

HEGEL AND THE SECULARIZATION HYPOTHESIS

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I. “Secularization” and the Modern World

“To seek for a point in history in which the middle ages ‘end’ and the modern world ‘begins’ is a sheer absurdity. But that does not do away with the necessity of looking for an *intellectual* line of demarcation between the two ages.”² From Ernst Cassirer’s monumental study, *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit* of 1906, to Hans Blumenberg’s provocative and brilliant work, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* of 1966, the problematic of modernity has been the theme of countless books, essays and lectures. Since these quests for a concept of “the modern” may properly be thought of as “footnotes to Hegel,” it is not surprising that Hegel’s philosophy itself has been drawn into the controversy.

The following remarks are designed to throw some light on how this has happened by presenting a case study drawn from a selection of this vast literature. The general thesis to be examined is that an intellectual line of demarcation for the “beginning” of the modern world may be found under the general rubric “secularization.” The term itself has been used to this end by a wide variety of scholars ranging from Max Weber,³ John Neville Figgis⁴ and Carl Schmitt⁵ to Walter Benjamin,⁶ Paul Tillich,⁷ Friedrich Gogarten⁸ and Harvey Cox.⁹ Figgis, for example, concludes his seventh and final lecture on *Political Thought* by stressing “the general secularization of life which followed the destruction of religious unity and the *Aufklärung* of the eighteenth century. What is to be noted is that only through this revolution did ideas no less than facts take the shape in which they influenced the modern world.”¹⁰ And, to the extent that he has one, Weber’s philosophy of history is guided by his concern for “the steady progress of the characteristic process of ‘secularization’ to which in modern times all phenomena that originated in religious conceptions succumb.”¹¹ The thesis has also been exploited to account for specific dimensions of modernity, as, for example, in M.B. Foster’s account of the rôle of Christian theology in the rise of modern natural science,¹² and in Carl Schmitt’s argument that “all significant concepts of modern political theory are secularized theological concepts”¹³—

¹ For many discussions of this and other topics over the past five years, I am deeply indebted to my colleague, Rulon Wells.

² Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*, New Haven: Yale U.P., 1946, p. 130.

³ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1920, Vol. I, pp. 24, 87n, 196, 199, 212, *et passim*; *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1922, pp. 405, 408, 417, *et passim*.

⁴ J.N. Figgis, *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius: 1414–1625*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1916 (1st. ed. 1907), pp. 22, 27, 249–50.

⁵ Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität*, Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1922, p. 37.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961, p. 274.

⁷ Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Abridged Edition), Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 24.

⁸ Friedrich Gogarten, *Der Mensch zwischen Gott und Welt*, Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1952, pp. 149ff.; *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit: Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem*, Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1953, pp. 82ff., pp. 129ff.

⁹ Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, New York: Macmillan, 1965, p. 1ff.

¹⁰ Figgis, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

¹¹ Translated by Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York: Oxford U.P., 1958, p. 307.

¹² M.B. Foster, “The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science,” in *Mind* (October, 1934), pp. 446–68, and “Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature,” *Mind* (October, 1935), pp. 439–66 and (January, 1936) pp. 1–27. Also see: Pierre Duhem, *Le Système du Monde*, Paris: Hermann, 1913–59, 10 Vols., esp. Vol. I. p. 261, cited in Hubert G. Alexander, *Time as Dimension and History*, Albuquerque: U. of New Mexico Press, 1945, p. 70.

¹³ Schmitt, *loc. cit.*

both of which were formulated with reference to Weber—as well as in Hans Sedlmayr’s theological critique of modern art.¹⁴

The notion that secularization, in one or another of its many senses, provides a key to modernity has, of course, been the object of criticism. In addition to the considerable literature evoked by Weber’s famous 1905 essay on the Protestant Ethic, Hannah Arendt has attempted to show that the condition of man in the modern age is not to be understood in terms of increasing secularity (insofar as this is identified with worldliness) or any other religious phenomenon, but that “the hallmark of the modern age” has been the very opposite: “world alienation.”¹⁵ The tendency of secularization theorists to postulate the medieval or christian epoch as a “given”—itself requiring no interpretation—has also been subjected to severe criticism, at the level of onto-theological assumptions by Martin Heidegger,¹⁶ and with respect to political theory by Eric Weil.¹⁷ The most violent attack upon the secularization thesis may be found in the first part of Blumenberg’s book.¹⁸ But, helpful as these critiques are, each in its own way points to the necessity of coming to terms with Hegel in order to overcome the real intellectual difficulties indicated by the persistent attractiveness of the secularization hypothesis as an explanation of modernity. The present essay proposes to serve as a step in that direction.

II. “Secularization” as a Critique of Hegel

Of the many senses of the word “secularization,” perhaps it would be helpful to isolate three recent usages in order to facilitate the development of our argument.

A. *Secularization as Liberation*

In the first, and least critical, of these, the word has been used to designate or, better, celebrate the liberation of modern man from his erstwhile religious and metaphysical tutelage. Thus Harvey Cox and other participants in the Bonhoeffer-inspired “Death of God” movement have revived Auguste Comte’s famous “three stages” argument, replacing the somewhat drab notion of “positivism” with the considerably more poignant—for theologians at least—idea of a “non-religious Christianity.”¹⁹ Despite the current waning of enthusiasm for this version of the secularization hypothesis, it will no doubt prove durable enough to undergo several future incarnations.

B. *Secularization Unmasked*

More pertinent to our topic is a second sense of the word—as an unmasking of false consciousness. This is the sense which has apparently prompted Blumenberg to defend the legitimacy of modernity against those who regard it as the unhappy offspring of the illicit marriage between Athens and Jerusalem, reason and

¹⁴ H. Sedlmayr, *Verlust der Mitte*, Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1955, pp. 156ff.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1959, pp. 230–31. Also see: Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Cleveland: Meridian, 1963, pp. 65–71; and *On Revolution*, New York: Viking, 1963, pp. 158–60.

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950, p. 187.

¹⁷ E. Weil, “Die Säkularisierung der Politik und des politischen Denkens in der Neuzeit,” in *Marxismusstudien*, Vol. IV, pp. 144–62.

¹⁸ “Säkularisierung—Kritik einer Kategorie des geschichtlichen Unrechts,” in H. Blumenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–74.

¹⁹ Ved Mehta’s three “Profiles” of “The New Theologian” (*The New Yorker*, November 13, 20 and 27, 1965) present an appropriate sketch of this movement.

faith. The sacramental formula employed by this school of secularization theorists turns upon the phrase “historization of eschatology.” As their title indicates, this sense of secularization was very much at the center of Rudolf Bultmann’s 1955 Gifford Lectures, *History and Eschatology*.²⁰

A study of the text, however, indicates that Bultmann’s Hegel critique and other formulations of the secularization thesis are heavily indebted to Karl Löwith, whose *Meaning in History* (which bears the more revealing title, *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen*, in the German version)²¹ constitutes the *locus classicus* for this sense of the word “secularization.”²² Löwith’s argument in this book, which may be put very succinctly, is that the philosophy of history developed in the occident depends for its essential character upon the presupposition that the Christian religion is the absolute truth. This assumption, says Löwith, was shared without question by historically oriented philosophers from Augustine to Hegel.

What distinguishes Hegel from Augustine in principle is that Hegel interprets the Christian religion in terms of speculative reason, and providence as “cunning of reason” As the realization of the spirit of Christianity, the history of the world is the true theodicy, the justification of God in history.

With this secularization of the Christian faith, or, as Hegel would say, with this realization of the Spirit, Hegel believed himself loyal to the genius of Christianity by realizing the Kingdom of God on earth. And, since he transposed the Christian expectation of a final consummation into the historical process as such, he saw the world’s history as consummating itself. “The history of the world is the world’s court of justice” (*Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*) is a sentence which is as religious in its original motivation, where it means that the world’s history is proceeding toward its judgment at the end of all history, as it is irreligious in its secular application, where it means that the judgment is contained in the historical process as such.²³

The most fateful aspect of the Hegelian philosophy, as Löwith sees it, is that Hegel himself failed to grasp “the profound ambiguity” at the heart of his own thinking. The subsequent history of philosophy—or at least Germanic philosophy until Nietzsche—may therefore be read as a modern dress version of the Oedipus tragedy, in which the rôle of protagonist is played in turn by Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard (together with other lesser “left” Hegelians) and, finally, Nietzsche, who comes closest to a full realization that the philosopher of history has murdered his holy father and desecrated his mother faith in producing that bastard quest for a “meaning” of history “determined absolutely from within history itself”²⁴ This, of course, is the basic plot outline of Löwith’s most famous study, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, which remains, so far as I have been able to

²⁰ R. Bultmann, *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957. For specific discussions of secularization and Hegel, see: pp. 56, 62–70, 73, 82, 89, 120. In addition, see: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961, pp. 117: “Hegel takes over the Judaeo-Christian ideology and applies it to history in its totality”

²¹ K. Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*, Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1949; German version: *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953.

²² See Löwith, *Meaning*, pp. 2, 19, 49, 57, 58, 193, 200, 201, 202.

²³ Löwith, *Meaning*, pp. 57–58.

²⁴ K. Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. D.E. Green, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964, p. vi. (Original German text completed in 1939).

determine, the *only* systematic interpretation of nineteenth century German philosophy.²⁵ That this should be so, despite the moot character of its central thesis, indicates the distance we will have to go before finally coming to terms with the tradition which has given birth to Marxism, Existentialism and various shapes of linguistic and analytic philosophy. For although the word “secularization” plays no significant rôle in Löwith’s *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, the version of the secularization hypothesis now under consideration is clearly present:

Whoever has really experienced a slice of world history, rather than merely knowing it through hearsay, speeches, books, and newspapers, will have to come to the conclusion that Hegel’s philosophy of history is a pseudo-theological schematization of history arranged according to the idea of progress toward an eschatological fulfillment at the end of time; it does not correspond at all to visible reality.²⁶

That Hegel, the “master” of irony,²⁷ and the only philosopher since Aristotle to deal with tragedy “in a manner both original and searching,”²⁸ should be open to such an interpretation is indeed one of the more astonishing and ironical aspects of contemporary Hegel scholarship. For however valid the unmasking theory of tragic recognition may be, and despite the fact that Löwith himself does not explicitly make use of the Oedipal analogy, his interpretation of Hegel and the nineteenth century depends fundamentally upon the characterization of Hegelian philosophy as a horrendous, albeit unconscious, *ἀμαρτία*, the speculative secularization of the Judeo-Christian eschatology.

But assuming that Hegel does make this mistake, what precisely does the mistake itself consist in? What does it mean to schematize history pseudo-theologically? to secularize an eschatology? Hegel himself calls attention to the resemblance between two forms of “die allgemeine Überzeugung, daß Vernunft in der Welt und damit ebenso in der Weltgeschichte geherrscht habe und herrsche”²⁹: (a) the affirmation of Anaxagoras “daß der Nus, der Verstand überhaupt oder die Vernunft, die Welt regiere”³⁰ and (b) the Christian belief “daß ... eine Vorsehung die Welt regiere.”³¹ But does this *eo ipso* constitute a *reduction* of the presupposition³² of a lecture course on world history to the specific structure of a Christian’s belief in divine providence? The reader of Löwith’s *From Hegel to Nietzsche* or *Meaning in History* will discover no answer to these questions. Löwith simply states his thesis again and again, that Hegel unconsciously identified the orientation of philosophy with that of the Christian faith.³³

²⁵ There have, to be sure, been many compendia and chronicles of philosophy in this period, but, with the possible exception of G. Lukács’ *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955)—a highly illuminating study, despite its polemical veneer—no other book even bears comparison with Löwith’s masterful presentation.

²⁶ Löwith, *From Hegel*, p. 219. German edition: *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1964, p. 239.

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. by L.M. Capel, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, p. 260.

²⁸ A.C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, London: 1950, p. 69.

²⁹ Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Hoffmeister, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1955, pp. 36–7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³² It is odd that Hegel’s explicit discussion of the “weltliches Reich” and “geistliches Reich” in *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte* (Löwith’s major source) is not taken up in *Meaning in History*.

³³ Since 1949 the unmasking theory of secularization has become a household implement of literary scholars as a device for unlocking the secrets of Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In one case at least, the process has even come full circle. See M.L. Abrams’ paper “Hegel’s *Phenomenology*: Philosophy or Literature?” (Presented at Yale University, April 18, 1969).

There is, nevertheless, an argument, or at least the makings of one. Just as the concept of “secularization,” first articulated in *Meaning in History* (1949), epitomizes in a word the thesis of *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (1939), where the term does not appear, so too Löwith’s response (1968) to Blumenberg’s attack on the secularization thesis provides a retrospective clue to the unstated assumptions of the earlier studies.³⁴ But to take up this argument will require us to consider a sense of “secularization” which goes beyond the “vulgar Marxist” technique of unmasking a false form of consciousness.

C. *Hermeneutic and Historicity: The Shadow of Heidegger*

It should be noted at the outset that Blumenberg’s book is neither an interpretation nor a defense of Hegel. But his own philosophical thesis—that historical epochs, modernity included, arise through a process of discontinuity—need not concern us here. The secularization thesis is simply that variant of the continuity thesis which Blumenberg finds most prevalent today.³⁵ The model which he takes as his clue to the presumptive illegitimacy of “secularization” is the expropriation (*Enteignung*) of ecclesiastical property.³⁶ And this interpretation indeed has a good *prima facie* claim to appropriateness since the term was apparently coined on April 8, 1646 by the French delegates at the preliminary negotiations for the Treaty of Westphalia.³⁷ Here too we find a term which has come to designate retrospectively a phenomenon as old as the Christian church. But the aspect which Blumenberg focusses upon is the connotation of illegitimacy inextricably associated with the word from its first employment.³⁸ The “paradigm of expropriation”³⁹ is then subjected to a learned and subtle historical discussion ranging from Augustine on legitimate and illegitimate possession of the truth to the question whether the concept of infinity in modern physical theory was “taken over” from the attributes of the Christian god. The philosophical error which Blumenberg discovers “in the background” of the secularization (expropriation) thesis he designates as “a Platonism”: “was wahr ist, ist dies kraft eines Herkunftsverhältnisses als Abbild zu einem Urbild von Wahrheit, das mit Gott identifiziert ist.”⁴⁰

Löwith rightly senses that he is the prime target of Blumenberg’s attack (despite the fact that he is only mentioned on two pages), but he denies ever having questioned the legitimacy of modernity, much less regarding it as “a Christian heresy.” “Denn auch unsere These besagt nicht mehr und nicht weniger, als daß alttestamentliche Prophetie und christliche Eschatologie einen Horizont von Fragestellungen und ein geistiges Klima *geschaffen haben*—im Hinblick auf die Geschichtsphilosophie einen Horizont der Zukunft und einer künftigen Erfüllung—, das den modernen Geschichtsbegriff und den weltlichen Fortschrittsglauben *ermöglicht* hat.”⁴¹

³⁴ I refer to Löwith’s review of the first part, pp. 11–74, of Blumenberg’s *Legitimität der Neuzeit*, in *Philosophische Rundschau*, Vol. XV, No. 3 (July, 1968), pp. 195–201. The rest of the book is reviewed in the same volume by Hans-Georg Gadamer, pp. 201–09.

³⁵ Presumably Blumenberg would find a Hegelian philosophy of history equally incompatible with his discontinuity theory. But to specify this would require a discussion of the elements of continuity and discontinuity involved in the concept of “determinate negation.” Blumenberg does not discuss this. But see: Blumenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–3.

³⁶ Blumenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 19ff., pp. 33ff.

³⁷ J. G. v. Meiern, *Acta Pacis Westphalicae publica*, II 15 § 14; cited in S. Reiche’s contribution to *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3rd ed. (RGG³), ed., Campenhausen *et al.*, 6 vols., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957ff., Vol. V, p. 1280.

³⁸ The Church has tended to regard these expropriations as illegitimate. For examples in English, see O.E.D.

³⁹ Blumenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Löwith, *Rundschau*, p. 198.

However accurate his disclaimers might be, Löwith has in this recent interpretation of this thesis introduced a new element: the doctrine of the *horizon* of questioning. He has thus explicitly associated the central thesis of his many writings with the theory of “the hermeneutical situation.”

Hermeneutic, one of the most fashionable words in contemporary philosophy and theology, designates an activity which, like secularization (in the sense of expropriation), dates back to the earliest days of Christianity.⁴² The distinction between *hermeneutica sacra* and *profana* (i.e., for the interpretation of classical literature) was first drawn in the 18th century and, through the work of Hegel’s contemporary, Schleiermacher, as well as Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, it has come increasingly into the focus of philosophical attention as a problem *an und für sich*.⁴³

The word “hermeneutic” has been the object of a number of amusing etymologies, but it would be difficult to assign priority to any of its three generally accepted fields of reference: expression, explanation and translation-interpretation.⁴⁴ Of these, the last has been raised to a level of heightened philosophical (and ultimately theological) prominence through Heidegger’s “ontological analytic of Dasein as laying bare the horizon for an Interpretation of the meaning of Being in general.”⁴⁵

Sein und Zeit is the best known of the many works—beginning perhaps with the writings of Emil Lask—in the neo-Kantian tradition which have sought to present an ontological interpretation of the concept of transcendental self-consciousness, or transcendental unity of apperception, which was first formulated in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁶ The desideratum of Heidegger’s efforts is a rediscovery of the question of Being. And his method of going about this is to lay bare the structure of transcendental self-consciousness by reformulating Kant’s theory of the a priori intuition of time. The critical move (as Cassirer has rightly pointed out⁴⁷) is the suspension of the epistemological question (and all talk about the validity or foundations of knowledge) in favor of the ontological question. Indeed, Heidegger tends to regard the quest for the

⁴² According to Gerhard Ebeling, hermeneutic was born out of the problem of interpreting the Old Testament in light of the New Testament doctrine that the O.T. prophesy had been fulfilled. See RGG³, Vol. III, p. 246.

⁴³ Theologians such as Robert W. Funk, Gerhard Ebeling and Wolfhart Pannenberg have, on the other hand, tended to regard the “hermeneutical situation” as a “solution” to the problem of revelation. Pannenberg claims to derive some of his hermeneutical insights from Hegel, but, on the basis of my sampling from this literature, the shadow of Heidegger seems to delineate more precisely the thought patterns of these new wave theologians, “Hegelian” or not.

⁴⁴ See Ebeling in RGG³, III, 243.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1960, pp. 15ff. Also see pp. 372ff. Since the English translation of Macquarrie and Robinson includes the pagination of the cited German text, double references would be superfluous.

⁴⁶ This is of course much more apparent in Heidegger’s *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Bonn: F. Cohen, 1929 (English tr. by J.S. Churchill, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1962). Compare: *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 319–21. For an excellent, and to my knowledge unique, presentation of Heidegger’s philosophy in its neo-Kantian historical context, see Manfred Brelage, *Studien zur Transzendentalphilosophie*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965. Especially helpful is the essay “Transzendentalphilosophie und konkrete Subjektivität,” pp. 72–229, in which the ontological interpretations of the transcendental problem by Nicolai Hartmann, Martin Heidegger and Richard Höningwald are presented in their interrelatedness.

⁴⁷ Ernst Cassirer, “Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik: Bemerkungen zu Martin Heideggers Kant-Interpretation,” in *Kant-Studien*, Vol. XXXVI (1931), pp. 1–26.

foundations of knowledge, the search for a *fundamentum inconcussum*,⁴⁸ as one of the major factors contributing to modern man's *Seinsvergessenheit*.⁴⁹

Transcendental self-consciousness, as an ontological structure, Heidegger calls *Dasein*. Thus interpreted, self-consciousness is not *in* time: it "times itself."⁵⁰ Kant's transcendental unity of apperception is accordingly supplanted by the "Einheit der Zeitigung der Zeitlichkeit."⁵¹ *Dasein* is in-the-world *because* it "times itself,"⁵² because it is ecstatically "thrown" out of time, is claimed by the world and responds to this claim which it itself is.⁵³ The distinction between the "authentic" and "inauthentic" modes of *Dasein*'s responses, which lends much of the pathos to the argument of *Sein und Zeit*, need not concern us here.⁵⁴ What is important for an understanding of our third sense of the word "secularization" is the significance which Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* has given to the term "horizon." For if *Dasein* is not properly understood as being "in" time (which Heidegger regards as the "vulgar" conception of time, brought to its quintessential conceptual exposition by Hegel⁵⁵), then the primordial structure of *Dasein* must be comprehended in terms of its various modes of "timing itself" into the world. "Die existenzial-zeitliche Bedingung der Möglichkeit der Welt liegt darin, daß die Zeitlichkeit als ekstatische Einheit so etwas wie einen Horizont hat."⁵⁶ *Dasein* is therefore said to experience the directionality of its "timing ecstasies" in accordance with the "horizontal schemata" of "Zukunft, Gewesenheit und Gegenwart."⁵⁷

The critical point to notice here is that Heidegger, unlike Kant, does not treat self-consciousness as a fundamental structure, *to which* the judgmental structure of all true propositions must be seen to conform; for Heidegger self-consciousness is the horizontal structure *from which* and *through which* *Dasein* projectively attains the definiteness and concreteness of Being-in-the-world.⁵⁸ It is through the "Zeitigung der Zeitlichkeit" that *Dasein* comes to have the character of "Geschichtlichkeit" (historicity).⁵⁹ And here, once again, Heidegger's inversion of the normal (vulgar?) mode of considering philosophical questions is evident: "Die Analyse der Geschichtlichkeit des Daseins versucht zu zeigen, daß dieses Seiende nicht 'zeitlich' ist, weil es 'in der Geschichte steht,' sondern daß es umgekehrt geschichtlich nur existiert und existieren kann, weil es im Grunde seines Seins zeitlich ist."⁶⁰

⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 24 *et passim*.

⁴⁹ Heidegger's rejection of the secularization hypothesis is based on this theory that the process of decomposition culminating in modernity must be traced back as far as Plato. Thus a recovery of the question of Being requires, according to Heidegger, a destruction of the history of "metaphysics."

⁵⁰ "Sich zeitigen." See, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 304.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 365, 427, etc.

⁵² "Wenn kein *Dasein* existiert, ist auch keine Welt 'da.'" *Ibid.*

⁵³ "Das *Dasein* ist der Rufer und der Angerufene zumal" *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁵⁴ The basic principle of this distinction, "Entschlossenheit," disappears from Heidegger's writings after the "Rektoratsrede" (*Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität*, Breslau: Korn, 1933). Its systematic function in Heidegger's later thought comes to be played by the concept of "Gelassenheit" (see *Gelassenheit*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1959).

⁵⁵ See: *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 428ff.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Dieter Henrich has attempted to show that the revolutionary reorientation of regarding self-consciousness as an ontological *terminus a quo* rather than a *terminus ad quem* is properly to be attributed to Fichte. See D. Henrich, *Fichtes Ursprüngliche Einsicht*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1967. Henrich does not explicitly discuss Heidegger in this essay.

⁵⁹ See *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 372ff.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

In *Sein und Zeit*, the question of the horizon for the “historizing” of *Dasein* leads to a discussion of the horizon defined by the “Zwischen” (between) of birth and death. And it is in terms of this latter especially that Heidegger affirms the “finitude” of *Dasein*. But once having been thematized, this horizontal problematic was easily adaptable as the touchstone for asking a critical question: What is the origin of the horizon necessary for the possibility of envisaging a unity in world history?

This is the question which Löwith finally comes explicitly to pose in his response to Blumenberg. That he was reluctant to do so we may extrapolate from his earlier criticism of the Hermeneutic School and its leading contemporary exponents, Gadamer and Heidegger.⁶¹ For Gadamer had already formulated the hermeneutic version of the secularization thesis in the 1950’s:

Dass “die Geschichte” zum Gegenstand der Erkenntnis wird, setzt aber auf alle Fälle voraus, dass sie als eine Einheit gedacht ist. Diese Einheit kann eine inhaltliche sein, und dann heisst das, dass sich die Geschichte der Menschheit zur Einheit eines verständlichen Zusammenhangs ordnen lassen. So ist in der jüdisch-christlichen Überlieferung das Wissen von der Geschichte *Geschichtstheologie*. Erst als das Produkt eines Säkularisationsprozesses, der diese christliche Theologie der Geschichte auflöst, entsteht der moderne Begriff einer Philosophie der Geschichte. Von Voltaire bis Hegel und Comte ist damit stets das gemeint, was wir heute eine materiale Geschichtsphilosophie nennen würden, und d.h. die Erkenntnis eines einheitlichen Sinnes in aller menschlichen Geschichte.⁶²

From Löwith’s point of view, a hermeneutic formulation of the secularization thesis was no doubt entered upon with some reluctance. For, despite the fact that “unmasking” constitutes no real argument, Löwith had previously argued very explicitly that the hermeneutic philosophy of historicity as developed by Gadamer, and, especially, Heidegger, was suspect precisely because of its “Hegelian” character.⁶³ “Im Prinzip sind jedoch Hegels konstruktiver Fortschritt und Aufstieg und Heideggers destruktiver Rückschritt und Abstieg nicht verschieden.”⁶⁴ Contemporary Germany’s most famous critic of Hegel and most prominent friend-enemy and erstwhile disciple of Heidegger has now begun to make manifest the “dialectical” character of his relationship to both.

But perhaps there is a moral to this story of the secularization hypothesis which ramifies beyond the limits of this most famous and (in its “unmasking” version) most facile contemporary interpretation of Hegel. Perhaps Löwith is not alone in his tendency to read an interpretation back into Hegel from the mesmerizing cadences of Heidegger’s thought. For a survey of the non-trivial expositions of Hegel’s philosophy since 1927 (studies which are more than mere philological exercises) reveals again and again the heavy shadow of Heidegger. This is most obviously evident in Marcuse’s book, *Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie*

⁶¹ See, for example, Löwith, *Vorträge und Abhandlungen: Zur Kritik der christlichen Überlieferung*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966, pp. 205ff. and Löwith, *Heidegger: Denker in dürftiger Zeit*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1960.

⁶² H.-G. Gadamer, “Geschichtsphilosophie,” in RGG³, Vol. II, p. 1489. Also see: Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 2nd ed., Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965, pp. 195ff., 501.

⁶³ See the chapter on “Geschichte, Geschichtlichkeit und Seinsgeschick” in Löwith, *Heidegger*, pp. 44–71, esp. 45–6, 53–4, 58, 67, 68. Hegel is also clearly alluded to in Löwith’s “... vor etwa hundertfünfzig Jahren ...” on p. 70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–6.

der Geschichtlichkeit⁶⁵ and in Kojève's lectures,⁶⁶ but it is also unmistakable in the writings of scholars such as Jan van der Meulen,⁶⁷ Manfred Riedel⁶⁸ and even Jürgen Habermas.⁶⁹

As profoundly searching analyses, these works, together with the valuable studies by Heidegger himself,⁷⁰ must be ranked among the best works on Hegel produced in our time. Perhaps we may hope that the period between this, Hegel's bicentennial, and the 200th anniversary of the *Phenomenology*, will witness the emergence of Hegel interpretations equally rich in profundity while adhering more closely to the Hegelian principle of "immanent critique."⁷¹

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⁶⁵ H. Marcuse, *Hegels Ontologie*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1932.

⁶⁶ A. Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel: Leçons sur la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit, professées de 1933 à 1939 à l'École des Hautes Études*, ed., R. Queneau, Paris: Gallimard, 1947.

⁶⁷ J. van der Meulen, *Hegel: Die gebrochene Mitte*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1958. Van der Meulen's dissertation was on Heidegger and Hegel.

⁶⁸ M. Riedel, *Theorie und Praxis im Denken Hegels: Interpretationen zu den Grundstellungen der neuzeitlichen Subjektivität*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965.

⁶⁹ J. Habermas, "Hegels Kantkritik: Radikalisierung oder Aufhebung der Erkenntnistheorie," in *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968; and "Arbeit und Interaktion: Bemerkungen zu Hegels Jenenser 'Philosophie des Geistes'" in *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968.

⁷⁰ In addition to *Sein und Zeit*, see "Hegels Begriff der Erfahrung" (now available as a separate volume in English, *Hegel's Concept of Experience*, with [a section from Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit translated by K.R. Dove](#), New York: Harper & Row, 1970) in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1950; *Identität und Differenz*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1957 (translated and with an Introduction by Joan Stambaugh, *Identity and Difference*, New York: Harper & Row, 1969); and "Hegel und die Griechen" in the *Gadamer Festschrift*.

⁷¹ My own labors in the Hegelian vineyards suggest the following points about the problem of winning an immanent critique of Hegel. (1) It must consistently recognize that Hegel was, on his own account, the author of two, and only two, "works": *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the System (i.e., the two editions of the *Science of Logic*, the three editions of the *Encyclopedia* and the *Philosophy of Right*). However stimulating and insightful they may be, all other parts of the Hegelian corpus are either anticipatory or derivative of the conceptual edifice articulated in these "works." Hegel interpretations which fail to stress this will be "systematically misleading." (2) We must take more seriously the conceptual (and not, following Theodor Haering, merely the genetical-philological) problem of an introduction to Hegel's System. This means that the question of Hegel's *Phenomenology* must be considered in the light of Hegel's own description of it as "the deduction of the concept of science" and not merely as a brilliant work in its own right (à la Kojève). The recent studies by H.F. Fulda, together with the critical responses of Otto Pöggeler, have rightfully recalled this question to a position of prominence. (3) As Otto Pöggeler has argued, Hegel's *Phenomenology* remains—despite the commentaries of Gabler, Hyppolite and Loewenberg—an unlocked mystery as a "through-composed" book. (The signal for this in Hyppolite and Loewenberg is the word "noumenology." Gabler's study was never completed; it breaks off after a treatment of *Phen.*, ch. V). The most searching study we have of the methodological problem of the *Phen.* is, alas, Heidegger's essay, *Hegel's Concept of Experience*. Perhaps a necessary first step in coming to an understanding of the *Phen.* will be to disentangle Heidegger's fateful identification of Hegel's *Geist* with his own concept of *Sein*. I have made a preliminary effort in this direction in "[Hegel's Phenomenological Method](#)," *The Review of Metaphysics*, XXIII, 4 (June, 1970).