vindication of God is, for Leibniz, the means of securing the most radical principle of the autonomy of philosophy that could be conceived of, the principle of sufficient reason. There is only one possible application of this rational principle: Given the assumption that the best of all possible worlds has been realized, one can in principle deduce the answer to any conceivable question. This motive can be seen, for example, when Leibniz, in opposition to Newton, justifies the idealization of space and time with the argument that because of the homogeneous indistinguishability of their parts, they exclude rational explanations of actions that involve location in space and time. Everything is aimed at the goal of realizing the omniscience and independence of reason. And it is difficult to avoid the impression that this project was bound to succeed—if it had not been for the earthquake in Lisbon, Voltaire's ridicule, and Kant's demonstration that this in-

vestiture of reason could indeed establish the autonomy of theoretical, but not of practical, reason.

Finally Odo Marquard has attempted to apply Hegel's understanding of his philosophy of history as 'theodicy' to the interpretation of the idealist philosophy of history as a whole. The latter supplies a solution to the problem of theodicy by radicalizing human autonomy in such a way that by means of it, following Augustine's schema, it can accomplish the "radical demonstration of God's innocence."⁸ Does acceptance of this thesis mean that the richest and most ambitious version of the philosophy of history that we have before us is really secularized theology after all? Marquard does not employ this concept. But for him also the motive of theodicy provides the answer to the question whether there is "after all perhaps even a theologically plausible and honorable motive" for idealism's "radicalizing autonomy, that is to say, human freedom over against God—in the extreme case even to such an extent that talk of God must cease."

The occasion for and the accomplishment of this kind of theodicy can indeed be gathered from the example of Kant's discovery of the problem of antinomy, and of the means of overcoming it, in the *Transcendental Dialectic*.^b The discovery that reason brings about its own greatest self-deceptions in obeying its knowledge drive surpasses even Descartes's *genius malignus* [malicious spirit] because it no longer uncovers only a hypothetical consequence but rather the reality of the immanent movement of reason. But at the same time the intensification of the demonstration relieves God of responsibility, the God Who in His absolute sovereignty could still have been Descartes's deceiving spirit, whereas Kant in the transcendental turning of his critique of reason not only sees but also has us overcome the source of deception in the rational subject itself. Though initially all that man takes upon himself here is the 'blame' for the theoretical aberrations of his uncritical use of his reason, still this could at the same time have presented itself as a formula for relieving God of responsibility for the tortures of history. One should not forget here that since Augustine's turning away from Gnosticism, the concept of the 'bad' in the world had been displaced and continues up to the present to be displaced continually further and further: The bad aspect of the world appears less and less clearly as a physical defect of nature and more and more (and with less ambiguity, on account of the technical means by which we amplify these things) as the result of human

actions. To that extent, the philosophy of history already reflects a situation in which man suffers less and less from the defects of nature and more and more from the productions of his own species. That would have to produce a new variety of Gnosticism and, no less necessarily, a new conception of revolt against it. Following Marquard, the idealist philosophy of history would perhaps not be a secularized theology in its content and formal structure, but it certainly would be in its function. It would be a theology that expresses itself, out of concern for the vindication of God, as an anthropology, or better, as Marquard puts it, a "theology that prevents itself consistently and throughout." Happily I do not have to discuss here the question whether the philosophy of history is the cunning of theology^c practiced through theodicy, in which theology makes use of its dissolution into anthropology (as affirmed by Feuerbach) only for what is after all a more thorough and final exoneration of its God. The remaining question, then, is whether dependence on theodicy as a central motive would be the indirect secularization of an originally theological idea. This question cannot be lightly passed over, if only because the connection Odo Marquard asserts is at least as plausible as the thesis of the expropriation of eschatology. Marquard shares the skepticism I advocate in regard to the "usual derivation of modern philosophy of history from the Bible's eschatological conception of the future,"⁴ but at bottom not because 'secularization' alleges *too much* substantial identity with theology but rather because for him it exposes *too little* of the genuinely theological function of this philosophy. For Marquard too, secularization becomes an appearance, which as such can be functionally explained: The philosophy of history would be, as it were, 'indirect theology,' which speaks again and again of man, so as not to tarnish the image of God—like someone who constantly avoids a particular topic of conversation because he knows that any word from him on that subject could give an indication of something that he wishes to avoid suggesting in any way. Theology is not a stage in the transformation of anthropology; rather it is the reverse: Philosophy's talk of history and of man is the perfected final phase of theology, in its humanly most 'refined' form as theodicy. Phenomena of secularization would then be due to a "methodical atheism *ad maiorem gloriam Dei* [to the greater glory of God]," which would be nothing less than "what may be the only promising form of theodicy."

My objection focuses on the—if not material, still at least functional—identity of theology and theodicy, to the extent that the latter makes an appearance in the form of the philosophy of history. The principle of autonomy, precisely if it is to be understood as a historical principle, can never be sufficiently radical to carry the burden of total responsibility that its function as theodicy would require. The philosophy of history never justifies the world as the created world but only as a world still to be produced. Marquard himself defines the philosophy of history by one characteristic only: It “proclaims a world history with the single goal and end of universal freedom.”⁵ But precisely if freedom is the goal and the end, it cannot be the means to provide what is supposed to be provided here: the absolute scapegoat for absolute goodness. After all, the only reason the schema functions for Augustine is that the single original and then inherited sin was committed precisely under conditions of perfect freedom and hence can carry with it total responsibility; mankind as the subject of the philosophy of history, which works itself free through history and out of it, has this freedom only as an idea, and thus at any given time the full blame that has to be allocated cannot yet be assigned to it. If philosophy of history, in the form of theodicy, is supposed to rescue God’s goodness, then it must deny His omnipotence. This insight, which Voltaire arrived at in his critique of Leibniz, is probably atheistic; not, however, in the paradoxical sense proposed by Marquard but rather in a destructive sense. For the defects of divine omnipotence are the possibilities and necessities of human self-empowerment in history. The question of who bears the responsibility pales into insignificance in the face of the question of power. Where power is absent, there cannot be responsibility either.

Voltaire’s quasi-theodicy of finite power is destructive because it does not satisfy the one interest that the modern age can have in a theodicy: an interest in the establishment of reliability. Of course omnipotence is not reliable as such, but only omnipotence is capable of reliability. In the modern form given it by Leibniz, theodicy is already outside any theological function; it does indeed belong to the “protest of the Enlightenment against the God of will and His *potentia absoluta* [absolute power],” but that is not the same as the assertion that in theodicy it is “no longer the ‘merciful God’ but rather the ‘righteous God’ ” Who is thematic.⁶ In fact the Enlightenment’s interest in theodicy is certainly not primarily related to the question of righteousness; its

problem is that of a reliability that, going beyond the Cartesian *veracitas* [truthfulness], provides a guarantee of the autonomous lawfulness of the world process, undisturbed by miracles. The proof of the impossibility of a proof of God's existence became possible for Kant at the moment in which the lawfulness of natural phenomena no longer needed to depend on this guarantee because it was supposed to be demonstrable as a transcendental condition of the possibility of nature. Here lies the connection that Marquard seeks between the Transcendental Dialectic and the problem of theodicy in the modern age.

Modern theodicy is an 'indirect' advocacy of human interests. If this thesis is correct, then a philosophy of history that arises from theodicy cannot be the 'indirect' advocacy of theological interests; it cannot be 'the continuation of theodicy by other means.' Even if the idealist thesis of autonomy were the vindication of a God Who did not indeed create the best of all possible worlds but Who instead equipped man with the compensatory capacity to improve continually the quality of the existing world, then this vindication would still only give rise to renewed reflection on history, in regard to the question whether its course does in fact show man to be a compensatory creature and does free his author from the suspicion of not being sufficiently reliable in honoring the autonomy of man and his world. But this suspicion leads not so much to methodical as rather to hypothetical atheism, which regards history as the sum total not of man's effort to exonerate God but rather of the demonstrated—and bearable—possibility of doing without God. Without keeping its name, Marquard has reduced the secularization thesis to its most extreme and most effective form: What remains is no continuity of contents, of substance, of material, but only the naked identity of a subject, whose survival through changes in clothing and in complete anonymity, against all importunities, both gross and subtle, is assured. Theology's incognito role as the theodicy in the philosophy of history is the perfection of Docetism. Marquard has described it as the cunning of my reason—so it is at least that of reason in some form—that with the functional model of history^d I provided the secularization thesis with the only possible chance of defending itself, once (and because) the theses of identity and theorems of continuity in history turned out to be untenable⁷—in other words, still, in spite of everything, a philosophy of history once again, although it is precisely in the philosophy of history that the modern age miscarried, and by the philosophy of history that

it was put at risk "as in the pursuit of a supposedly risk-free speculation": "The philosophy of history is countermodernity." It would show lack of respect for an important train of thought to play Marquard's statements of 1965 off against those of 1973—who would not know more accurately since then what can be produced through supposed transformations of theology? But I may be allowed to express my discomfort at being made the tool of a cunning of reason in that I supposedly prepared the final and most stable refuge for the secularization theorem while I was still attacking Marquard's anonymous identity of theology in the theodicy of the philosophy of history. The thesis that it is a functional reoccupation that creates the appearance of a substantial identity lasting through the process of secularization is meant to *explain* phenomena of tenacious obstinacy, not to mitigate or to legitimate them. It is true that Marquard seems to incline toward the thesis that the modern age could only have succeeded if it had broken with the expectations and eliminated the residual needs that had been bequeathed to it. I can formulate this sharply as follows: Modernity could only have succeeded and defended itself against countermodernities if it had really begun just as absolutely from scratch as Descartes's program prescribed. But this program too, as will be shown in part II, is only the answer to a provocation, and the answer was to become absolutist because the provocation was absolutist. But then modernity would be bound to miscarry because the very idea of beginning it was already involved in the functional continuity of provocation and self-assertion, and therefore in its origin 'antimodern.' This sort of paradox is unavoidable when one sees even in the functional model of history the cunning of reason in its determination to become a philosophy of history once again.

I want to get at the root of this difficulty that Marquard causes himself and me. I think I have found it in a much earlier context. Marquard wrote in 1958 that there are two conceptions of the disappearance of the theological definition of reason: the theory of liberation and the theory of the Fall; but perhaps, he wrote, this disjunction of liberation and apostasy is not exhaustive. Perhaps these alternatives can be overcome by "attention to genuinely theological motives for the emancipation of reason." And then there follows a sentence that as a premise makes it possible to deduce even the reinterpretation, so much later, of the functional model of history as a countermodern salvage attempt: "Emancipation is neither liberation nor apostasy when

theology itself provokes it.”⁸ Here Marquard is inventing the cunning of reason that a decade and a half later he will find in the functional model. For it is only an artifice to want to see neither the achievement of freedom nor the Fall in an action *because* it was provoked by theology itself and received not only its logic but also its consecration from that source. Of course if one imputes to the self-assertion of reason a need for an external sanction, then one will only be able to seek that sanction in the agency that made the self-assertion necessary. To explain a phenomenon by referring it to a provocation is not to justify it. Talk of the “legitimacy” of the modern age makes sense only to the extent that that legitimacy is disputed.

Translator's Notes

- a. This account of Augustine's doctrine of free will is presented at greater length in part II, chapter 1.
- b. Of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. [Marquard's first book was entitled *Skeptische Methode im Blick auf Kant* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1958).]
- c. This phrase is a variation of Hegel's famous “cunning of reason,” according to which ‘reason’ accomplishes purposes in history that its ‘rational’ human agents do not intend.
- d. For a general statement of this ‘model’ see part I, chapter 6, paragraph 3ff.

The Secularization Thesis as an Anachronism in the Modern Age

The considerations presented up to this point have been intended to contribute to deciphering a methodology for the application of the category of secularization in historiography. This attempt to extract a more precise meaning from a term hitherto mostly used with an innocent confidence that it must mean something has caused a number of its users to step forward and protest that that was not what they meant by it. My question in return is not so much what in fact they did mean by it as what would have to have been meant by the term "secularization" to make it capable of the productivity it has been thought to have in the comprehension of historical relations. The methodological burden of proof that I have laid out may not be immediately convertible into theoretical performance; such difficulties are found in the methodological history of all historical disciplines, whose source material was not laid down and conserved with an eye to the satisfaction of theoretical interests. Much that methodology would lead us to anticipate discovering will have to remain obscure here. But in regard to the secularization theorem it is possible nevertheless to gain an overview as to whether the high expectations that were suggested by preliminary conjectures and brilliant aperçus can ever be consolidated into well-founded judgments. And it still seems more like a case of terminological metastasis. The prospects for acquiring more secure insights must be tested carefully in cases where what appears to be such a productive expression is used as though it represented a long-recognized state of affairs.

The suggestion of secularization was not 'cooked up,' after the modern age had long enjoyed undisputed standing, in order to accuse it of an exact recompense for its "cultural debt." The availability of the category of secularization for ideological employment is not a result of the cunning—already invested in that category—of any reason or (for that matter) unreason. There is such a thing as the possibility of mobilizing implications after the fact, and the fact that the use of the expression "cultural debt" in this context can be documented is a symptom of this, and no more. The insinuation of the primordial trickery of priests was one of the weaknesses of the Enlightenment because it thoughtlessly ignored the background of needs underlying the phenomena and the institutions at which the Enlightenment's critical attack was aimed. The superficiality of this sort of reckless exposure of supposed hidden backgrounds should not be repeated by a rationality of humane consideration.

Even if the relevant phenomena do not satisfy the criteria we have developed—the criteria of identifiability, authentic ownership, and unilateral removal—and if consequently their character as 'secularizations' must be explained as an appearance, not a reality, still this appearance has a real foundation, a demonstrable role in a historical logic. The only reason why 'secularization' could ever have become so plausible as a mode of explanation of historical processes is that supposedly secularized ideas can in fact mostly be traced back to an identity in the historical process. Of course this identity, according to the thesis advocated here, is not one of contents but one of functions. It is in fact possible for totally heterogeneous contents to take on identical functions in specific positions in the system of man's interpretation of the world and of himself. In our history this system has been decisively determined by Christian theology, and specifically, above all, in the direction of its expansion. Theology created new 'positions' in the framework of the statements about the world and man that are possible and are expected, 'positions' that cannot simply be 'set aside' again or left unoccupied in the interest of theoretical economy. For theology there was no need for questions about the totality of the world and history, about the origin of man and the purpose of his existence, to be unanswerable. This explains the readiness with which it introduced titles into the budget of man's needs in the area of knowledge, to honor which was bound to be difficult or even impossible for any knowledge that did not appeal, as it did,

to transcendent sources. Its strength could only be the weakness of its heirs. If this has the appearance of a reproach, it might be compared to the reproach that Leibniz advanced against Descartes, that through the radicalness of his doubt and the questionable perspicuity of its elimination he had introduced into the world a demand for certainty, which on account of the rigor of its requirements could not be fulfilled by him or by anyone else, but which could not be revoked and rejected merely on account of the impossibility of satisfying it.

The modern age's readiness to inherit such a mortgage of prescribed questions and to accept as its own the obligation to pay it off goes a long way toward explaining its intellectual history. There is an element of tragedy in the way in which this effort, as generous as it was hopeless, finally ends with the more or less explicit insinuation that the inheritance came about in a dishonest way. What mainly occurred in the process that is interpreted as secularization, at least (so far) in all but a few recognizable and specific instances, should be described not as the *transposition* of authentically theological contents into secularized alienation from their origin but rather as the *reoccupation* of answer positions that had become vacant and whose corresponding questions could not be eliminated. I have represented this too one-sidedly as being due to a lack of critical intensity and have not referred often enough to the importance, noted elsewhere, of 'residual needs.'

The excessive longevity of a system of questions that extends across a change of epoch, and its influence over the answers that are possible given the premises of the new epoch, is not a phenomenon that first appears in relation to the beginning of the modern age. Christianity itself in its early days was subjected to a comparable 'problem pressure' in its confrontation with questions that were originally foreign to it. The embarrassment that is already evident in Philo of Alexandria and then in the patristic authors in their efforts to set up something on the basis of the biblical story of the creation that would be comparable to the great cosmological speculations of Greek antiquity, and the quantity of allegory that had to be found in order to comply with this externally imposed compulsion, show us the pressure of the 'carry-over' of questions to which an answer was held to be possible.

We are going to have to free ourselves from the idea that there is a firm canon of the 'great questions' that throughout history and with an unchanging urgency have occupied human curiosity and motivated the pretension to world and self-interpretation. Such a canon would

explain the changing systems of mythology, theology, and philosophy by the congruence of their output of assertions with its content of questions. The problematic of the carry-over of questions is above all a problematic of the epochal thresholds, of the phases of more or less rapid change in the basic rules for the procurement of very general explanations. The reproach that a theoretical system accomplishes too little for man's self-understanding taken as a whole is less often expressed than it appears in fact to be present in the consciousness of the founders, and above all of the epigonic advocates of such systems, when they believe the time has come to undertake to demonstrate their system's comprehensive ability to deal with problems. It is not so much the modern age's pretension to total competence as its obligation to possess such competence that might be described as a product of secularization.

Questions do not always precede their answers. There is a 'spontaneous generation,' from the authority of nonrational annunciations, of great and acutely active assertions such as those of eschatological immediate expectation, the doctrine of the Creation, or original sin. I have retained the expression "spontaneous generation" [*Urzeugung*] here, although it has proved to be open to misunderstanding.¹ I have already tried to show, in connection with Augustine's doctrine of original sin, the only way in which the expression can be meant to be understood: that the content of the doctrine is not determined by the systematic requirements of justifying the Creation that the converted Gnostic had to satisfy, since a different content from that of an inherited guilt could certainly have been found. The *generatio aequivoca*² consists simply in the fact that the combination of the concept of freedom and the doctrine of original sin could be codified at this specific location into the 'answer' to a 'great question' that was yet to be accurately stated. When the credibility and general acceptance of such answers dwindle away, perhaps because inconsistencies appear in the system, they leave behind them the corresponding questions, to which then new answers become due. Unless, perhaps, it turns out to be possible to destroy the question itself critically and to undertake amputations on the system of world explanation. That this cannot be a purely rational operation is a lesson of history, if it is a lesson of anything. Even the dwindling and (especially morally) discredited mythology of the Greeks 'prescribed' to the nascent philosophy what questions it had to assume responsibility for and what systematic scope it had to

possess. Far beyond its initial phase, philosophy, as the embodiment of the early theoretical attitude, continues to bear the imprint of the effort to measure up to this supposed standard of its achievement and to postpone or to gloss over the disappointments that could not fail to appear. Analogies to the later secularization theorem are already found where the beginnings of science are in competition with the older offerings that they have to replace. Pliny passes on a story about Hippocrates according to which he copied down what he read on the votive tablets in the temples, where the means employed in the successful healing of sick people were indicated, and this was how he invented medicine. Jakob Brucker, the early historian of philosophy to whom most philosophers in his century owed their knowledge of the history of philosophy, introduces this anecdote and makes the double comment that Hippocrates would not have been tolerated or honored in Greece if this were true and that the anecdote must have originated from "an invention of enemies of his and of doctors in general."² Christianity also encountered, in the Hellenistic world into which it was expanding and to which it offered its annunciation as a motive for joining it, questions that it was not originally equipped to answer and for which it lacked the conceptual equipment that it would be called upon to produce in the arguments in which it was beginning to get involved. In this situation what emerged as the basic process of adjustment to the preexisting formal system of world explanation was the conversion of what were originally values for salvation into explanatory values. This process was to prove to be irreversible, however often attempts might be made to revoke it, most radically by the theology of the Reformation in a historical situation in which the developed system of these explanatory values, in the form of Scholasticism, had entered its crisis. If this hypothesis is correct, then the Reformation's reduction of Christianity to its value for salvation was at the same time an attempt to eliminate the 'problem pressure' that was the result of its early 'secularization' as a system of world explanation.

In acute situations of immediate expectation, the promised salvation can remain extremely undefined; everything is going to be different, and he who asks how has already lost his chance to participate. The status of the change as beyond interrogation is a result of the intolerability of the existing state of affairs. Acute eschatology is the equivalent of the obsessional neurosis whose universal effect Freud described

with the phrase, "... at last the whole world lies under an embargo of 'impossibility.'"²⁷³ Salvation then can take whatever form it likes. Only the precise demands of the Hellenistic world, stamped as it was by philosophical ideas, made it necessary to overcome the uncertainty in the formulation of the goal of salvation, which can be sensed throughout the New Testament, in favor of definitions. When one considers, for example, how deeply our tradition has been influenced by the idea of immortality, one is startled to find that this idea is not to be found in the biblical texts that originate before the Babylonian exile. But at the same time the corpus of revelation as a whole was very inadequately equipped for providing answers to the questions that were being posed regarding the recently promised "life." Greek philosophy was able, for various reasons, to specify more precisely what conditions had to be satisfied in a condition of "happiness." These conditions presented themselves to the Christian authors of the early centuries as an obligatory systematic program. No doubt any system will have to say something about happiness, but how one can talk about it will depend on very many variables in the way the formal system of positions is filled, until finally the subjectivity of the very concept of happiness becomes a systematic element. In the world of Hellenism, Christianity found its function and the scope of the answers required of it prescribed to it as an empty frame to be filled. Its claim to be heard and to take part in the competition of doctrines promising salvation and explanation of the world could only be made good by the acceptance of this function. In a certain respect it was a strong point of Christianity that it had not committed itself to certain concrete contents of salvation in its acute initial situation, because now it could formulate them for the first time. Even if what this formulation promised was a transcendent expectation, it still had to borrow its content from antiquity's philosophical definition of eudemonia: The salvation content of immortality becomes theoretical contemplation, the *visio beatifica* [beatific vision]—fundamentally a philosopher's bliss.

In the patristic formation of Christianity, for the first time a system of propositions presented itself as the *final* form of philosophy. Christianity produced this characteristic claim by formulating its dogma in the language of ancient metaphysics and claiming to solve the enigmas of that metaphysics concerning the world. The patristic authors habitually use the formula that the founder of their religion answered all the questions of ancient philosophy. Christ had brought not only

a summons and annunciation from and about another world but also the true and final knowledge of this world including all the problems *de rerum natura* [concerning the nature of things].⁴ Thus the *modern* phenomenon (interpreted as secularization) of the reoccupation of vacant answer positions is not bound specifically to the spiritual structure of *this* epoch. The Christian reception of antiquity and the modern taking over of explanatory functions of the Christian system have largely analogous structures as historical processes. Just as patristic Christianity appears 'in the role of' ancient philosophy, so modern philosophy 'substitutes' to a large extent for the function of theology—admittedly for the function of a theology that on account of that process that occurred two millennia earlier is at least terminologically adapted to such substitution. Even when modern philosophy conceives itself as in the sharpest possible contradiction to its theological prehistory, which it considers itself to have 'overcome,' it is bound to the frame of reference of what it renounces.

Once men had begun "to know so amazingly much about God," as the young Hegel wrote,⁵ even an atheism or a renewal of the pagan cosmos was possible only insofar as it was able to fill again the space laid claim to by what it negated. If we consider for once not Hegel, the "theologian for the sake of philosophy,"⁶ but Nietzsche's "struggle against latent Christianity," then we find not only that "he was unable to express the recurrence of the world of Heraclitus in any but anti-Christian language"—which might be a very superficial phenomenon of provocativeness that goes no deeper than the language employed—but, much more precisely, that "the questions that arose for Nietzsche from the 'death of God' were each related to the lapsing of a theological answer."⁷ The "active forgetfulness" of which Nietzsche speaks, the forgetfulness of the child, for which he makes Zarathustra long, seems not to be easy to introduce into history. The divine art of forgetting, which is invoked in the fragments of the "Dionysus Dithyramb," is not the art of human history, whose irreversibility implies memory.⁸ In history the price we pay for our great critical freedom in regard to the answers is the nonnegotiability of the questions. This does not exclude the possibility that these questions derive from a human interest that lies deeper than the mere persistence of the epochal carry-over; but it does make clearer how much more difficult it is to demonstrate the universality of a human interest than simply to point to the fact that it has been able to survive a few centuries.

In regard to the origin and structure of the problems connected with the secularization thesis and the criteria of its applicability, it is instructive to observe that the notion of an original property in ideas, and the accusations that derive from it, are already employed in the polemics and apologetics that accompany the reception of ancient ideas by Christianity. To assert and defend the legitimacy of its ownership of ideas is the elementary endeavor of what is new, or claims to be new, in history; to dispute this legitimacy, or to prevent or at least shake the self-consciousness that goes with it, is the technique of defending the existing state of affairs. Early Christianity not only laid claim for itself to the legitimate ownership of its truths, by virtue of revelation, but also disputed the legitimacy of the ancient world's possession of the ideas that they had in common or that it had taken over from that world. The trick of representing the ancient philosophers as having secretly learned from the Bible recurs again and again in the patristic literature and denies even the most obvious instances of dependence by reinterpreting these as the restoration of property that had been alienated much earlier.

In relation to the Stoic doctrine, which had been assimilated to the point of seeming self-evident, that the cosmos exists for the sake of man, Ambrosius of Milan poses the rhetorical question, "Unde hoc, nisi de nostris scripturis, dicendum adsumpserunt?" ["From what source have they claimed that this must be said, if not from our scriptures?"]⁹ Augustine formulates the Christian claim quite generally, as follows: "But if those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, say something that is true and consistent with our faith, not only do we have no need to be afraid of this, but we may take over the property in this truth from those who are its unrightful possessors. . . . What they possess as their silver and gold they have not produced for themselves; they have derived it, as though from a mine, from the shafts of divine providence, which rules everywhere. But then they have perverted it, employing it wrongly in the service of evil spirits. When the Christian severs himself in spirit from the unhappy community of the pagans, he must take these treasures from them and use them righteously for the proclamation of the gospel."¹⁰ The theft of the gold and silver vessels from Pharaoh's Egypt is Augustine's allegorical prototype of behavior with respect to the *iniusti possessores* [wrongful possessors] of the truth, already supplemented here with the fiction that at bottom the heathen themselves would have had to

intend the transfer of the goods to the legitimate usufructuary. This formula of *debet ab eis auferre christianus* [the Christian should take it from them] is one of those unbelievable licenses that are supposed to justify the possessors of the truth in putting to their own use everything held by those who cannot or will not know anything of this truth. It is the prototype of the morality of the genius, of the superman, and of the functionary who serves the only truly justifying interests.

Tertullian, two centuries earlier, had linked the category of legitimacy to the question of truth even more radically. Regarding the nature of the soul, he says, it is not a question of the truth of a proposition as such but of the evidence of its origin. It would be better to remain ignorant about such a question if God did not choose to reveal anything about it rather than to learn anything about it from men who presumed to be able to grasp it unaided and in that way succeeded in taking possession of the truth.¹¹ Evidence of legitimate ownership of the truth is demanded because the assertion of a religious revelation at the same time implies that that revelation is the sole competent authority for the realm to which it applies, since a God Who reveals something that men already know in any case, or could know, puts in question the necessity of His revelation and thus its exclusive value for His believers. For this reason alone it cannot be the case that philosophy at any time brought to light authentically and by its own means anything that had ever been ascribed to revelation. Thus there must be secularization—both the anticipatory secularization that is ancient philosophy's sacrilegious use of the contents of the Bible and the posthumous secularization that is German Idealism and the materialism that grows up under its influence.

It seems to me that in the background of the early Christian demand that ancient philosophy demonstrate the legitimacy of its possession of a share of the truth, there stands a Platonism: What is true is so by virtue of its derivation as a copy of an original truth that is identified with God. The dependence of an image on its original is already for Plato something that cannot be bracketed out and disregarded. Its status as an image must be taken into account as an internally determining element in an appearance as well as in any copy of it. This is the only way in which the derived reality of nature can be traced back at all to a sphere of absolutely intelligible realities. In the same way, in reverse, the Ideas have not only a content of absolute truth but also at the same time an implication of what ought to exist, which

motivates their duplication, materialization, conversion into nature, as can be seen in the myth of the demiurge. The early Christian authors lay claim to the truth that can be found in the ancient philosophers (and that has now been 'confirmed') in order not only to integrate it into their system as something that has now become available to everyone—as what we would call "objective" truth—but also to return it to its truth in a stricter sense of the term by reestablishing its genetic reference. Henceforth for the whole epoch of the Middle Ages, there is an authority responsible for guaranteeing the truth as well as the reality of the world, which no longer has its own obvious and immediate evidence, and never regains it.

A similar residue of Platonism is still involved in the implication of blame in 'secularization': Just as the image not only represents the original but can also conceal it and allow it to be forgotten, so the secularized idea, if left to itself and not reminded of its origin, rather than causing one to remember its derivation can serve instead to make such remembrance superfluous. The work of the historian or philosopher of history in uncovering secularizations reestablishes anamnesis and leads to a kind of restitution through the recognition of the relation of debt. Admittedly, in Tertullian's argument regarding the legitimate use of the truth, this Platonic background has already disappeared almost entirely in the legalistic style of apologetics, in the process of forensic *praescriptio* [exception, exclusion], which denies the opponent the formal qualifications required for entry into argument about the subject of the dispute.¹² Thus Tertullian forbids the heretics to cite Scripture in support of their position in a dispute, since only the rightful owner may make use of an object. And legitimate ownership arises through acquisition from the hand that has disposition over the object.

Thus the connection between the concept of truth and the idea of ownership was not established for the first time in the modern age on the basis of 'bourgeois' attitudes; rather it arises from the overlapping of formal identity and material discontinuity in the epoch-making changes in our history. It is true that this connection changed fundamentally in the modern age. One of the developments that constituted this epoch produced the axiom that the legitimate ownership of ideas can be derived only from their authentic production. This is important if only because it renders the idea of a legitimate secularization paradoxical, while at the same time it gives the criterion of genuine ownership its specific importance for the first time. Intellectual

acquisition through any kind of 'carrying-over,' in the broadest sense, has become suspect. This also belongs in the context of the self-assertion of reason, which in this way opposes itself to the extreme emphasis on the element of divine grace in theology and its philosophic equivalents (from *illuminatio* [illumination] to *concursus* [*concursus divinus*: divine 'coproduction' or agreement]). Its postulate is that of the self-inherence of truth as guaranteed by its self-generation. Knowledge derived from mere teaching becomes a derivative form of a possession of truth that every rational subject is supposed to be able to appropriate to itself by itself carrying out the work of knowledge. This appropriation is radically different from every type of transfer of ownership. The appeal of the idea of 'method' rests on this assumption, that it makes the equipment that is necessary to the work of knowledge available potentially to everyone.

Leibniz raises against Descartes's voluntaristic account of the truths of reason the simple objection, which, however, is felt to be decisive, that if there were such a dependence on the divine will, then even the properties of a geometrical object would hold only *velut privilegium* [by privilege]. There is a double meaning in the background of this argument: Neither would the object possess its properties by virtue of internal necessity, nor would the knowing subject possess its truths by insight into such necessity.¹⁸ Truth has ceased to be analogous to theology's rule of grace. The idea of endowed and conveyable property in ideas thus loses its basis. And the accusation of illegitimate appropriation takes on an additional anachronistic quality because the process that is said to have taken place would have had to destroy the conditions under which the alienated property had its value.

Here it becomes evident that the change in the presuppositions of the idea of spiritual ownership not only has a determining effect on the criteria for the applicability and effectiveness of the historical category of 'secularization' but, even more radically, has a destructive impact on the possibility of constructing such a process of spiritual expropriation and debt. The claim that the use of this schema promotes historical understanding involves a premise that is foreign to the modern age's self-understanding and that is 'secularized' in its own right. Reflection on history falls into this same circle of presuppositions even when it does not join in the evaluation suggested by the concept of secularization, that is, in either the regret over the loss of spiritual property or the gratification with regard to the purer essentiality of

the remainder of transcendence once it has been freed of everything that can devolve upon 'the world.' When historical understanding makes use of this category, it enters into religion's self-interpretation as a privileged access to truth. It takes over the assumption, which is necessarily bound up with the claim to have received a revelation, of a beginning that is not historically explicable, that has no immanent preconditions. This beginning introduces not only a new but also the *final* historical formation. Any historical self-consciousness that believed itself capable of making, or believed it had already made, another new beginning, a beginning that was supposed to constitute a 'modern age' [*Neuzeit*: literally, new age] as a scientifically grounded and therefore final epoch, was bound to come into conflict with this Christian claim to novelty and finality. The finality in the Christian self-conception was bound to try to assert itself against this by denying the possible authenticity of any such founding act in history and at the same time accusing it of having had to make illegitimate use of the truth that belongs to Christianity.

Let me prevent any misunderstanding from arising or persisting here: The claim that the modern age made an absolute beginning through philosophy is no more correct than the claim that the latter half of history had an absolute beginning in the events to which the Christian era traces its origin. In historical analysis, the claims of both beginnings to the status of supposedly unconditioned givens have gone up in smoke. However, these claims are not identical in nature. The philosophical program for the beginning of the modern age 'failed' because it was unable to analyze away its own preconditions. This statement is not one that is brought to bear from outside but rather is a conclusion that must be reached in order to maintain consistency with this beginning. The philosophical inception of the modern age is itself a subject for philosophy, and thus has become just as continually surpassable, where the insufficiently radical character of the Cartesian *Cogito* is concerned, as it is integrable into the declining Middle Ages, where the historical conditioning of its need to 'make certain' is concerned. These difficulties have served to arouse an understanding, which was still lacking in the Enlightenment, of the historical conditioning of the foundation of the institution of Christian theology. On the other hand, one must regard the secularization thesis as an indirectly theological exploitation of the historiographical difficulties that have arisen with regard to the philosophical attempt at a beginning of the

modern age. The secularization thesis makes these disturbances of the attempt to carry out something free of all preconditions appear as a sort of providential resistance on the part of what is indispensable. But the modern age does not have recourse to what went before it, so much as it opposes and takes a stand against the challenge constituted by what went before it. This distinction, which will have to be substantiated in part II, makes worldliness the characteristic feature of the modern age without its having to be the result of secularizations.

Translator's Note

a. A process of 'bringing forth' that is equivocal (i.e., neither univocal nor analogous), in the Aristotelian sense, because it produces a new kind of entity, contrary to Aristotle's principle that "*man* brings forth *man*." A traditional term, therefore (interchangeable with "spontaneous generation"), for the original production of life from inorganic material.