

its inception, humans are the powerless serfs of life, but they do have the natural world with its gods, their service that suits the gods, and art as an expression of their service and of their bond with the sacred. In setting out on their new journey, humans place all that at stake.

## *Second Essay:* The Beginning of History

Karl Marx says somewhere that there is really only one science, which is history, meaning thereby that understanding the evolution of the world would be true knowledge. Such a claim, however, is either a reduction of history to the abstraction of the temporal process as such (which raises the question of the time frame within which this process takes place) or it is a bold speculation which attributes to all the processes of nature the role of a preparation necessary for the process of history, that is, for the special case of meaningful or meaning-related events. Becoming, however, is meaningful or meaning-related only when someone cares about something, when we do not have before us sequences merely observed but rather ones which can be understood in terms of an interest in and relating to the world, of an openness for oneself and for things. We first encounter hints of an interest in the animate sphere. Yet the process of the evolution of life, generally accepted today, can be called meaningful in this sense only at the cost of a great speculative effort. Of all that we know from experience, only human life can be interpreted as meaningful in this sense. Even its least movement can be understood only in terms of an interested self-relation grounded in an openness for what there is. Does that, though, already mean that human life, simply as such, shares in positing history, that history as such is simply given with it? Hardly anyone would be likely to claim that, even if they were to believe, on the basis of rigorous analysis, that historicity belongs to being human as that which prevents us

from taking humans, wherever and whenever we encounter them, for "finished" natural formations and forces us to see in them free beings who to a great extent form themselves. Yet there undoubtedly exist—or at least until quite recently existed—"nations without history." The question of history strictly speaking must be understood more narrowly.

The usual attempt at answering that question points to the phenomenon of collective memory which either first emerges with writing or has its strongest support in it. That, though, would mean deriving the meaning of events from the meaning of a narrative about them. However, the meaning of a narrative about events is different from the meaning of what is narrated. The meaning of events is an achievement of those who act and suffer, while the meaning of a narrative lies in understanding the logical formations pointing to those events. The meaning articulated in this understanding is relatively context independent, since, within certain limits, it can be understood in the same way by other persons in other places, ages, and traditions while the meaning of an event lies in the development of the situation itself. It might well be that genuinely historical acts and events need to be set in the context of tradition and narrative; in that case, though, the meaning of a narrative is intelligible in terms of historical acts and not the other way around. Let us assume, however, that not every narrative and so not even every narrative about the past aims primarily and thematically at actual events in history—if so, we would be dealing with the curious phenomenon of an ahistorical history, a historical narrative without a history. We believe that the original keeping of annals, as it was practiced in the Near East, Egypt, ancient China, etc., is precisely such a historical narrative without an actual history: the reason being that its purpose and meaning was the preservation of the lifestyle of prehistorical humanity, a humanity whose life's meaning was given and prescribed, defined basically by the acceptance, transmission, preservation, and securing of life. Such a life can unfold in complex and massive social formations, in grand empires with complicated hierarchies and bureaucracies, and yet be

essentially no more than a giant household or aggregate of households gathered around the central cell of the royal house. Its entire vital functioning, the meaning of what takes place there, need never transcend the household and its cyclic rotation of birth, reproduction, and sustenance, together, to be sure, with the inevitable complementary movement of continuous preservation of life through work and production. Annalistics captures the past as something important for the successful future comportment of the grand household which cares for itself in this sense; it is primarily composed of ritualistic writings, cultomantic records, observations of what is fortunate and unfortunate in events and acts. As long as humans live in such a way that this vital cycle of acceptance and transmission, of the preservation and securing of life, exhausts the meaning of what is done, we can say that it moves in the rhythm of perennial return, even though in reality tradition functions, inventions take place, and the style of life changes to the point of producing a change as fundamental as the collective memory just mentioned.

Even though the life of such societies is focused on the acceptance and maintenance of life, even though it is rooted in the immediacy of being human, for which openness itself is not revealed or life problematic (as we sought to portray it in the preceding essay)—such life centered on subsistence is not without the third movement of life, that of truth, though without the explicitly thematic orientation characteristic of a historical epoch. Precisely because humanity here lives only in order to live, not to seek deeper, more authentic forms of life; precisely because humans are focused on the movement of acceptance and preservation, this entire life remains something of an ontological metaphor.

We distinguish three fundamental movements of human life, each of which has its original form, its (thematic or athematic) meaning, its own temporality indicated by the predominant temporal dimension: the movement of acceptance, the movement of defense, and the movement of truth.<sup>1</sup> The movement of acceptance consists in the human need to be accepted and

introduced into the world, since the human entry into the realm of open, individuated being has the character of something prepared and fitted together (*harmonía*). For most things—elements, natural entities, realities not created by the human hand, indeed for most of animate being—acceptation has no inner significance; fitting in is here, in modern biological terms, a mechanical adaptation. The being of humans, their entry among individuals in the vastness of the universe, cannot be like the being of such existents—i.e., being in such a way that they would be incapable of being affected by it in their very core, so that being would be a matter of “indifference” (that is, neither indifferent nor non-indifferent, but simply lacking all meaning for them). Their being is non-indifferent from the start; that is, they “sense” their strangeness, they are sensitive to their “un-rightness,” to their inauthenticity (*adikia*) and demand “justice” (*dikē*), actually finding it in the good will of their kin who accepted this new existence even before it was in a full sense present; accepted it already by existing together and so constituting the potential fold of space into which a new existence can be brought. Human acceptance is that *didonai dikēn kai tisin allēlois tēs adikias* (“according right to each other and putting aside unrightness”) of which the ancient fragment of Anaximander speaks.<sup>2</sup> *Adikia* is that initial key to understanding with which an existence “positions itself” with respect to the lightning of individuation, of entry into the universe. The *adikia* it feels—the penetration, the onset—is compensated by others who accept it and constitute the world for it as the warm and kindly hearth, symbolizing the keeping of the flame of life. At the same time, *adikia* is compensated in turn, with regard to the others, by the existence that has been accepted. This compensation takes place in all to whom this existence is devoted, whom it loves and whom it itself accepts in turn.

Now, it is clear that the second movement, that of defense (which could also be called the movement of self-surrender) is necessarily correlated with the first. We can only accept the other by risking ourselves, by attending to the other’s needs no

less than our own, by *working*. Work is essentially this self-disposal of ourselves as being at the disposal of others; it has its source in the factual dependence of life on itself which is precisely what makes life an ontological metaphor. It is not possible to *be*, that is, to carry out the onset into the universe of individuated things, without the movement of acceptation and self-surrender: *dikē kai tisis* (“justice and retribution”). As soon as we become links in the chain of acceptation, we are *eo ipso* potential participants in work; already the child prepares for it; this preparation is already itself incipient work.

The fundamental trait of work, however, is that it is involuntary; we accept it under duress, it is hard, it is a burden. The harmony, the fitting together without which we cannot be, is *palintonos harmoniē*, a linkage of opposites.<sup>3</sup> Life is inescapably bound with a burden, which means that *tisis tēs adikias* (“retribution for injustice”) simultaneously itself engenders *adikia*. If we want to live, we have no choice. The fundamental choice, to live or not to live, thus bears within it a burden; it is this burden which then finds further, more tangible expression in the unfree, laborious character of work.

The burden which is thus at the basis of the finite placement of humans amid the universe of what-is, of their “intrusion” among existents, points, however, to an *alleviation*, to a relief. The burden which humans accept and which inevitably accompanies them throughout life is itself accepted in an atmosphere of alleviation; the rhythm and interpenetration of burden and relief are the scale of the sense of life on which we oscillate as long as we live. Alleviation can assume various modes, ranging from a mere pause and momentary forgetting to the forms of the ecstatic and the orgiastic. In the utter lightness of euphoria (the word itself points to a movement that is unhampered and takes place with total ease) it is as if all burden disappeared, we are borne as if by a whirlwind to which we yield without reservation. The movement of acceptation, though, includes the ecstasy represented by *erōs*: it is at once the surrender that means acceptance, which includes as well the will to be accepted—thus the creation of a refuge that makes possible the

acceptance of a new existence, even if that is not its intent or focus—as well as that increasingly intense abandon that lets us touch upon the realm of the undifferentiated in ecstasy and participate in it as in the bliss of being—the bliss of which Zarathustra's *Nocturnal Hymn* sings.<sup>4</sup>

Now, it is characteristic of humans before history that they understand their entire life in terms of something like an ontological metaphor, that they do not differentiate between the night which is a fact of experience and night as the darkness out of which the lightning of being strikes; between the earth that bears fruit and nourishes and the earth that is the backdrop of all that is, of the world which is not identical with any single factual existent which, in turn, shows itself only against the backdrop of the world. For them, what-is and being, phenomena and the movement of their manifestation, converge on a single plane, reminiscent of the language of poetic metaphor: here, relations that elude common empirical experience are expressed with twists of such experience, though with the help of conjunctions, distinctions, and variations that are impermissible in the ordinary world and are not thematized as such. Indeed, the lack of thematization is even greater here since the reader of poetical works anticipates metaphors as metaphors, as linguistic tropes, while mythical humans do not recognize in them the level of that which is being rendered and the level of the rendering itself; they do not distinguish between meaning and object, speech and that which is being said. Nonetheless this ontological metaphor manifests itself in something that cannot be explained by any theory of myth and mythology that starts out from the assumptions of a world cleft by the vagaries of metaphysical philosophy into an opposition between sense experience and more or less rational constructs. Such a theory cannot come to terms with the prehistorical in a positive sense (that is, without leading to amputations or yielding to mysticism); for it is clearly manifest that, even if prehistoric humanity is no less capable of doubting and criticizing than the historical humans of the scientific epoch, its world is full of gods and powers, and that all of this is accepted as obvious even though

no one has ever seen them or offered proof of their presence. The higher, the “transcendent,” the “supernatural,” known even if not experienced like ordinary experience, itself stems from the duality of the ontological metaphor. Amid the world of beings there manifests itself a presence of Being which is understood as higher, incommensurate, superior, but which is not yet clear *as such*. Rather, it shares with beings the same region of one and the same world in which everything is simultaneously and indistinguishably manifested and concealed.

Thus it is evident that in the “natural world” of prehistoric humans the movement of truth makes itself felt as well, though it remains thematically subordinated to the movements of acceptance and defense (or disposing) of the self. The movement of truth affirms itself precisely in this predominance of powers within a “single” world; as a proper relation to manifestation as such—that is, to that which makes manifestation possible—it shows itself in the difference between the supernatural and the natural, the divine and the empirical. At the same time, the movement of truth is the source of art, the expression of its open, futural character, the character of a *that which is coming*; for the divine is that which opens all else, like the Earth and the Heavens, though it itself is not among the things that have already presented themselves to us—it is in that sense that the divine is always “on the way.” It is to this that humans relate in image, dance, and song. By contrast, the movement of acceptance, the onset into the world which contains the opposites of *adikia/dikē*, burden/alleviation, is grounded essentially in the past; the movement of defense and self-disposal in the present. Understandably, each of these movements contains within it the whole of temporality, without which it would not be a movement; yet in each there holds sway a different “extasis,” a different “horizon.” The clearest illustration of the temporality of the movement of acceptance is perhaps the example of the ancient patriarchal family of Hellenic or Roman antiquity: the father, raising up from the ground the infant laid at his feet, carries out an act of acceptance which bears within it a relation to all the horizons of temporality—he sees in this act, a decision

of life or death, not only the possibilities of the child but the possibility of his own existence in it, his own finitude. All of that, however, is included in the continuity of the *lars* of the home whose existence is the point of departure for the whole act of acceptation and is that to which the circling of the movement of acceptation returns.

Thus as long as humans move in the sphere of "mere life" and its concerns, intrinsic to which is the assurance of the sustenance of the entire *familia*, then "belief" in the gods is the only way to dwell in the world and to understand the universe, the sole truth appropriate to it. (The anthropology of the Left Hegelians shows a sense for this when it gropes around the human family for the secret of the protofoundations of religion. However, it blocks its access to the problem by adopting from idealism the doctrine that "having a view"<sup>5</sup> is the fundamental mode of the mediation of humans and the world, as well as the doctrine that alienation is the source of the objectification of these "views.") Now the question is: to what and to what extent does the realm of the divine extend in a given world? Not surprisingly, it involves in the first place all that has to do with the order, sustenance, and organization of society, for it is precisely that which constitutes the privilege of the gods, and there is no barrier that would separate off human society from the universe. In fact, we see that the earliest empires are theocracies with divine rulers or rulers in the role of managers of divine households—either way, these rulers mediate between the divine and the human. For that reason there can be no substantive separation or difference between the empire and the universe. Pharaoh commands not only the labor of humans but the regular course of the floods; the Emperor of China is as responsible for natural catastrophies as he is for social ones; the great king of Persia gets along with the gods of all of his subject nations; of Xerxes it is said that he had the Hellespont whipped for disobedience. (Later, when Plato designs the true commonwealth, the community of philosophers, on the basis of the universe of divine Ideas, it means something completely different, even if this ideal universe is

recommended as a model to imitate; sensible reality—and the community of the state is such a reality—can never be integrated into the Ideal. The foundation of the community upon Ideas exempts it precisely from continuity with the rest of the sensory world; in this respect, in raising the community of the state out of "nature," Plato will follow the tradition of the Greek *polis*.)

It seems, of course that the events of high civilizations with their written traditions differ basically from the events of "natural" humanity, since writing and its transmission indicates a will to conscious preservation of a complex system of life, a determination to oppose all change—something comparable to an effort at human regulation of the course of events, thus putting forth a hitherto absent goal. Yet the will to tradition, an immutable tradition, precedes writing; writing is not itself a new goal but simply a new, extremely effective medium for the petrification of life forms. The will to permanence is essentially, sacral and ritualistic, having to do with a fundamental characteristic of prehistoric truth, i.e., the cosmic-ontological metaphor: originally, writing is, above all, related to the empire and to rituals; these are realms which, as we tried to indicate earlier, are closely bound to one another. It is customary to divide the earliest written texts of the Near East (including the Mycenaean) into palace texts, juridical texts, literary texts, and letters; that does not mean that, for example, palace texts should be considered profane in our sense of that word. The ruler who knows and directs carries out a superhuman activity, creating order and life; he not only makes possible the life of the society as a whole, but shelters a certain part of the earth from devastation. Thus writing, with its petrified memory, does not arise in the context of human acts aimed at endowing life with a new meaning. Nonetheless, it brings about a new presence of the past and the possibility of the far-ranging reflection that is exhibited in poetry and its immense influence throughout the entire *oikoumenē*<sup>6</sup> of the time. For these reasons it is wise to distinguish three levels of human events: the nonhistorical, which occur in the anonymity of the past in a purely natural

rhythm; the level of prehistory on which a collective memory is preserved in the form of a written tradition; and the level of history proper. Prehistory, however, is the presupposition of history not only for reasons having to do with the presence of the past in explicit documents but, first and foremost, because history represents a distancing from and a reaction against the period of prehistory; it is a rising above the level of the pre-historical, an attempt at a renewal and resurgence of life.

In an article that appeared in French, "La transcendance de la vie et l'irruption de l'existence,"<sup>7</sup> and was not included in the collection *Dasein und Dawesen*, Oskar Becker seeks to divide the doings of human life into three levels analogous to some extent to what we are presenting here. He recognizes a "basal civilization" which, though unable to escape it, breaks the "circle of the present situation" of animate life by introducing into it through language and tool usage existence with its horizons of retention and anticipation, though solely for the purpose of sustaining life in its "small rhythm," without far reaching goals. Secondly he recognises a "low civilization" which he characterizes, with reference to Schelling,<sup>8</sup> as the intrusion of freedom (as freedom for evil, an intrusion of sensual passion and of *libido dominationis*, together with the awareness of guilt as it shows up in Genesis and in Babylonian poetry), but also, with reference to Freud's dominance of the "pleasure principle." Finally, he recognizes the historical age proper, in which the principal theme is the unfolding of the possibility basic to human beings, to win or lose themselves.

It does not seem appropriate to distinguish the rise of the great empires (and of "lower civilizations" in Becker's sense) from primordial humanity by the intrusion of a "freedom to evil," by the new dimension of passion and guilt. The early empires do not differ from natural humanity by any new dimension of human life not present on the preceding level, in the way that the human level of speech and tool use differs from animal life forms. The early empires differ only in following the same aims *in an organized manner*, attributing to human existence the same meaning of common sustenance

which purely natural humans attribute to it randomly, instinctually. The impression of something radically new in the rise of the great empires of the ancient Orient is due in part to their making use of what gestated through the long neolithic period, preparing humans for the settled mode which became organized and crystallized in empires. However, the overall meaning and direction given to the doings of humans remained constant—the transmission and preservation of life, life itself in its self-consumption and reconstitution—or, in a traditional image, the preservation of the flame of life. Still, the great empires do represent an essential propaedeutic for a different conception of life's meaning. This new way, to be sure, does not develop in them; yet the aggregation of individuals, their organized interdependence, their ongoing interaction and verbal communication, the human mode of making manifest what presents itself, all create a possible room for living beyond oneself, for legend, for glory, for endurance in the memory of others. Organized life generates the foundation for a human immortality or at least for what comes nearest to it. Insofar as organization needs to be reinforced by the written word, writing, too, is a precondition of this higher stage where life relates explicitly to memory, to others, to life among them and in them, beyond the limits of one's own generative continuum.

Here, then, where life is no longer its sole own purpose but where there is the possibility of living for something else, lies a rupture which is not merely quantitative. Hannah Arendt pointed to this rupture in her profound reflections on the role of labor (and subsequently of work) in human life by way of its primordial opposition to political life.<sup>9</sup> Because the family is the original locus of labor, political life, life in the *polis*, initially unfolds on the necessary foundation of the family *oikos* (house, household). Yet in the contradiction between its self-enclosed generative privacy and the will to public openness there is already a continuity, generated and maintained by free human activity. This new human possibility is based on the mutual recognition of humans as free and equal, a recognition which must be continuously acted out, in which activity does not have

the character of enforced toil, like labor, but rather of the manifestation of *excellence*, demonstrating that in which humans can be in principle equal in competition with each other. At the same time that means living fundamentally not in the mode of *acceptance* but of *initiative* and preparation, ever *seeking the opportunity* for action, for the possibilities that present themselves; it means a life in active tension, one of extreme risk and unceasing upward striving in which every pause is necessarily already a weakness for which the initiative of others lies in wait. This new mode is protected from the unfreedom of natural cyclicity by the domestic security offered by the *oikos*, the household that provides for life's needs; as protection against its own inner trend to rest, routine, and relaxation it has the stimulus of the public openness which not only offers opportunities but also ever lies in wait to seize them.

Arendt contrasts labor, preventing the extinction and decay of life which consumes without establishing anything of permanence, with work which builds a firm, permanent structure of life, shelter, and community, the indispensable places of a home. Something fundamentally different arises on this foundation, freeing humans from mere self-consumption and dissolution in transience—a life that freely defines itself so that it could define itself also in the future and in others, independently of that foundation. From that moment on this life is essentially and in its very being distinct from life in acceptance; here life is not received as complete as it is, but rather transforms itself from the start—it is a *reaching forth*.

It is, however, essential for such reaching forth that it neither considers itself nor is a small island in an accepted life but, on the contrary, that it justifies and grounds all acceptance, all passivity. While political life draws its free possibilities from the home and its work, the home in turn cannot exist without the community which not only protects it but gives it meaning. Political life as life in an urgent time, *in a time to . . .*, this constant vigilance is at the same time a permanent uprootedness, lack of foundation. Here, life does not stand on the firm ground of generative continuity, it is not backed by the dark

earth, but only by darkness, that is, it is ever *confronted* by its finitude and the permanent precariousness of life. Only by coming to terms with this threat, confronting it undaunted, can free life as such unfold; its freedom is in its innermost foundation the freedom of the undaunted. To be sure, one might object that this is a part of the life of any warrior on whatever level, even the most “natural”; however, warriors prior to the emergence of political life find their support in a meaning woven into the immediacy of life, fighting for their home, family, for the continuum of life to which they belong—in them they have their support and goal, those provide them with the shelter from the danger they need; in contrast to that stands the goal of a *free* life as such, one's own or that of others; it is, essentially, an unsheltered life.

Life unsheltered, a life of outreach and initiative without pause nor ease, is not simply a life of different goals, contents, or structures rather than a life of acceptance—it *is* differently, since it itself opens up the possibility for which it reaches; while *seeing* this liberation, both the dependence of the one and the free superiority of the other, sees what life is and can be. Without aspiring to the superhuman, it becomes freely human. That, however, means life on the boundary which makes life an encounter with what there is, on the boundary of all that is, where this whole remains insistent because something quite other than individual entities, interests, and realities within it inevitably emerges here.—Such life does not seek to escape its contingency, but neither does it yield to it passively; since it has glimpsed the possibility of authentic life, that is, life as a whole, the *world* opens itself to it for the first time—it is no longer merely an involuntary background against which that which concerns us shows itself; rather, it itself can now stand forth, as the whole of that which opens up against the black backdrop of closed night. This whole now speaks to humans *directly*, free of the muting effect of tradition and myth, only by it do they seek to be accepted and held responsible. Nothing of the earlier life of acceptance remains in peace; all the pillars of the community, traditions, and myths, are equally shaken, as are all the answers

that once preceded questions, the modest yet secure and soothing meaning, though not lost, is transformed. It becomes as enigmatic as all else. Humans cease to identify with it, myth ceases to be the word of their lips. In the moment when life renews itself *everything* is cast in a new light. Scales fall from the eyes of those set free, not that they might see something new but that they might see in a new way. It is like a landscape illuminated by lightning, amid which humans stand alone, with no support, relying solely on that which presents itself—and that which presents itself is everything without exception. It is the moment of creative dawning, “the first day of the creation,” mysterious and more pressing for enfolding and bearing with it the astonished.

That means that the renewal of life’s meaning in the rise of political life bears within it the seed of philosophical life as well—if Plato and Aristotle are right in saying that *thauma archē tēs sofias* (“wonder is the beginning of wisdom”).<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, to be sure, also tells us that the lover of myths is also a philosopher in a way; though he will be one only if he seeks to awaken a sense of wonder, of awe over what *actually* is; the wonder of being is no fable, it manifests itself only to those who dare come to the boundary of night and day into the gate to which *dikē* holds the key, and such a daring one is at the same time *eidōs phōs*,<sup>11</sup> the human who knows.

Arendt offers a powerful interpretation of the passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that deals with the fundamental possibilities of free life (*apolausis*, *bios politikos* and *bios filosofikos*)<sup>12</sup> from the perspective of liberation (from life’s privacy with its bondage to the self-consumption) by life in the *polis*: political life at a stroke confronts humans with the possibility of the totality of life and of life as a totality. Philosophical life grafts itself to this trunk and brings forth what is enclosed within it. Perhaps, though, from these reflections, based on Aristotle’s distinction of the active life, we could deduce the very beginning of history in the proper sense of the word. We can speak of history where life becomes free and whole, where it con-

sciously builds room for an equally free life, not exhausted by mere acceptance, where after the shaking of life’s “small” meaning bestowed by acceptance, humans dare undertake new attempts at bestowing meaning on themselves in the light of the way the being of the world into which they have been set manifests itself to them.

These reflections should not be understood as an idealization of the Greek *polis*, as if it arose from the spirit of selfless devotion to “the common good,” analogous to the perspective of the guardians, as it is postulated—not described—in Plato’s *Republic*. For one, the genesis of the *polis* is not a process that can be precisely localized, attributed to these or those individuals; anonymous assumptions, contingencies of particular situations play a role here that cannot be quantified. Until the Persian Wars, for instance, the Athenian *polis* is something that crystallizes gradually in conflicts with its neighbors as well as in the struggles of political parties in which *tyrannis*, opposed to the spirit of the *polis*, plays anything but a minor role.<sup>13</sup> Yet precisely the circumstance that the *polis* arises and sustains itself amid internal and external struggles, that it is *inter arma* that it finds its meaning and that long-sought word of Hellenic life, is characteristic for this new formation and new form of life. Here, in very specific conflicts on a modest territory and with minimal material means is born not only the Western world and its spirit but, perhaps, world history as such. The Western spirit and world history are bound together in their origins: it is the spirit of free meaning bestowal, it is the shaking of life as simply accepted with all its certainties and at the same time the origin of new possibilities of life in that shaken situation, that is, of philosophy. Since, however, philosophy and the spirit of the *polis* are closely linked so that the spirit of the *polis* survives ultimately always in the form of philosophy, this particular event, the emergence of the *polis*, has a universal significance.

We can find evidence of the link between philosophy and the spirit of the *polis* among the protophilosophers themselves.

The spirit of the *polis* is a spirit of unity in conflict, in battle. One cannot be a citizen—*polites*—except in a community of

some against others, and the conflict itself gives rise to the tension, the tenor of the life of the *polis*, the shape of the space of freedom that citizens both offer and deny each other—offering themselves in seeking support and overcoming resistance. Action itself, however, is in turn basically nothing but struggle, defense against others and attack whenever an opportunity arises. In such continual conflict and struggle there arises in the *polis* a power that stands above the opposed parties and on which the meaning and glory of the *polis* depends: the lasting fame among mortals, *kleos aenaon thneton*.<sup>14</sup>

Heraclitus speaks of that which is “common to all,” which “nourishes” all “human law,” that is, the *polis* in its general functioning and particular decisions.<sup>15</sup> What though is this divine law? “We need to know that *polemos* is what is common, and that conflict is the right (*dikē* = *eris*), and that everything takes place through *eris* and its impetus.”<sup>16</sup>

*Polemos* is what is common. *Polemos* binds together the contending parties, not only because it stands over them but because in it they are at one. In it there arises the one, unitary power and will from which alone all laws and constitutions derive, however different they may be.

Yet the power generated by strife is no blind force. The power that arises from strife is a power that knows and sees: only in this invigorating strife is there life that truly sees into the nature of things—to *phronein*. Thus *phronēsis*, understanding, by the very nature of things, cannot but be at once common and conflicted. To see the world and life as a whole means to see *polemos*, *eris*, as that which is common; *xunon esti pasi to phroneein*: “insight is common to all.”<sup>17</sup>

To speak, to lend words to the insight into the common origin means to speak “with understanding” (*xun noō*).<sup>18</sup> That, though, means “to accompany things with such words as will divide each according to the way it is, and to tell how it is with them.”<sup>19</sup> To delimit a thing according to its being, however, means to see it in terms of the way it enters into openness (the realm of the individuated cosmos) by emerging out of darkness; it means to see the lightning of being over all that is, the

open night of what-is. That, though, is the work of the one who is wise, the work of the philosopher. In the philosopher all *aretē*, all excellence, (the mark of free life characteristic of the *politēs*) is gathered. “*Sōphronein* is the greatest *aretē* and wisdom is to say what is uncovered (*ta alētheia*) and to do what is thus understood in its fundamental nature.”<sup>20</sup>

*Polemos*, the flash of being out of the night of the world, lets everything particular be and manifest itself as what it is.<sup>21</sup> Thus the greatest contradiction cleaves together in a unity which is above all, which manifests itself in all and governs all. Humans, however, encounter this One<sup>22</sup> and become wise only when they themselves act, accomplishing their deeds in the atmosphere of freedom ensured by the law of the *polis* which, in turn, nurtures itself on the one law of the Divine<sup>23</sup> whose name is *polemos*.

Thus *polemos* is at the same time that which constitutes the *polis* and the primordial insight that makes philosophy possible.

*Polemos* is not the destructive passion of a wild brigand but is, rather, the creator of unity. The unity it finds is more profound than any ephemeral sympathy or coalition of interests; adversaries meet in the shaking of a given meaning, and so create a new way of being human—perhaps the only mode that offers hope amid the storm of the world: the unity of the shaken but undaunted.

Thus Heraclitus sees the unity and the common origin of philosophy and the *polis*.

Therewith the question of the origins of history seems decided. History arises and can arise only insofar as there is *aretē*, the excellence of humans who no longer simply live to live but who make room for their justification by looking into the nature of things and acting in harmony with what they see—by building a *polis* on the basis of the law of the world which is *polemos*, by speaking that which they see as revealing itself to a free, exposed yet undaunted human (philosophy).

Thus the history of the West and history as such have a truly dignified beginning, one which shows not only where the great rupture between prehistoric life and history is situated, but also

on what level historical life must sustain itself if it is not to succumb to external and internal threats. This beginning then reaches out to future historical outreach, especially by teaching what humankind does not wish to comprehend, in spite of all the immense hardness of history, does not want to understand, something that perhaps only latter days will learn after reaching the nadir of destruction and devastation—that life need be understood not from the viewpoint of the *day*, of life merely accepted, but also from the view of strife, of the night, of *polemos*. The point of history is not what can be uprooted or shaken, but rather the openness to the shaking.

At this point we need to come to terms with two conceptions of history derived from the creators of phenomenology which seem deeply different from ours because both speak explicitly of philosophy alone as the starting point and, in a sense, the core of history.

Edmund Husserl speaks of European history as a teleological nexus whose axis is the idea of rational insight and life based on it (i.e., a life in responsibility). In his view, this teleological idea distinguishes European culture from all others; at the same time, the idea of a life in reason, the insightful life, singles out Europe from among other cultures as the essential among the contingent. Insight and reason are the “inborn” idea of humanity as such; thus the European spirit is at the same time universally human. European culture and civilization are universally valid; the others only particular, however interesting they may be.

From that it appears to follow that history as an unfolding and gradual realization of this teleological idea is essentially the history of Europe, and of the rest of the world only insofar as it enters the field of European culture. Another consequence appears to be that the beginning of history must coincide with the beginning of European culture; this is consistent with Husserl’s speaking of Greek beginnings, understanding thereby the “original founding” of the European teleological idea in Greek philosophy.

At first glance this conception seems to revive the naive

rationalism of the eighteenth century for which enlightenment, light, is the sole source of life. In truth, it is integral to the entire cast of Husserl’s phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy. What meaning can history have within phenomenology? Phenomenology is a doctrine concerning not only the structure of what-there-is but also *that* it is, as well as how it manifests itself and why it appears to us the way it does. History can be nothing more nor other than the necessary skeleton of this unconcealment, of this appearing of what-is. This appearing can only culminate in the manifestation of its own nature, in revealing itself—and that is philosophy, not a specific philosophy but the very process of philosophizing. It is a part of the nature of things that what-is thus manifests itself not only rationally but through reason. Husserl’s phenomenology is reminiscent less of Enlightenment rationalism than that of Hegel.

It is ironic that Husserl wrote the work which contains his phenomenological conception of history on the eve of the second global conflagration that definitively displaced Europe from its leading role in the world. It is true that at the same time it made European science and technology a global link. Yet European civilization became a global link in precisely that form which Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences* showed to be decadent, that in it a loss of meaning takes place, the loss of that very meaning-bestowing teleological idea that, for Husserl, makes up the inner, spiritual essence of Europe.<sup>24</sup>

Phenomenology cannot see history as something substantive, making it one of its central themes, without manifesting therein its entire basic conception, methodical as well as material. In the course of his intellectual career, Husserl increasingly stressed the genetic over static analysis, as well as the role of passive genesis, the genesis of all presumably merely given components of lived experience in internal time consciousness. Everything that is static points to a genesis and so to history. Thus history is the deepest content level which phenomenology can reach; yet if we understand history as something like free acting and deciding, or perhaps its fundamental

presuppositions, then we need to say that Husserl's genesis, though transcendental and precisely as transcendental, can know only those structures which can be grasped in the reflection of the impartial, disinterested spectator, that is, of a subjectivity that is fundamentally ahistorical in our sense of the term. If the "phenomenon" of phenomenology is the deep phenomenon—not the "vulgar" phenomenon that simply manifests itself, but rather its concealed enabling presuppositions in transcendental genesis—then we need to note that grasping it presupposes a fundamentally "ahistorical" subjectivity because it is a disinterested one. That involves further the very conception of reflection as grasping subjective structures by turning the objectifying regard "inward," to the "noetic" aspect—as if the act-structure, which is the original source of the opposition between "noesis" and "noema," were binding for all phenomena and as if intentionality were the final word concerning the subjectivity of the subject.

By contrast, Heidegger's conception is historical, not only in the sense that phenomenological analysis leads to a definite genesis but most of all in rejecting the disinterested spectator as a presupposition of phenomenologizing. Instead, it focuses on an interest in being as the starting point and the condition for understanding the deep phenomenon, the phenomenon of being. Thus that interest is the condition on the one hand of the revival of the ontological question on a phenomenological foundation and, on the other hand, of the right understanding of the significance of phenomenology in general.

For Heidegger phenomenology is not a content but a method, the name for an investigation which bases all its claims on direct manifestation and demonstration. That does not, however, mean that what it investigates is something self-evident, something obvious. Quite the contrary, the proper "phenomena" of phenomenology are originally concealed because they have to do not with existents which manifest themselves but with their being, with what makes them possible and with their mode of being which has yet to be brought to light. That "bringing to light," however, is possible precisely and only

because humans are not as alien to their relation to being—and so to being in general—as for instance natural objects or human artifacts. This relation is anything but disinterested; it is not and cannot be a mere observation report. That is precisely the meaning of the formula that humans in their being are *concerned* with their being. Their own being is given to them as a responsibility, not as a curiosity. Humans have to carry on their being, carry it out, and they are depending on whether they accept this task or seek to ease it, escaping from it and hiding it from themselves. We can also express that by saying that *Dasein* (= the nature of being human) is its own purpose. Evidently this initial analysis is already historical in a wholly different sense than Husserl's transcendental genesis. This "carrying out" that is not observation is not for that reason blind. It has its distinctive mode of seeing in which our "comportment," our practical dealing with the practical things of our surrounding world, is only the final, most noticeable component that stands out like the tip of an iceberg into our everydayness. The usual act-theory of intentional consciousness cannot clarify even this comportment and acting: it stresses or leaves only as much of it as can be noted by either a direct or internal glance. Actually this comportment is only a grasping of those possibilities, possibilities of a relation to oneself among things and by means of things which must already be accessible to us in some sense. They can be accessible, open only in an actual situation, in that factual "here" which is different for each one of us and in every moment. In it, mood sets the tone of our possible comportment toward that being amid which we have been set with respect to our ability of coming to terms with it. Thus this "primal fact of how we are" at a stroke, and nonintentionally, nonthematically opens for us the mysterious situatedness among things as well as that whole to which we ever relate, the whole of a relation to ourselves through the possibilities of encountering things and fellow humans. Yet just as this comportment always already presupposes the situatedness amid what we did not create, what must have been here already, so it also presupposes that we understand both that towards which

we comport ourselves and why we do so. Since practical understanding is primary and alone truly intelligible and since in it things are what "meet" or "suit" our possibilities, that in turn presupposes that possibilities as such, that is, as ours and still to come, as an intelligible, meaning-generating continuum, are already present. In the very "moment" when we are set among things, we hold before us this "schema" according to which we understand what there is. Thus again it is not an understanding and an explanation of what we encounter, some apperception which is continually synthesizing the formerly noted with the presently noted, but rather always sees the present already in the light of what is there "ahead of us," though not as an object but as that which "we are to grasp."

As we can see, comportment with respect to individual existents presupposes an understanding of a certain whole of being which is open to us in the "schema" of our possibilities, as well as felt as a whole in the feel of our disposition. Neither the schema nor our disposition are intentional objects nor anything autonomous, yet without them we cannot grasp concretely our life's task—we cannot, without them, grasp life as freedom and as originary history. Not intentionality but transcendence is the original trait of life which differentiates itself from the being of individual existents which have no concern for their being, thus do not exist for their own sake nor have any "for the sake of"—or have only a glimpse of it, as animals might. Transcendence, with its mutually required moments of disposition, projection, and comportment, is, however, the transcendence of humans towards the world, to the whole of what is brought to light, what is projected and to which there always belong existents who are like us—who are a relation—as well as those existents that lack this trait. The world, as Kant was the first to say, is neither a thing nor an aggregate of experienced things—not because it is a mere "deductive" idea incapable of being instantiated in experience but rather because it is given in the wholeness of transcendence, in this "original history," to use Heidegger's expression. The world is not the object of experience because it cannot be given, it is not an entity; by its very

nature it is not something that "exists." The transcendence towards the world, however, is originally not given by the activity of thought and reason, as it was for Kant; its foundation, rather, is freedom.

Thus in the conception of both of these phenomenologies we can note the age-old philosophical opposition between the primacy of the intellect or of freedom as constituting the inmost nature of human spirit, and the question of the philosophical grounding and nature of history is necessarily linked to it. Heidegger is a philosopher of the primacy of freedom and in his view history is not a drama which unfolds before our eyes but a responsible realization of the relation which humans are. History is not a perception but a responsibility. However, he does not understand freedom either as a *liberum arbitrium* or as a laxness in the realization of duty, but in the first place as a freedom of letting being be what it is, not distorting being. This presupposes not only an understanding for being but also a shaking of what at first and for the most part is taken for being in naive everydayness, a collapse of its apparent meaning to which we are led by the emergence of being itself in the form of the radical "no" and in the explicit posing of the question of being. The uncovering of being is the experience from which philosophy grows as the ever renewed attempt at life in truth. Freedom, in the end, is freedom for truth, in the form of the uncovering of being itself, of its truth, and not only of what-is (in the form of open comportment and the correctness of statements). Freedom is not an aspect of human nature but rather means that Being itself is finite, that it lives in the shaking of all the naive "certainties" that would find a home among what-is so that they would not need to admit to themselves that humans have no home other than this all-revealing and free being which for that very reason cannot "be" as particular existents are. It is Being in its mystery and wonder—that Being is. The uncovering of Being itself, however, takes place in philosophy and in its more primordial, more radical questioning. This uncovering thus inevitably brings it about that not only the range of accessible existents but the very world of a particular

epoch is subject to change. Since the rise of philosophy, history is more than aught else this inner history of the world as being, as distinct from what-is, yet as appropriate to it as the being of what is.

What is surprising about this opposition of the two phenomenologically proceeding philosophies is that for all that fundamental discrepancy of their starting points, perception here, freedom there, they both arrive at the idea of the central place of philosophy in history. And since both understand by philosophy the philosophy of the West, both arrive at the centrality of Europe in history.

History is not intelligible without free responsibility. Both philosophies know and acknowledge that. Yet only one sees the origin of responsibility in the purity of evidence, in the subordination of mere opinion to evidence; the other sees it in not closing our eyes to the demand of making a free road and place for freedom, for the being present which is set free of the ordinary and superficial forgetting of the mystery of the being of what is.

Whence that concurrence of the historical thesis of these two philosophies, so different in all else? Why do both consider philosophy so central that they see in it the true origin of history? The reason probably is that both are philosophies of truth: truth is their central problem which they have no intention of resolving from supposedly self-evident propositions but from phenomena, from that which presents itself. One, however, sees truth as perfect clarity which knows no obscure places, only questions susceptible to answers while the other, inspired by the finitude of being, is open to the eternal mystery of what-is, and which, precisely in this mystery, inspiring questions that remain questions,<sup>25</sup> seeks to preserve its fundamental truth, the uncovering of the being of what-is to which thus inevitably belongs its concealment, as the Greek expression *a-lētheia* expresses it.

Thus at its core Heidegger's philosophy is as closely linked to philosophical thought as Husserl's phenomenology. It is, however, better suited to serve as a starting point for

philosophizing about history, due to its point of departure from freedom and responsibility already in being human, not only in thought. At its center there are problems, like that of escaping from that fallenness into things, into the world with which the dominant contemporary philosophies of history are thoroughly engaged. As a philosophy of finite freedom and as a reminder of what stands above the world, making it possible, it is kin to idealism, but it provides a deeper and more "realistic" grounding for the historical outreach of humans because it is the only consistent doctrine capable of accounting for the autonomy of what-is against all kinds of subjectivism, including that which derives from the ordinary materialistic conception of the relation of object and subject as consisting in causal efficacy in the external world. Most of all, it can shed light on the nature of historical action and open our eyes to what history is all about. The reflections that follow will attempt to explicate several problems of older and contemporary history in light of motifs taken over from it. The author alone, to be sure, must bear responsibility for his deductions.